



CIRCLE OF CONFUSION

POWELL

by

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FADE IN:

INT. POWELL HOME, BEDROOM - DAY

COLIN LUTHER POWELL, 65, retired four-star general, U.S. Secretary of State and the most popular public figure in the country stands in boxer shorts and socks in front a large closet.

He looks sleep-deprived and stressed, worn down by the burdens of his office. And right now he's running late.

He throws on a crisp shirt. A tie. His dark green ARMY DRESS UNIFORM.

He checks himself in a full-length mirror. His hair is more gray now than black and he's not as trim as he once was, but he's still an imposing man.

He straightens the raft of MEDALS on the jacket, the name tag over the breast pocket that reads, simply: "POWELL."

He stares at his reflection for a long beat. Something is weighing heavy on his mind and the sight of himself in his old uniform gives him pause.

He snaps out of it as his wife, ALMA, early 60s, poised and splendid in an elegant dress, enters.

ALMA
Ready?

POWELL
Ready.

ALMA
The car's here.

POWELL
Good. Let's go.

They continue the conversation as they head DOWNSTAIRS.

ALMA
They'll drop me off first.

POWELL
Okay.

ALMA
And you'll go on and get Annemarie from the hotel.

POWELL
I will.

ALMA
The church is only a few blocks
away.

POWELL
Yes.

POWELL
It won't take more than five
minutes.

POWELL
Right.
(beat)
What happens then?

ALMA
Colin--

POWELL
That's when I walk her down the
aisle?

ALMA
Promise me you won't do this when
you're with her.

POWELL
All right, I promise.

ALMA
Because she's going to be nervous.
However composed she might look
she'll be about ready to break down
in tears, and one of your jokes
might be all it takes.

They walk out the front door --

EXT. POWELL HOME - DAY

A limo is waiting for them in the driveway of this upscale
suburban house. The DRIVER greets them with a tip of his cap.

Alma holds Powell back a moment.

ALMA
Listen. How are you doing?

POWELL
I'm fine.

ALMA
It's bad timing.

POWELL
If it wasn't this it would be
something else.

ALMA
Try not to think about it, okay? At
least for today, just put it all
out of your mind.

POWELL
I'm not thinking about it. I'm
thinking how lovely you look in
that dress.

ALMA
Good. Hold that thought.

The Driver lets them into the back of the limo.

INT. LUXURY HOTEL, WASHINGTON D.C. - NIGHT

A wedding reception in full swing. The GUESTS include a
lively mix of POLITICIANS, MILITARY BRASS and JAMAICANS, many
of whom sport brightly-colored traditional dress.

The celebrations flow freely between a BALLROOM, where a
REGGAE BAND has the YOUNGER CROWD jumping, and the BAR AREA,
which feels like a *de facto* officers' club as ADMIRALS and
GENERALS trade war stories over tall glasses of rum punch.

RICHARD ARMITAGE, late 50s, holds court at the bar. Bald,
barrel chested, formidable -- a guy you want with you in the
trenches, even if he's ever so slightly past his prime.

SUPER: RICHARD ARMITAGE, DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE.

ARMITAGE
The president's on stage. He's
started his speech. And I'm running
around in hallways like a headless
chicken, trying to find the right
staircase.

As his story progresses, some of the MILITARY TYPES chip in
to goad him along. An ADMIRAL--

ADMIRAL
General Powell's with you?

ARMITAGE
No, the General can't -- the
Secretary can't leave the
auditorium.

ADMIRAL
Of course.

ARMITAGE
It's the United Nations. You've got
cameras all over.

A COLONEL, flushed with booze--

COLONEL
The world is watching!

ARMITAGE
Half a billion people are watching.

An ARMY WIFE, teasing--

ARMY WIFE
So you're on your own. The hero of
the hour.

ARMITAGE
Yeah, but look at me. This is not
the same body that rescued 20,000
boat people from the middle of the
South China Sea.

Everybody LAUGHS.

ARMITAGE
So I'm running around, sweating
through my suit. Every door I try is
locked from the other side. It's like
a bad dream. Eventually I find the
right one, I'm backstage, but I've
got to get to the teleprompter guy in
about the next seventeen seconds or
the president's going to say the
wrong thing and there's going to be
an international incident.

He pauses for effect. But then his attention shifts from the
rapt audience in front of him to the other side of the bar,
where LAWRENCE WILKERSON, late 50s, signals to him.

ADMIRAL
So what happened? Richard?

Armitage stands abruptly.

ARMITAGE
Excuse me.

He pushes through the crush to join Wilkerson. Bespectacled,
serious, a Southern military gentleman -- he's a little less
bald than Armitage, a little less bullish.

ARMITAGE
What's going on?

SUPER: LAWRENCE B. WILKERSON, COLIN POWELL'S CHIEF OF STAFF.

WILKERSON
Not here.

AT THE BAR

MIKE POWELL, late 30s, picks up a couple of beers and heads across the room. He looks very much like a young Colin, but walks with a slight limp, his body tilted forward.

Behind him, Wilkerson and Armitage disappear into another part of the hotel.

Mike carries on towards Powell, his dad, who is with a group of old ARMY BUDDIES. He's the center of attention and doing his best to join in the laughter and back-slapping. But his mind is elsewhere. His face lights up when he sees Mike and he excuses himself from the group.

POWELL
I hope one of those is for me.

Mike hands him a beer.

MIKE
I'm not sure I'm in the right place.

POWELL
How do you mean?

MIKE
I thought this was my sister's wedding, but then I walk in and it's like a convention of the Joint Chiefs and all their staffs.

POWELL
She asked me if I'd like to invite a few friends.

MIKE
And?

POWELL
I told her "yes".

MIKE
What happens if we're invaded?

POWELL
Tonight?

MIKE
Yeah. I mean, is there a Rear Admiral or someone who *isn't* here, just in case? Like when they do the State of the Union and the Secretary Of Agriculture gets hidden away in a bunker.

POWELL
I wouldn't worry, Mike. I think we've got it covered.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY

Wilkerson leads Armitage towards a TV near the front desk. It's showing CNN but the sound is off. Wilkerson calls out to the CONCIERGE, 40s.

WILKERSON
Excuse me?

CONCIERGE
Yes, sir?

WILKERSON
Can we get some volume on this, please.

CONCIERGE
Of course.

He reaches behind the desk for a remote.

ARMITAGE
Larry, are you going to tell me what this is?

WILKERSON
Hold on a second. You won't believe me if you don't hear it for yourself.

The Concierge turns up the volume.

CNN ANCHOR (ON TV)
... as to whether Secretary of State Colin Powell will go to the U.N. and give a speech that could make the case for war in Iraq. In exclusive breaking news this evening, sources within the administration have told CNN that

CNN ANCHOR(cont'd)

Secretary Powell will indeed appear before the UN Security Council, and he is expected to do so within a matter of days.

ARMITAGE

Oh, fuck me.

He starts immediately back towards the bar.

WILKERSON

Richard, slow down.

ARMITAGE

Does he know?

WILKERSON

We can't do this now.

ARMITAGE

We have to do it now.

Alma exits a restroom just as Armitage and Wilkerson hustle past. She sizes up the situation in a flash.

ALMA

Larry?

WILKERSON

Alma, it's nothing.

ALMA

It doesn't look like nothing.

She moves to cut them off.

ARMITAGE

We're going to need him for just a couple of minutes.

ALMA

Richard, if you're about to ruin this day for my little girl, then so help me --

WILKERSON

Alma, please.

The conversation has carried them back into the bar area. From across the room, Powell, who's still chatting with Mike, sees them. He knows immediately this isn't good.

MOMENTS LATER

Powell huddles with Armitage and Wilkerson as the party continues around them. In hushed voices --

POWELL
It's been leaked?

WILKERSON
Yes.

POWELL
A decision *I haven't made yet* has
been leaked to the press?

WILKERSON
Yes, sir, that's about the size of it.

POWELL
Do we know how --?

ARMITAGE
It's got Cheney's paw prints all
over it.

WILKERSON
It doesn't matter whose paw prints.

ARMITAGE
He's trying to force our hand.

POWELL
Larry's right, it doesn't matter
who authorized it -- the genie's
out of the bottle now.

WILKERSON
You'll have to confirm or deny.
"I'm still making up my mind" isn't
an option now, sir.

POWELL
How long?

WILKERSON
The press are going to respect that
this is your daughter's wedding day
for, oh, about another ten minutes.
And it's all anyone's going to be
talking about on the morning shows.
You have to preempt that.

ARMITAGE
The report is false. Deny it.

WILKERSON
It's not that simple. If you deny
it now it'll be seen as a finite
signal you oppose invasion.

POWELL
If I deny it now the president's
going to want my resignation.

There it is. They all look a little stunned, Powell included,
hearing it said so starkly.

He glances through to the ballroom where ANNEMARIE POWELL,
early 30s, radiant in her wedding dress, tears up the dance
floor, surrounded by AUNTS and COUSINS, oblivious and happy.

Powell looks pained. He can't believe this is happening now.

WILKERSON
Sir?

POWELL
I can't think in here with this
music.

He walks off. Armitage starts to follow.

WILKERSON
Give him a minute.

EXT. HOTEL BALCONY - NIGHT

Powell steps outside from the bar and closes the French door.
The MUSIC continues to filter out.

It's a clear, cold winter's night, but he seems to welcome
the chill as he tries to clear his head for one of the
hardest decisions he'll ever make.

He looks out across the sparkling lights of the city. Not too
far away, THE WHITE HOUSE stands illuminated.

EXT. THE WHITE HOUSE - DAY

A sweltering summer's day. TOURISTS mill around the perimeter
fence. A sense of calm and normality.

SUPER: AUGUST 5TH 2002. SIX MONTHS EARLIER.

RUMSFELD (O.S.)
What we're talking about is nothing
less than a whole new mode of war-
fighting.

INT. WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM - DAY

"PRINCIPALS" meeting -- all the key players in the
administration. PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH heads the table,

relaxed but focused, as DONALD RUMSFELD, 70, makes his pitch with cock-sure bluster.

Powell is at Bush's left. DICK CHENEY, 61, to his right. Silently taking everything in, giving nothing away.

SUPER: DONALD RUMSFELD, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE.

RUMSFELD

I'm going to let General Franks take you through the details. But this is something I personally am excited about, and I'm confident you'll all come to share that sentiment. Tommy?

TOMMY FRANKS, 50s, intimidating but soft-spoken, takes over.

SUPER: GEN. TOMMY FRANKS, COMMANDER OF U.S. FORCES IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

FRANKS

We're calling this the "Hybrid Plan."

He begins a PowerPoint presentation.

FRANKS

The idea is to take the best of the Generated Start and the Running Start, both of which you are all familiar with, and arrive at something altogether more optimal, premised on a streamlining of troop numbers.

Powell doesn't like where this is going. He exchanges a glance with Armitage, seated in back, but holds his peace.

Franks clicks to a slide showing a MAP of the Middle East, plus troop numbers, deployment times etc.

FRANKS

This allows us to shrink the front-end of the operation and achieve force deployment in eleven days.

CONDI RICE, 47, ever attentive, is first to chip in.

SUPER: CONDOLEEZA RICE, NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR.

RICE

As opposed to?

FRANKS

As opposed to ninety days.

A MURMUR around the room as everyone takes this in. GEORGE TENET, 49, earnest and slick, responds.

SUPER: GEORGE TENET, C.I.A. DIRECTOR.

TENET

What if we were to get intel of an unexpected move by Saddam once deployment was underway? Say he's going to hit Kuwait or cut off oil flow to Turkey?

FRANKS

There's built-in flexibility for that kind of thing. It's not a point of no return.

RUMSFELD

We can get you the details.

TENET

Please.

RICE

There'll need to be humanitarian assistance from day one.

Powell nods in agreement. He tries to catch Rice's attention, but she avoids eye contact.

FRANKS

That's an aspect we're still fine-tuning.

RUMSFELD

Look, the key is the quicker force posturing. This will greatly improve our short-term capability in the region. It will enable us to strike a body blow to Saddam before he even knows what hit him.

All eyes turn to the president.

BUSH

Good. I like the concept of that. Keep honing it, keep me up to date.

INT. POWELL'S CAR, TRAVELING - DAY

Speeding away from the White House, towards Foggy Bottom. Powell and Armitage in the back.

POWELL

It's bullshit.

ARMITAGE
It's not your purview.

POWELL
A situation like this, you go as a last resort if you go in at all, and you do it with *overwhelming* force, not some "streamlined" mini-army.

ARMITAGE
Are you pissed about the new plan, or are you pissed that this is the focus?

POWELL
You don't think I'm right to be offended by their gimmick of an invasion strategy?

ARMITAGE
I don't think you get to have an opinion either way. Not so long as you're out of the uniform.

POWELL
I'm more experienced at this than anyone in the administration, uniform or not.

Armitage rolls his eyes. Powell catches it and fixes him with a reprimanding stare, though he doesn't really mean it. There's an easy camaraderie between these old friends.

ARMITAGE
Yes, sir.

EXT. STATE DEPARTMENT - DAY

The car pulls up. Powell and Armitage get out and make for the entrance.

ARMITAGE
Look, things are moving awful fast here. They're not drawing up these kinds of contingencies as an academic exercise. This is real.

POWELL
If they're set on war, our window to influence that decision is already closed.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT - DAY

They walk a hallway.

ARMITAGE
What if they're not?

STAFFERS pass them by. Armitage lowers his voice.

ARMITAGE
What if they're not already
committed to invasion?

POWELL
You were in the briefing.

ARMITAGE
So Rumsfeld's got a boner for his
shiny new take on Sun Tzu. And
Cheney can sit there with that
lopsided poker face as long as he
likes -- we all know he's itching
for another go at Saddam. But they
don't get to decide. The president
does. And he doesn't have the body
language of a man who's set on
sending American kids to war. Not
yet he doesn't.

They pass through a BULLPEN AREA, the bustling hub of
Powell's office. A TV shows news footage of HAMID KARZAI. The
chyron reads: "NEW PRESIDENT EXPRESSES HOPE FOR REBUILDING
AFGHANISTAN."

Wilkerson joins them.

WILKERSON
How'd it go?

Powell shakes his head: not good.

ARMITAGE
It went swell. We'll be dancing on
the banks of the Tigris by Labor Day.

WILKERSON
(to Powell, concerned)
He's exaggerating?

ARMITAGE
Force deployment in 11 days!

They enter --

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE

Wilkerson closes the door.

WILKERSON

All right. So what are we thinking?

POWELL

Richard wants me to take a stand.

ARMITAGE

I do. If you can't put the brakes on this, no one can.

POWELL

But you were right, Richard -- we don't know what this is yet. All we've seen is a fanciful presentation that wouldn't pass muster in a freshman seminar at West Point. And quite frankly the last thing I want to do right now is jump blindly into a political knife fight with Dick Cheney.

ARMITAGE

Well, I'm sorry, sir, but you might have to get a little metaphorical blood on your hands before we're all of us accountable for spilling the real thing across half the Middle East.

Powell glares at him, and this time he really is mad.

POWELL

Are you done?

Armitage knows he went too far.

ARMITAGE

Yes, sir.

POWELL

(to Wilkerson)

Talk it out. Report back.

WILKERSON

Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

INT. BULLPEN

As they walk away from Powell's office --

ARMITAGE
He's not there --

WILKERSON
Pushing and shoving isn't going to help.

ARMITAGE
We've got to get him there somehow.
We've got to get him to a place
where he's ready to take this on.
He's the country's top diplomat and
he's still thinking like a general
gaming out deployment scenarios.

WILKERSON
I know. But there's more than one
way we can play this, it doesn't
have to be a knife fight...

He continues over --

INT. POWELL HOME, DEN - NIGHT

Powell sits at his desk, deep in thought.

WILKERSON (O.S. CONT'D)
Cheney's not the only one with
influence in this administration,
whatever he might like to think.

Powell is surrounded by framed photographs -- family portraits, but also a quick pictorial history of his career: in Vietnam, with Reagan, with Clinton etc.

He picks up the phone and dials. Condi Rice answers.

INTERCUT WITH RICE ON HER CELL PHONE.

RICE
Hello?

POWELL
Condi, sorry to call so late.

RICE
That's okay. I was just catching up
on some reading.

She's still in her OFFICE. The only person here.

POWELL
Listen, I need a favor. I need you
to get me some face time with the
president.

RICE
Colin, you don't need my permission
for that.

POWELL
No, but I don't have the same kind
of one-to-one access you do. And in
this instance I'm going to want the
opportunity to speak my mind
without a lot of other people
diluting the message.

RICE
You mean without the vice president.

POWELL
Of course if you want to sit in,
that's fine.

RICE
I'll put it to the president.

POWELL
Thank you.

He hangs up just as Alma enters.

ALMA
Problems?

POWELL
Maybe. Things are getting a little
complicated.

ALMA
You look tense.

POWELL
No, it's just been a long day.

ALMA
I can see it in your shoulders.
It's making *me* tense.

Powell drops his shoulders.

POWELL
Better?

Alma smiles, but still looks worried.

ALMA
Come and say hi to Annemarie.

POWELL
(brightening)
She's here?

INT. POWELL HOME, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Annemarie is at the kitchen table studying BROCHURES from several nice-looking hotels.

Powell and Alma enter.

ANNEMARIE
Good.

POWELL
What's good?

ANNEMARIE
Your being here. We have to make a final decision.

POWELL
On the choice of husband?

ANNEMARIE
On the venue.

POWELL
Ah. Well, as your father I think it's only right that I should have the final say on this important matter and --

Annemarie thrusts two brochures at him.

ANNEMARIE
Pick one.

POWELL
Now?

ANNEMARIE
Yes.

POWELL
It's months away. What's the rush?

ANNEMARIE
The rush is so we can actually book something here in Washington as opposed to, you know, Washington State. Pick.

POWELL
This one.

He chooses the one she is obviously holding forward.

ANNEMARIE
Good choice! Thanks, Dad.

She gathers up her things.

POWELL
You're leaving already?

ANNEMARIE
Yeah, sorry, but some of us
actually sleep.

She kisses him.

POWELL
If there's anything else I can help
with. Choosing the dress or--

ANNEMARIE
I'll be sure and let you know.

She kisses Alma.

ANNEMARIE
Bye, Mom.

ALMA
Bye, sweetie.

Annemarie leaves.

POWELL
I didn't know she was here.

ALMA
You were busy. She didn't want to
disturb you.

POWELL
She can always disturb me, she
knows that.
(beat)
Well, I actually have a couple more
calls to make.
(off her look)
What?

ALMA
Nothing. Just... be careful.

POWELL
Okay... I'm not sure that I know
what you mean by that.

ALMA
Your shoulders again--

POWELL
Alma, there's nothing wrong with my
shoulders.

ALMA
And making calls from home, this late
in the day... Colin, I'm not asking
for a classified briefing but I wish
you'd let me in a little bit.

Powell hesitates, he's not sure how much he can tell her.

POWELL
It may be that I'm going to have to
take a position on something and
it's not going to win me an awful
lot of friends.

ALMA
We talked about this.

POWELL
Yes.

ALMA
When you took the job.

POWELL
I remember.

ALMA
The Army insulated you in a way
that doesn't happen when you're the
Secretary of State.

POWELL
Yes, it did. And now I've got to
sell the president's foreign policy
to people who would very often
shoot their own grandmothers before
they'll agree with anything I say.
But in this case it's not the
Chinese or the Europeans I'm going
to be up against. Not even the
Democrats.

ALMA
Oh. I see.

POWELL
I don't remember that being
something we talked about.

ALMA
You've always been willing to speak out.

POWELL
But on strategy, on tactics. I haven't ever had to counter members of my own administration on an issue of whether or not we ought to go to war.

Alma's not sure what else to say but the concern is all over her face.

INT. VICE PRESIDENT'S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Rumsfeld and his wife, JOYCE, are shown into the reception hall by a butler, ARTHUR, 60s.

ARTHUR
If you'll wait here, the vice president will be with you shortly.

RUMSFELD
Thank you, Arthur.

Arthur leaves them. Joyce pulls her shawl around her.

JOYCE RUMSFELD
It's cool in here.

RUMSFELD
They say he has the temperature throughout the residence kept at sixty-two degrees. Year-round.

JOYCE RUMSFELD
Gosh, that's... consistent.

RUMSFELD
(admiring)
Isn't it?

Cheney and his wife, LYNNE, join them.

CHENEY
Don.

RUMSFELD
Dick.

CHENEY
Hello, Joyce.

They all greet each other. Hugs and air kisses.

CHENEY
Shall we?

INT. CHENEY'S PRIVATE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Cheney carves a roast duck. The others sit at the table.

RUMSFELD
Colin couldn't join us this evening?

Cheney smirk-grimaces.

LYNNE CHENEY
Oh, don't be mean.

JOYCE RUMSFELD
Did you see him on "Meet the Press" the other day though?

CHENEY
In fact I did, Joyce.

RUMSFELD
(mimicing Powell)
"If you would consult any recent poll, the American people seem to be quite satisfied with the job I'm doing as secretary of state."

They all laugh.

RUMSFELD
You've never cared about poll numbers, Dick.

CHENEY
We're running a country here. It's not the Miss Wyoming pageant.

LYNNE CHENEY
(whispers to Joyce)
He cares more than he lets on.

Joyce smiles. Cheney pretends not to hear, but he looks very briefly stung by his wife's remark.

CHENEY
(recovering)
Don -- breast or leg?

RUMSFELD
Oh, I think breast.

CHENEY

Good.

He carves him a generous, fatty portion.

LATER

After dinner. Cheney takes Rumsfeld to one side.

CHENEY

Don, I've been meaning to ask you.
In all seriousness now. You don't
think Powell is going to cause us
problems down the line? Assuming
things move forward.

RUMSFELD

In all seriousness? We've both
known General Powell now for, what,
most of three decades? Sure, we've
had our differences over the years.
But I'll say this. He is first and
foremost a soldier. A good soldier.

Cheney nods, understanding the double-edged compliment.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Powell scribbles notes on a yellow legal pad, discarded pages
all around him. Armitage paces restlessly.

POWELL

It's no good.

He tosses down the pad.

POWELL

Whichever way I frame it, it sounds
like I'm pre-judging his position.
That's only going to antagonize him.

ARMITAGE

The president trusts you.

(off his look)

He respects your wisdom, how about
that? You're the secretary of
state, for Christ's sake. He knows
that you know that war is a real
possibility here -- he can't object
if you give a clear account of
where you stand.

POWELL
I don't know that I can give myself
a clear account, there's too much
we simply don't know. And honestly
I want Saddam Hussein gone as much
as the next man.

Wilkerson enters.

WILKERSON
It's on.

POWELL
Now?!

WILKERSON
The car's waiting.

POWELL
I'm not ready. I don't have the
pitch.

WILKERSON
He's leaving early for Crawford. It
has to be now.

Powell hastily gathers his notes. His secretary, AMY, 30s,
knocks and enters.

AMY
Excuse me, sir. I've got the White
House kitchen on the line.

She hesitates, knowing how ridiculous he'll find this.

AMY
They want to know how you'd like
them to cook your burger.

Powell just stares at her.

AMY
I'll tell them however the
president likes his?

POWELL
Please.

AMY
Okay, I'll tell them.

She leaves. A beat.

ARMITAGE
We've already got a war we haven't
won yet. We don't need another one.

WILKERSON

He's not going to take invasion off the table. Not for you, not for anyone. If you urge that now, you'll make yourself irrelevant.

POWELL

You're right.

(to Armitage)

He's right. We've got to stay in the conversation if we want to affect the outcome.

ARMITAGE

Okay, fine. But you're not going in there to pledge fealty. You have to ask for something.

INT. WHITE HOUSE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Powell and Rice wait in an anteroom. It's a little awkward, not least because of the SECRET SERVICE AGENT at the door, pretending not to listen.

POWELL

Are you getting away at all?

RICE

Oh, maybe just to my aunt's for a weekend.

POWELL

Ah.

RICE

You?

POWELL

Yes, our place on the coast. Just Alma and I. You know, it's our fortieth anniversary coming up.

RICE

I didn't know. Congratulations.

Powell smiles. Another awkward beat.

The door opens and Bush waves them in.

BUSH

Come on in, guys.

INT. PRESIDENT'S PRIVATE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The three of them eat. Cheeseburgers and good claret -- though Bush avoids the wine, of course.

POWELL

Sir, if I may -- the presentation by General Franks brought home to me just how rapidly the military planning is moving forward.

BUSH

You can't be shocked that we're doing due diligence there, Colin. You of all people.

POWELL

No, sir. Of course not.

BUSH

There's no commitment to any course of action. No decisions have been decided.

POWELL

No, I understand that. And that's why I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about an alternative approach.

BUSH

You can speak freely.

POWELL

That's good to know, sir, because I want to impress this on you.

He gathers his thoughts. Picks up his wine glass as a prop.

POWELL

When you hit this thing, it's like a crystal glass. It's going to shatter. There will be no government. There will be a breakdown in civil order. There will be consequences beyond anything you or I can even imagine. You break the glass, you own it -- and you are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people.

BUSH

That's well said, Colin. I appreciate it. And it's your job to be tactical like that. But it's my

BUSH(cont'd)

job to be strategic. And I believe that freedom is something the Iraqi people long for. I believe that given the opportunity they will seize their chance for freedom.

POWELL

(beat)

Yes, sir.

He tries to catch Rice's eye, but she's focused on Bush.

BUSH

So. What do you think I should do?

Powell hesitates. He's still not sure about this.

POWELL

Take it to the U.N.

Bush grimaces.

POWELL

A new resolution won't preclude military action, but if you make a commitment to diplomacy, you'll end up in a position of much greater strength.

Bush looks unconvinced, but Powell is warming to his own argument even as he formulates it.

POWELL

If Saddam fails to comply, if he refuses to disarm, you'll be poised to go in with a unified international coalition. The moral high ground will be yours.

Bush takes another bite of cheeseburger as he thinks it over. He's nodding -- something about that registered.

BUSH

Okay. Let's try it.

Powell looks shocked. He wasn't expecting it to be that easy.

BUSH

Is that all?

POWELL

Uh, yes. Yes, I think so.

RICE

Thank you, sir.

POWELL
(realizing they're done)
Thank you Mr. President. I
appreciate the opportunity.

BUSH
Sure thing.

Powell and Rice leave the president to his burger.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

Moments later. They walk along a portico.

RICE
You persuaded him. Congratulations.

POWELL
Maybe. On the U.N., yes. But I'm
not at all sure I got through to
him on the bigger picture. I don't
think he understands the
consequences. Going to war is the
most profound decision a president
can make. It's not something you do
on a gut impulse.

RICE
You should give him a little more
credit. He gets it.

They reach an entrance to the West Wing. Powell hangs back.

POWELL
I'm going to walk around for a
minute.

RICE
Well, good night then.

POWELL
Thanks again for making this
happen. Thanks for your support.

It's almost a question -- is she really on his side here? But
Rice just nods curtly and enters the building.

Powell sighs, rubs his brow. The enormity of the situation
starting to take hold in his mind.

He looks out towards the Washington Monument, brightly lit
against the night sky. He looks along the deserted portico
and seems suddenly to sense his isolation.

INT. CHENEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Cheney sits with SCOOTER LIBBY.

CHENEY

This is absolutely the last thing we should be doing. We go to the U.N., they turn this into junior high debating society, they send inspectors in for the nine thousandth time. What happens? Saddam will play us for fools. I may not be everybody's favorite cabinet member, but I am nobody's fool. No, we've played this game long enough. It's time to act. It's time to take the fucker out.

SUPER: I. LEWIS "SCOOTER" LIBBY, CHENEY'S CHIEF OF STAFF.

LIBBY

You know, the president will be at the ranch the next few weeks.

CHENEY

Yes.

LIBBY

Maybe it's a chance to air some of these ideas in a more relaxed environment...

INT. AIR FORCE TWO, FLYING - NIGHT

Cheney reads a draft of a SPEECH. Correcting, crossing out.

LIBBY (O.S.)

Secretary Powell had his little tete-a-tete with the president. Now it's our turn.

EXT. CRAWFORD RANCH - DAY

Dawn breaking. Bush and Cheney fish by a man-made lake.

BUSH

They tell me they stocked this thing with yellow perch. I don't know, I can't ever seem to catch any. Maybe fishing's just not my sport. But I find it calming, you know? Just a soul-calming way to start the day.

CHENEY

I hear that, sir. I've always loved to fish.

(beat)

Mr. President, about this speech I'd like to give.

BUSH

Yeah, you know, Dick -- I am scheduled to address the U.N. in a few weeks. Don't you think it's going to pre-empt that for you to go out now and talk about all this?

CHENEY

On the contrary, I see it as a chance to prepare the way for the message you yourself will deliver next month.

BUSH

(only half-joking)

Prepare the way -- kinda like John the Baptist.

CHENEY

(beat)

If you like.

Bush returns his attention to the elusive perch, seemingly pondering the analogy he just conjured.

CHENEY

Sir? Mr. President, I really believe I need to make this speech. I believe it's extremely important that I do so.

BUSH

Okay, make it.

(joshing)

Just don't cause me any trouble.

Cheney: silent, inscrutable.

EXT. POWELL VACATION HOME - DAY

A modest place but a prime location, close to the ocean.

INT. POWELL VACATION HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

Alma watches as Powell confers at the kitchen table with Armitage, Wilkerson and other AIDES.

Powell sees her there and comes over.

POWELL

Alma--

ALMA

I was just thinking how nice it is
to have such an extended family.

POWELL

It's only for a day or two. I'll
make it up to you.

ALMA

When? Our *fiftieth* anniversary?

POWELL

When everybody's gone. I'll take
you clam digging.

Alma laughs in spite of her annoyance.

ALMA

That's sweet, sort of.

POWELL

Come here.

He tries to bring her in for a hug, but she brushes him off,
not quite ready to forgive him.

ALMA

You should get ready, the Foreign
Secretary is on his way.

EXT. COASTAL ROAD - DAY

A 1960's VOLKSWAGEN BEETLE speeds alongside the ocean. A
SECRET SERVICE SUV struggles to keep up.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN, TRAVELING - DAY

JACK STRAW, 50s, in the passenger seat, looks a little sick
as Powell, in his element, takes a bend at speed.

The car's engine makes an ominous NOISE.

POWELL

Huh. That doesn't sound so healthy.

SUPER: JACK STRAW, BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY.

STRAW
Don't you think we should, um, pull
over or something?

EXT. OCEAN BLUFF - DAY

Powell checks the engine as Straw gulps some sea air. SECRET
SERVICE AGENTS keep watch around them.

POWELL
Yeah, looks like I'm going to have
to spend a few hours with this one.

STRAW
That's inconvenient.

POWELL
No, that's the whole point.
(off Straw's confusion)
Never mind.

STRAW
Can we talk shop now for a minute?

POWELL
Please.

STRAW
Look, my government's position is
that diplomacy simply must be seen to
have been exhausted. And that means
allowing the weapons inspectors to do
their work, it means getting the
necessary resolutions from the U.N.
The prime minister is going to urge
the president to pursue a unified
coalition.

POWELL
Where do you think the French are
on this?

STRAW
You should talk to Dominick.

He means *Dominique*.

POWELL
Ah, crap. I was hoping you might do
that for me.

STRAW
Ha. Sorry, old friend. Just don't
let him start quoting Descartes at
you and you'll be fine.

INT. POWELL VACATION HOME, STUDY - DAY

Powell on the phone. Straw is with him. Armitage too.

POWELL
Bonjour, Dominique.

INTERCUT WITH DE VILLEPIN, 50s, suave, silver-haired philosopher-statesman. He's on a YACHT somewhere on the sparkling Mediterranean.

SUPER: DOMINIQUE DE VILLEPIN, FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER.

DE VILLEPIN
Bonjour, Colin! I hope you are enjoying your holiday.

POWELL
Yes, thank you. And you?

DE VILLEPIN
Oh, wonderful, wonderful. The sea is clear, the food is magnificent...

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN passes in front of him.

DE VILLEPIN
The women are beautiful.

Powell rolls his eyes at Straw, who laughs quietly.

POWELL
Okay. Listen, Dominique -- before we meet, I'd like to get a sense of your government's position if we try for another resolution at the U.N.

DE VILLEPIN
I would have to discuss that with President Chirac.

POWELL
Sure, but candidly now, just between ourselves.

DE VILLEPIN
Candidly, I think it is something that could be agreed upon, but I do not expect the deliberations to be entirely without incident.

POWELL
All right, thank you, Dominique. We'll talk again soon.

DE VILLEPIN
I look forward to it.

They hang up.

ARMITAGE
I could have saved you the cost of
the phone call.

POWELL
Yeah.

Wilkerson enters.

WILKERSON
Sir, you need to see this. Cheney's
giving a speech to the V.F.W.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Everyone gathers round a TV showing Cheney making a speech in
front of a large crowd of MILITARY VETERANS.

CHENEY (ON TV)
A return of inspectors would
provide no assurance whatsoever of
his compliance with U.N.
resolutions. On the contrary, there
is a great danger that it would
provide false comfort that Saddam
was somehow "back in the box".

POWELL
What the hell is he doing?

CHENEY (ON TV)
Simply stated, there is no doubt
that Saddam Hussein now has weapons
of mass destruction.

A chorus of "Oh!" And "Goddamn!" from the room.

CHENEY (ON TV)
There is no doubt that he is
amassing them to use against our
friends, against our allies --
against us.

POWELL
Son of a bitch.

EXT. POWELL VACATION HOME, DRIVEWAY - DAY

Powell attacks the Volkswagen engine with a wrench. His way of relieving the stress.

Armitage approaches.

ARMITAGE

Sir?

POWELL

I can't fix this damn thing.

ARMITAGE

Sir, you need to get back to Washington.

POWELL

I don't know what the hell is wrong with it.

ARMITAGE

Mr. Secretary -- look at me, please, sir. You need to take a deep breath, jump in the fucking ocean if that's what it takes. But you need to get your head straight and go back to Washington.

Powell throws down the wrench. Takes a breath.

POWELL

It was for my benefit, you know.

ARMITAGE

I'm sorry?

POWELL

A man who's never served a day in his life -- the sheerchutzpah of it -- to go in front of men and women who've risked their lives for this country, half of them in wheelchairs -- to get up there and act like we've got cause to march on Baghdad, when we don't. Not yet. We don't know. We do not know the nature of the threat. And now it's all over cable news like this is administration policy, and it's one step short of a declaration of war!
(beat)

It was for my benefit. It was bait.

ARMITAGE

Take it.
(off Powell's surprise)
Take the bait -- why not?

POWELL

I made my case. We're going to the U.N. I will not trade tit for tat with Dick Cheney on an issue of this gravity.

ARMITAGE

And I'm saying that you have to take him on precisely because the issue is so grave. You think you can't beat him at this?

POWELL

I don't care about "beating" him, or anyone else for that matter. I'm not turning this into a personal vendetta.

A beat. Armitage trying to gauge how far he can push this.

ARMITAGE

I know you want to stay above the fray. I even admire you for it. But sometimes it's just not possible.

POWELL

You want me to act more like a politician, fine. But I still take my orders from my commander in chief and there's still a thing we like to call the chain of command.

ARMITAGE

Yes! Yes, sir, there absolutely is. And tell me what it does to that chain of command if the vice president is allowed to run roughshod over it.

POWELL

The president is his own man -- credit him that at least.

ARMITAGE

You can parse it any way you want. All I know is I've never seen a deputy exert that kind of influence, not once in my career -- military, civilian -- never.

Powell allows himself a quick smile, breaking the tension.

POWELL
Are you excluding yourself from
that analysis?

Armitage grins back, a little sheepishly.

ARMITAGE
No, sir. You always do things the way
you want to do them no matter how
much I try to talk you out of it.
(serious again)
But I'm not going to let this one
slide, not this time. Because I
know I'm not saying anything you
don't already believe.

EXT. THE WHITE HOUSE - DAY

Powell's car pulls up. A crowd of REPORTERS and TV NEWS CREWS
waits. Powell gets out of the car and pushes through.

JOURNALIST #1
Are you at odds with your own
administration's position on Iraq?

JOURNALIST #2
Is it true you're planning to
resign?

JOURNALIST #3
General Powell, do you agree with
the vice president?

Powell is about to enter the building, but turns back. He
surveys the reporters, choosing his words carefully.

POWELL
The *president* has been quite clear
about the need for weapons
inspectors to return to Iraq. I
agree with the president.

And he ducks inside as the questions fly.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Powell meets with Bush. Rice is here too.

POWELL
Mr. President, that is your
intention, isn't it? The return of
inspectors?

BUSH
It is. That's my intention, that's
what we agreed on. I'm just not
sure it's gonna do any good.

Powell has to mask his exasperation.

POWELL
Be that as it may, sir, if we are
committed to this course of action,
it's going to require a U.N.
resolution. I know I don't have to
tell you this, but securing that
will be far from easy.

RICE
The French are already making
noises about a veto.

BUSH
You can handle the French, Colin.

POWELL
Yes, sir. But my point is -- sir,
what exactly do you intend to say
when you go before the U.N.?

Off Bush's blank expression --

EXT. CAMP DAVID - DAY

To establish.

SUPER: CAMP DAVID, SEPTEMBER 6th 2002.

RICE (O.S.)
The agenda is the president's
forthcoming speech to the U.N.

INT. CAMP DAVID, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Rice meets with Powell and Cheney. Armitage, Libby and other
AIDES keep to the background.

RICE
I'd like to reach a consensus today
on what the focus of the speech
should be so that I can take it to
the president for his approval.
Colin, why don't you lead us off?

POWELL
I believe we're generally in
agreement that the focus will be

POWELL(cont'd)

Iraq. But the president can't go before the General Assembly and talk about what a terrible guy Saddam is, and not say what he wants them to do about it. This will be the most important speech of his presidency to date. It's got to have a punch line.

CHENEY

We're overcomplicating the matter. Saddam is an evil man. He has repeatedly violated U.N. resolutions. All the president needs to say is that the United States reserves the right to act unilaterally.

POWELL

The international response if we go to war alone -- we'll be closing embassies around the world and that will only be day one.

CHENEY

This is not the issue. The clear threat is the issue.

POWELL

Which is what?

CHENEY

Excuse me?

Rice is getting agitated.

RICE

Okay --

POWELL

What is the threat, Dick? What is it exactly?

RICE

Gentlemen. We're getting off the point here.

POWELL

All right.

RICE

If we can return to the speech--

POWELL

(changing his mind)

No, I'm sorry, Condi, but this is precisely on point.

CHENEY

I'm frankly amazed we're still
having this conversation.

POWELL

We'll have this conversation until
the case has been made, your
personal amazement notwithstanding.

Cheney is speechless, not used to being confronted like this.

POWELL

If the president doesn't ask for
another resolution, it will be seen
as a statement of intent to go to war
no matter what. It's that simple.

CHENEY

The United States doesn't need
anyone's permission to protect its
interests from terrorists and
dictators.

(looking Powell in the eye)
Not even yours.

Silence. If there was any remaining mutual respect between
these two men, it's gone now.

EXT. CAMP DAVID, WOODS - DAY

Powell walks through the trees with Armitage, hacking at
undergrowth with a stick as he tries to cool off.

POWELL

You remember how he was when things
were ramping up for Desert Storm?
He used to be so calm, so
pragmatic. And now he's, there's no
getting around this -- he is hell-
bent on war. No, beyond hell-bent.
He has a fever about it.

(beat)

You know, I've wondered from time
to time if somewhere along the way
Dick didn't actually lose his mind.

Armitage starts laughing. Powell is annoyed at first, he
wasn't kidding. But then he laughs too.

POWELL

Oh, God. Maybe I'm losing my own
mind a little bit.

ARMITAGE

You can lose it in front of me,
sir, that's what I'm here for. When
you lose it back there in the room,
that's when we've got a problem.

POWELL

I thought I showed admirable
restraint back in the room.

ARMITAGE

You were walking a line. You gotta
be careful. Don't think because
Cheney has a fever that he is not
in command of his faculties. He is
the best player of this game
probably that Washington has ever
seen. If he senses you losing your
grip on the situation, he will --
pardon my French, sir -- he wipe
the floor with your black derriere.

POWELL

Never let 'em see you sweat.

ARMITAGE

Never.

They hear someone approaching through the trees. It's Rice.

RICE

There you are. Well, I just spoke
to the president and he's willing
to ask for a new resolution. So.
You got your punch line.

Powell and Armitage share a smile. A small victory. But they
know things are only starting to get tough.

INT. CAMP DAVID, LIBRARY - NIGHT

Powell sits by a flickering log fire, jotting notes on a
yellow legal pad.

Rice passes by the door, sees a lamp on and clicks it off.

POWELL

Hey!

RICE

Oh, I'm sorry.

POWELL

No, I didn't mean to yell.

RICE

I thought everyone had gone to bed.

She turns the lamp back on.

POWELL

I was just making some notes for tomorrow.

RICE

You'll have lots to discuss with Jack.

POWELL

Yes.

RICE

I'll let you get back to it.

She turns to go.

POWELL

Listen -- things got a little heated this afternoon.

RICE

Yes, I'd say so.

POWELL

It must be frustrating for you, always having to arbitrate these disputes.

RICE

It is what it is.

POWELL

But, what I mean is -- Condi, don't you ever want to do more to make your own feelings known?

RICE

I give the president my best advice whenever he asks for it.

An awkward pause.

RICE

Colin... is there something you'd like to say?

POWELL

No. No, I was just thinking. I don't know why, I've been dwelling a lot lately on what happened to my son.

RICE
To Mike?

POWELL
Yeah. Have I told you this?

RICE
No. Not the details of it.

She hesitates, then sits across from him.

POWELL
This was back when he was stationed in Germany. He and another two lieutenants were out driving on the autobahn one night when their Jeep flipped. The others escaped with cuts and bruises, but Mike was thrown clear and the vehicle landed on him. It ruptured his pelvis. They took him first of all to a local German hospital and one of the other men -- a Lieutenant Brechbuhl -- he knew the language and overheard the doctor say, "There's nothing we can do for this one." *There's nothing we can do* -- can you imagine? But they wouldn't accept it, they knew how tough Mike was, they weren't about to give up on their friend. They shouted and screamed and jumped up and down and finally got him transferred to the Army hospital in Nuremberg. Four days later he was at Walter Reed. And if they hadn't done it, if those two men hadn't said anything, if they hadn't spoken up and forced the issue -- there's no question Mike would have died.

Rice is visibly moved but she can't seem to summon an adequate response.

RICE
That's quite a story.

POWELL
Yes.

He looks to her for more of a reaction, a vulnerability in his eyes he seldom reveals. But her defenses remain up.

RICE
I -- I should really get some sleep. I'll see you at breakfast?

POWELL
(deflated)
Sure.

RICE
Well, good night then.

Rice leaves. Powell just sits there, alone with his thoughts, the dying fire throwing his shadow high against the wall.

EXT. CAMP DAVID - DAY

A HELICOPTER lands. TONY BLAIR steps out. Jack Straw follows. Bush greets them.

Powell watches from a distance with Wilkerson and Armitage.

ARMITAGE
How long have we got?

WILKERSON
One hour before they sit down.

POWELL
Okay, let's see what we can do.

INT. CAMP DAVID, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Powell meets with Straw.

POWELL
Jack, I'd like you to know, and I'd like the prime minister to know before the two of them sit down, that the president has decided to ask the U.N. for a new resolution.

STRAW
I see. That's a breakthrough.

POWELL
It is. But it's fragile.

STRAW
Really? I thought that once he'd decided, he'd decided.

POWELL
Nothing's been made public yet, obviously. And you must realize that a great deal of pressure is being exerted in favor of a different course of action.

STRAW

Yes, but look, we're not here to add ballast to your agenda. We've got our own concerns to voice.

POWELL

I appreciate that. But we essentially want the same thing. And I'm giving you a heads up that the president is in a place right now where he's already agreed in principle to do this. I'm simply trying to cement the deal.

STRAW

(beat)

Okay. I'll talk to the prime minister.

INT. CAMP DAVID, PRESIDENT'S STUDY - DAY

Bush meets with Blair. Cheney watches silently.

BUSH

Saddam is a threat. He's a menace.

BLAIR

Yes.

BUSH

We can't let him carry on getting his own way like he's been getting it.

BLAIR

Agreed.

BUSH

The world will be better off without him.

BLAIR

I've been saying so since before 9/11.

BUSH

Good. We're on the same page then. We're like-minded on this issue.

BLAIR

I believe we are, George. And you'll make all these points at the U.N., I'm sure.

BUSH

I plan to.

BLAIR

Forgive me for being direct then,
but do you know what else you're
likely to say?

BUSH

Tony, I know you'll be watching.
It's going to be a great speech.
I'd sure hate to spoil it.

Blair laughs, but he looks a little uncomfortable.

BUSH

Looking beyond the speech -- if we
do invade, and I'm not saying we
will. But I'll want to know who's
with me.

BLAIR

I understand that. But you have to
realize the political climate I'm
facing back home. My party is
fundamentally a party of peace. The
British people are a pacifist nation.

BUSH

Nobody wants war.

Blair glances at Cheney, who is impassive as ever.

BLAIR

No, of course not. But the question
I'll be asked is: What is the role
of the U.N. here? Is everything
being done diplomatically to make
war the absolute last resort?

BUSH

I get it. I get what you're saying.
It's -- we're still working on the
language.

BLAIR

But you'll ask for a resolution?

Now Bush glances at Cheney, who shakes his head almost
imperceptibly.

BUSH

Yeah. I'm gonna ask for a
resolution.

BLAIR

That's excellent news.

Not to Cheney.

BUSH
So you're with me?

BLAIR
I'm with you.

BUSH
I appreciate that, Tony.

They shake hands.

BUSH
We'll do the press conference now.

BLAIR
Good.

Bush catches Cheney's eye.

BUSH
I'll follow you.

BLAIR
Fine.

Blair leaves.

BUSH
He's a good guy.

CHENEY
He's loyal.

BUSH
Yeah.

CHENEY
And as much as I appreciate he's
got a difficult situation to manage
back home, we can't let that get in
the way of our own agenda.

BUSH
Sure, Dick. I know. It'll work out.

He walks past him to catch up with Blair. Cheney just got
frozen out and he doesn't like it a bit.

EXT. CAMP DAVID - DAY

Powell and Straw stand waiting with their Aides. JOURNALISTS
are gathered on the lawn.

Bush and Blair walk up to take questions. Bush turns to Straw
as he passes by.

BUSH
Your man's got *cojones*.

STRAW
(confused)
Oh.

Bush continues on to his podium. Straw looks to Powell.

POWELL
Cojones. Balls.

STRAW
Ah. Yes.

Wilkerson approaches.

WILKERSON
Sir?
(to Straw)
Excuse us.

He pulls Powell aside. Armitage is there too.

WILKERSON
We need to talk strategy for a moment.

POWELL
I know what you're going to say.

WILKERSON
It's an important move at this point.

Powell notices Armitage scowling.

POWELL
(amused)
Richard doesn't think so.

ARMITAGE
(deadpan)
How would you know that? My face is a mask.

WILKERSON
Seriously though. Do the Sundays, talk about biological weapons for five minutes.

ARMITAGE
Who's the audience for this? We can't put him on national TV just to suck up to Cheney.

WILKERSON

It's not about Cheney.

(to Powell)

If you want the president to take your arguments for diplomacy seriously, you have to show him you're not trying to pull military action off the table. The case might not have been made -- that's not to say there is no case.

Powell looks behind them to where Bush and Blair are taking questions from the press.

POWELL

All right, set something up. One show. I'm not doing the whole carnival.

WILKERSON

CBS? NBC?

POWELL

Anyone but Fox. If I'm going to go through with this, I don't want to have to look at Chris Wallace's smug face while I'm doing it.

SUNDAY MORNING TALK SHOW MONTAGE

NBC

TIM RUSSERT

Our issues this Sunday: September eleventh, one year later.

CBS

BOB SCHIEFFER

On this week that marks the first anniversary of the attack.

CNN

WOLF BLITZER

This special pre-September 11 "Late Edition".

NBC

TIM RUSSERT

The fate of Iraq's Saddam Hussein; the state of America's economy; and corporate responsibility and accountability.

CBS

BOB SCHIEFFER
We welcome the secretary of
defense, Donald Rumsfeld.

CNN

WOLF BLITZER
I spoke with president Bush's
national security advisor,
Condoleeza Rice.

NBC

TIM RUSSERT
An exclusive interview with the
vice president of the United
States, Dick Cheney.

FOX

CHRIS WALLACE
And here now, exclusively on Fox
News Sunday, the secretary of
state, Colin Powell.

POWELL
Good morning, Chris. It's good to
be here.

CNN

RICE
There is no doubt that Saddam
Hussein's regime is a danger.

CBS

RUMSFELD
A great danger.

NBC

CHENEY
The man is dangerous.

FOX

POWELL
If you look at his history of
developing and using biological and
chemical weapons.

CBS

RUMSFELD
Chemical weapons.

NBC

CHENEY
Weapons of mass destruction.

CNN

RICE
There will always be some
uncertainty about how quickly he
can acquire nuclear weapons. But we
don't want the smoking gun to be a
mushroom cloud.

INT. POWELL HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

Alma works on her laptop at the table, papers spread around
her. She doesn't react when the front door OPENS, O.S.

Powell walks in. He looks exhausted.

POWELL
Hi.

ALMA
(not looking up)
Hi.

Powell registers her lack of a proper greeting. He grabs a
soda from the fridge, giving her a chance to finish what
she's doing, but she just keeps on working.

POWELL
So...?

ALMA
So what?

POWELL
How did I do?

ALMA
I'm sure you were very persuasive.

POWELL
Well, that sounds like you didn't
even watch.

ALMA
I'm actually pretty busy. If you
remember, our daughter is going to

ALMA(cont'd)

be married and someone has to
organize the invitations.

POWELL

Didn't I give you a list of names?

ALMA

Yes, and I'm sure Annemarie will be
thrilled to share her big day with
the 3rd Armored Division, the 23rd
Infantry Division and the Pershing
Rifles class of 1958.

POWELL

It's just a few friends. We don't
have to include every one of them.

ALMA

It's fine. It's a big venue.

Alma returns her focus to her lists. Powell considers leaving
it there, but something's still eating at him.

POWELL

Is this about the anniversary?

ALMA

What?

POWELL

I'm trying to understand your mood.

ALMA

Colin, I really need to get this
done.

POWELL

It's not about the anniversary?

ALMA

Colin--

POWELL

I'm sorry our getaway got hijacked, I
really am. But there wasn't any way
around it given the circumstances.

ALMA

You're trying to "understand my
mood"? Is that what you just said?

POWELL

You really didn't watch?

And now Alma looks at him properly for the first time.

ALMA

Yes, I watched. I watched you and then I watched the rest of them, and honestly I don't know that I've ever seen such an impressive display of -- what's that phrase they use? *Message discipline*.

POWELL

All right.

ALMA

What happened to taking a stand?

POWELL

Alma--

ALMA

What happened to speaking up for something even if it wouldn't make you any friends?

POWELL

I haven't changed my position.

ALMA

And yet you allow them to wheel you out there and feed you the talking points and then you come home expecting me to compliment you on your performance!

POWELL

There's still a long way to go, it's a delicate process and this was something I needed to do.

ALMA

Who's idea was it?

POWELL

And no, I wasn't expecting any compliments. But I'm sure I haven't earned this interrogation.

ALMA

Whose idea was it?

POWELL

What does it matter whose idea?

ALMA

They're not stupid. They might be wrong but they're not stupid and they know what it does for public

ALMA(cont'd)

opinion when they make you the
point man on something like this.

POWELL

It was Larry's idea. Okay? He
thought it was a necessary move.
Are you going to question *his*
motivation?

ALMA

No. Of course not.

They both take a moment to cool off.

ALMA

I don't want to see you get used.

POWELL

Alma, that's not going to happen.

ALMA

You're too certain about that.

She picks up her laptop, the lists.

ALMA

I have to run to the printers. Any
last-minute regiments you want to add?

POWELL

(quietly)

No.

ALMA

Okay then.

She leaves the room. And as Powell stews, the voice of HARRY
BELAFONTE is heard.

HARRY BELAFONTE (O.S.)

In the days of slavery, there were
those slaves that lived on the
plantation, and there were those
that lived in the house.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Powell and Armitage watch HARRY BELAFONTE on CNN. The chyron
reads: "Harry Belafonte, Musician and Activist."

HARRY BELAFONTE (ON TV)

Colin Powell was permitted to come
into the house of the master. When
Colin Powell dares to suggest
something other than what the

HARRY BELAFONTE(cont'd)

master wants to hear, he will be
turned back out to pasture.

Armitage clicks off the TV and looks at Powell for a
reaction. He's pissed but trying to hide it.

POWELL

Big deal.

ARMITAGE

Sir--

POWELL

(changing the subject)

Did it come yet?

ARMITAGE

We'd have it if it came.

POWELL

Well, what's taking so long?

ARMITAGE

Sir--

POWELL

We should have had it an hour ago.

ARMITAGE

Mr. Secretary, I wanted you to see
that tape for a reason.

POWELL

Oh, Christ, Richard. Does anyone in
their right mind honestly give a
damn what Harry Belafonte thinks
about anything?

ARMITAGE

I think you do.

POWELL

About Harry Belafonte?!

ARMITAGE

About any time someone slaps you
like this with a piece of wet crap.
I think it gets under your skin. I
think it festers there.

POWELL

You have a way with the English
language, Richard. Does anyone ever
tell you that?

ARMITAGE

Yeah, I find it distracts 'em from
what a bald, ugly bastard I am.

Powell smiles in spite of his annoyance.

ARMITAGE

You're going to get asked about
this and it can't turn into an
issue.

POWELL

(rehearsing his response)
To use a slave reference is...
unfortunate. A throwback to another
time. But Mr. Belafonte is entitled
to his opinion. Greatest respect
for his work on civil rights
issues. *Et cetera.*

ARMITAGE

Okay.

Wilkerson enters.

WILKERSON

It came.

POWELL

Good.

He starts to follow Wilkerson out into the bullpen.

ARMITAGE

Sir?

Powell turns back.

ARMITAGE

No festering.

Powell nods, a little exasperated.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE, BULLPEN - DAY

Amy takes delivery of a thick manila envelope from a White
House SECURITY GUARD. She hands it to Wilkerson.

WILKERSON

Thanks, Amy.

The envelope is marked: "Top Secret". Wilkerson opens it,
takes out three copies of a bound speech: "Address by
President Bush to the United Nations General Assembly."

The three men skim quickly through to the end.

ARMITAGE

Fuck!

WILKERSON

They sent the wrong draft.

ARMITAGE

They fucked us.

WILKERSON

This is an old draft. It's a mistake.

ARMITAGE

It's not a mistake, Larry.
Goddamnit! I could kill somebody right now.

Amy and two other SECRETARIES who have gathered nearby quickly back off and pretend to be busy at their desks.

POWELL

He can't give this speech.

ARMITAGE

Actually the founding fathers never did figure out a smart way to stop the president saying dumb things. He can get up there and talk about his golf swing if the mood takes him.

He slams his copy in a trash can and storms off.

POWELL

We've got less than twenty-four hours. Make something happen.

WILKERSON

You want me to meet with Libby?

POWELL

No, we need to circumvent the V.P.'s office at this stage. Find a way for me to get five minutes with Secretary Rice without every West Wing staffer and their dog knowing about it.

INT. WHITE HOUSE BOWLING ALLEY - NIGHT

Powell tries to select a bowling ball, but none of them have holes that fit his large fingers. Eventually he grabs one and rolls it two-handed down the lane.

A strike! He looks pleased. When he turns, Rice is there.

RICE
Not bad.

POWELL
Think you can match it?

Rice smiles, but makes no move to pick up a ball.

POWELL
C'mon, when was the last time we
bowled together?

RICE
I would say... never.

POWELL
That long?

RICE
What's on your mind, Colin?

POWELL
What happened to the punch line?

RICE
I believe the speechwriters cut it.

POWELL
At whose request?

RICE
What's the difference? You know the
president always has final approval.

POWELL
And he approved this?

She avoids his look.

POWELL
Condi?

RICE
I'm not honestly sure he has had a
chance to review the last-minute
changes yet.

POWELL
He hasn't read it? *He hasn't read
it?!* He's got to give the thing
tomorrow!

RICE
It's one line.

POWELL
It's the only line anyone is going
to care about!

RICE
Look, what do you want me to do?

POWELL
Would you talk to the president?

RICE
It's after ten. He'll be asleep.

POWELL
Wake him up!

RICE
I'm not going to do that.

POWELL
Of course not. We're talking about
invading a sovereign nation but
let's make sure the leader of the
free world gets his beauty sleep.

RICE
Being flip won't help you here.

POWELL
(calming)
I know. I know.

RICE
I can try to speak to him first
thing in the morning.

POWELL
Fine.

Rice turns to leave.

POWELL
Condi?

RICE
Yes?

POWELL
You heard what Harry Belafonte
said?

RICE
Yeah. You weren't the only one he
went after.

POWELL
What's your response?

RICE
Mr. Belafonte is entitled to his opinion.

POWELL
Yeah, that's my line too.

She starts to go again, but stops herself.

RICE
You want to hear what I'd really like to say?

POWELL
Please.

RICE
I grew up in Birmingham, same as Alma.

POWELL
A few years later.

RICE
A few. But I ate the same bad food they gave us in restaurants. I held my head up when folks shouted at me in the street. I tried my dresses in the storage area at the department store when they wouldn't let me use the fitting rooms. I sure as hell don't need any lessons from the likes of Harry Belafonte on what it means to be black.

Powell just nods. Nothing he can add to that.

RICE
I'll call you as soon as I've spoken to the president.

EXT. MANHATTAN - DAY

A perfect early fall morning. Bright blue skies and not a cloud in sight. Skyscrapers gleam in the sunshine.

SUPER: SEPTEMBER 12TH 2002.

EXT. FDR DRIVE - DAY

The PRESIDENTIAL MOTORCADE speeds alongside the East River, towards the United Nations.

INT. POWELL'S CAR, TRAVELING - DAY

Powell on his cell phone. Armitage with him.

POWELL (ON PHONE)
 When was the last time we were in New York on the same day?... Of course not, I'll have a couple free hours after the speech... Hold on a minute, Annie. I've got to take this.
 (switching lines)
 Condi?... That's good news...
 (to Armitage)
 We got it.

Armitage punches the air.

POWELL
 (to Rice)
 Thanks. We'll talk afterwards.
 (switching lines)
 Annie?... No, I'm not letting you off the hook on this one. I'll call you later... I love you too.

He hangs up.

ARMITAGE
 You're sure we got it?

POWELL
 That's what she said.

ARMITAGE
 All right then. Now we just have to hope he doesn't get up there and ask the assembled delegates to work towards a new revolution.

Powell allows himself a quick smirk, but sobers up as the car passes an ANTI-WAR DEMONSTRATION outside the U.N. entrance. A line of POLICE holds back the angry, shouting PROTESTERS.

Powell glimpses an ARMY VET with a hand-written sign: "COLIN POWELL TRAITOR." He's visibly stung.

Armitage notices Powell's reaction. There's an uneasy silence as the car pulls past and into the U.N. compound.

ARMITAGE
 (to break the tension)
 That was Annemarie on the phone?

POWELL
 She's in town. I'm going to help
 her pick out some stuff for the
 gift registry.

ARMITAGE
 She'll appreciate your fine taste
 in bed linen and culinary
 knickknacks, Mr. Secretary.

Powell glares at him.

The car pulls up and they climb out to be welcomed by a host
 of U.N. OFFICIALS and other DIGNITARIES.

INT. UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY - DAY

DELEGATES and POLITICIANS from two hundred nations.

Powell and Armitage find their seats. Powell notices De
 Villepin across the aisle. They nod to each other.

Two rows below them, Cheney flicks through a copy of the
 speech, then puts it down, satisfied. Powell reacts.

POWELL
 Are we getting copies?

He looks around. Everyone else seems to have the speech.

Armitage reaches back and lifts a copy from in front of a
 LATIN AMERICAN DELEGATE, who flirts with the attractive
 SCANDINAVIAN DELEGATE behind him.

ARMITAGE
 (handing it to Powell)
 Here.

Powell goes straight to the last page.

POWELL
 Unbelievable!

He shows it to Armitage.

ARMITAGE
 Christ. What do we do?

STAGE

A U.N. OFFICIAL introduces the president.

OFFICIAL
Please welcome the President of the
United States.

Bush swaggers on. Muted APPLAUSE.

AUDIENCE

POWELL
The teleprompter.

ARMITAGE
What?

POWELL
They can insert the line before he
gets to the end.

He starts to get up but Armitage pulls him back.

ARMITAGE
You can't walk out of here with the
president on stage and the cameras
rolling.

Powell looks down at the TV CAMERAS on the floor, some
focused on Bush, others scanning the hall. He sits back down.

ARMITAGE
I'll take care of it.

He pushes through to the aisle and hustles out.

STAGE

The applause dies down and Bush begins his speech.

BUSH
Mr. Secretary General, distinguished
delegates, ladies and gentlemen. We
meet one year and one day after a
terrorist attack brought grief to my
country and brought grief to many
citizens of our world.

HALLWAY

Armitage breaks into a walk-run as he exits the main hall.
Bush continues in the background.

BUSH (O.S.)

Yesterday we remembered the innocent
lives taken that terrible morning.
Today we turn to the urgent duty of
protecting other lives without
illusion and without fear.

STAIRWELL

Armitage runs down. He's perspiring now.

He reaches the bottom. Tries the door. It's locked.

ARMITAGE

Fuck.

He bangs on it with his fist. Nothing doing.

ARMITAGE

Fucking Fort Knox.

He starts back up the stairs, dripping sweat as he goes.

STAGE

BUSH

Twelve years ago, Iraq invaded
Kuwait without provocation. Had
Saddam Hussein been appeased
instead of stopped, he would have
endangered the peace and stability
of the world.

AUDIENCE

Powell shifts in his seat, drums his fingers on the desk in
front of him. He's not hearing anything the president says.

STAIRWELL

Armitage descends another set of stairs. Another door at the
bottom. It opens.

ARMITAGE

Thank God for that.

BACKSTAGE

Armitage reaches the WINGS to the side of the stage, from where various AIDES and OFFICIALS watch the speech.

The TELEPROMPTER OPERATOR, 30s, sits in a cordoned-off area with a direct line on the president. As Bush speaks, the Operator scrolls slowly through the speech.

Armitage starts towards him but a SECURITY GUARD blocks him.

SECURITY GUARD
Excuse me, sir.

ARMITAGE
It's okay.

He shows his I.D.

SECURITY GUARD
I'm sorry, sir. You can't be back here right now.

ARMITAGE
(re: the Operator)
I have to speak to him.

The Guard just looks at him. Armitage leans in and whispers.

ARMITAGE
You have no idea how fucking important this is.

The Guard makes himself taller. He's got a good four inches on Armitage.

ARMITAGE
I'm the Deputy Secretary of State!

That was a little too loud. He realizes and backs away as two more SECURITY GUARDS move towards him.

ARMITAGE
Okay.

He retreats into the crowd.

STAGE

BUSH
By breaking every pledge, by his deceptions and by his cruelties, Saddam Hussein has made the case against himself.

BACKSTAGE

Armitage realizes he's still holding the copy of the speech. He snatches a pen from an unsuspecting U.N. OFFICIAL and scribbles a few words on the last page.

STAGE

BUSH

As we meet today, it's been almost
four years since the last U.N.
inspector set foot in Iraq.

BACKSTAGE

Armitage pushes back through the crowd of people towards the stage. The Security Guard spots him, moves to intercept.

STAGE

BUSH

Four years for the Iraqi regime to
plan and to build and to test
behind the cloak of secrecy.

BACKSTAGE

Armitage stumbles through to the edge of the cordoned-off area and throws the speech towards the Operator before the Guard can get to him.

It lands a couple feet short. The Operator doesn't notice.

ARMITAGE

Shit.

STAGE

BUSH

We must choose between a world of
fear and a world of progress. We
cannot stand by and do nothing
while dangers gather.

BACKSTAGE

Armitage can only stand by and do nothing, pleading silently for the Operator to see the speech on the ground next to him.

He does! He picks it up. Looks to Armitage, recognizes him. Armitage frantically mimes typing.

The Operator doesn't get it. He returns his attention to the teleprompter, rolls it on to keep pace with Bush.

Then he sees Armitage's scribbled notes on the speech. His eyes widen. Now he gets it.

STAGE

BUSH
We must stand up for our security
and for the permanent rights and
the hopes of mankind.

He stops. Looks at his teleprompter. The next words are:

"Thank you. [Acknowledge applause] [END]."

BACKSTAGE

The Operator shrugs apologetically to Armitage: too late.

ARMITAGE
Fuck.

AUDIENCE

A few people CLAP, believing the speech is over, then stop. Silence fills the hall.

Powell holds his breath.

Cheney looks worried.

CHENEY
(under his breath)
Get off the stage.

STAGE

Bush has a deer-in-headlights look on his face, but he knows this isn't how the speech is supposed to end.

BUSH
(ad-libbing)
And -- and we will work with the
U.N. Security Council for the
necessary resolutions. Thank you.

The hall erupts in APPLAUSE. Bush, back on script, acknowledges it.

AUDIENCE

Powell heaves a huge sigh of relief.

Cheney stalks away from his seat as the applause continues. He glances at Powell -- he looks furious, for once unable to mask his feelings in public. Powell waits for him to pass by before smiling to himself.

BACKSTAGE

Armitage beams. He's never looked so happy. Absent anyone else to celebrate with, he punches the Security Guard playfully on the shoulder.

ARMITAGE
How about that!

INT. UNITED NATIONS, FOYER - DAY

A BUZZ of excitement as everyone files out of the hall. Powell bee-lines for De Villepin.

POWELL
Dominique.

DE VILLEPIN
Ah, Colin. This was the speech you wanted, no?

POWELL
Yes indeed.

DE VILLEPIN
I must confess, I had my doubts when they appointed you to the Secretary of State. *Général le Desert Storm* at the UN. Ha!
(off Powell's look)
Not to offend.

POWELL
Of course.

DE VILLEPIN
But here you have pulled off something quite unexpected. A real piece of statecraft. Congratulations!

POWELL
Well, it's a start. We'll need to talk.

DE VILLEPIN
To discuss the resolutions.

POWELL
Let's not get carried away. One resolution will do it.

DE VILLEPIN
Forgive me, but I heard the president quite clearly. He said "resolutions". Plural.

De Villepin has a Gallic twinkle in his eyes. Powell, by contrast, looks suddenly miserable.

DE VILLEPIN
This makes things more interesting, no? We'll talk soon.

He walks on.

POWELL
Shit.

Armitage catches up to him.

ARMITAGE
What was that about?

POWELL
He said resolutions.

ARMITAGE
Who did?

POWELL
The president.

ARMITAGE
Oh are you kidding me? We go through all that and now the French are going to screw with us because of one stupid slip of the tongue?

POWELL
Welcome to the United Nations.

EXT. STATE DEPRARTMENT - DAY

Leaves on the trees are starting to turn. A brisk wind cuts in off the Potomac.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Powell meets with Armitage and Wilkerson.

ARMITAGE

You don't think it was him?

POWELL

Maybe it was really a mistake.

ARMITAGE

You don't believe that.

POWELL

(beat)

No.

WILKERSON

Sir, we can sit here all day and argue about who took out the line. The important thing is the president ultimately said the right thing, and now we get to ask the Security Council to give us what we want. Agreed?

POWELL

Agreed.

WILKERSON

So, what are we going to ask for?

INT. WHITE HOUSE, ROOSEVELT ROOM - DAY

Powell meets with Rice, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Tenet.

POWELL

As I see it, the weapons issue, the return of inspectors, is the most obvious one. But I'm open to discussing Saddam's links with terrorism. There's also his human rights record.

TENET

The terrorism angle is an intelligence nightmare. We'll never get the Russians and the Chinese on board, much less the French.

RUMSFELD

And human rights. I mean, okay, but how do you make that into a

RUMSFELD(cont'd)

tangible case? W.M.D is the only thing that's going to fly here.

Powell is pleasantly surprised.

POWELL

I agree. I think it's our best chance for nine votes.

RICE

Well, all right. Let's work something up that we can take to the president.

CHENEY

My office has been drafting some language on the weapons issue. I'll have them send it over.

Now Powell looks unpleasantly unsurprised.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Powell and Armitage look at a draft of Cheney's "language".

ARMITAGE

"Material breach of *any part* of this resolution... *Automatic* authorization... *All* necessary means." Is he kidding with this? We might as well resolve to send in the eighty-second airborne the next time Saddam says something mean about our mothers.

POWELL

We have to start somewhere. Let's float it.

LATER

Powell on the phone.

INTERCUT WITH DE VILLEPIN IN HIS PARIS OFFICE.

DE VILLEPIN

Colin, may I know who came up with this proposal?

POWELL

It was a joint effort. Why?

DE VILLEPIN

Because it is so extreme, and if I might say, so magnificently

DE VILLEPIN(cont'd)
baroque, that I can only assume it
was designed to fail.

POWELL
You're saying we won't get nine
votes if we take this to the
Security Council?

DE VILLEPIN
I'm saying you will be subjected to
public mockery in at least nine
languages if you take this to the
Security Council.

INT. STATE DEPRARTMENT - DAY

Powell walks a hallway with Wilkerson.

WILKERSON
We've worked up some new language.

POWELL
It's toned down?

WILKERSON
Yes.

POWELL
But not too toned down?

WILKERSON
No.

POWELL
I feel like I'm fighting on both
sides here.

They reach the bullpen. Amy meets them.

AMY
Sir, the vice president wants to
talk to you.

POWELL
Okay, call him back.

AMY
No, I mean he's in your office.

Powell takes a deep breath, steels himself, and enters--

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Cheney is on the couch, like he owns the place.

POWELL
What can I do for you, Dick?

CHENEY
There's nothing wrong with the
language I sent over.

POWELL
These things always get amended.

CHENEY
It's the robust statement this
situation calls for.

POWELL
There's a process here.

CHENEY
Saddam Hussein is not going to be
impressed by half-measures and
diplomatic cant.

POWELL
No one's suggesting we lessen the
force of the threat. But we've got
to come up with something that will
actually pass a vote.

Cheney stands, confrontational.

CHENEY
Screw the vote.

POWELL
Excuse me?

CHENEY
Screw it. We should be doing what's
right, not what the United Nations
is willing to rubber-stamp.

POWELL
You may believe that "what's right"
is whatever Dick Cheney says it is,
but that's not the world the rest
of us choose to live in.

CHENEY
Damn it, there's nothing wrong with
the language!

POWELL
That's not how the French see it.
Frankly, it's not how I see it.

CHENEY

You're taking your cues now from the Elysee Palace?

POWELL

I'd advise you to weigh your words carefully when you're standing in this office, Dick, because that sounded an awful lot like you meant to impugn my patriotism.

CHENEY

In all candor, *Colin*, I never have been very much in awe of your vaunted patriotism. I may never have dazzled anyone with all the medals on my chest, but I've served this country my whole life, I've governed, I've made the hard decisions, I've -- You don't even know. You don't know what it takes. You think you're so damn *superior*. You don't know. You have no idea.

He breaks off, veins popping, gulping air. Is he about to have another heart attack? But then he abruptly stalks out without so much as another look in Powell's direction.

Powell sinks into his chair, shaking his head wearily. Wilkerson enters.

WILKERSON

What in the hell was that?

POWELL

God only knows. I can't fathom it, Larry. I can't understand what makes him act like this.

WILKERSON

It's monomaniacal. That's all you can really say about it.

He notices how distracted Powell looks.

WILKERSON

Sir? Are you all right?

Powell nods.

WILKERSON

Don't let him get to you. Sir?

POWELL

I ever tell you how first came to Washington?

WILKERSON
(wearily)
Yes, sir. The fellowship thing.

POWELL
The White House Fellowship Program!
That's not an honor they give away
on the street corner.

WILKERSON
No, sir, it's not.

POWELL
I show up, fresh out of Vietnam,
ready to change the world... and
there's Dick. Four years my junior
and already the most connected guy in
the Nixon administration. I spend the
next two-and-a-half decades working
my way through the ranks. Finally I'm
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs -- guess
who's running *Defense*. Now I'm
secretary of state -- *of course* he's
the vice president. He practically
appoints himself to these jobs, I
don't know how in the hell he does
it. But somehow he's always a rung
above me, a step ahead. Always him.
Always Dick.

A beat.

WILKERSON
Come out here for a minute.

POWELL
Why, what's going on?

They step into the bullpen and look out across the large open-plan office. STAFFERS go about their work. A sense of important business quietly being taken care of.

WILKERSON
This place was a dysfunctional mess
before you took it over. No one
communicated, no one trusted anyone
else. The paranoia was dripping
from the ceiling. You made this
department what it is today --
nothing complicated, folks just
followed your example. That's
leadership. And these guys are
loyal, they've got your back. They
also don't care about the political
day-to-day. It might sound
simplistic but honestly, sir, they
just want to do what's right for

WILKERSON(cont'd)

the citizens of this great country.
And if they ever see you straying
from that mission, they'll be the
first to pull you back in. Why?
Because they know that's nothing
less than what you expect of them.

He hands Powell a document.

WILKERSON

The new language. Let me know your
thoughts before we send it over.

He leaves Powell looking thoughtfully at his small army of
dedicated public servants.

INT. CHENEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Cheney and Libby read the new document.

LIBBY

Well, I'm glad we're determining to
"remain seized of the matter". That
is encouraging.

CHENEY

They want to water this thing down.
They want to water it down and
leave it in the sun until all we're
left with is a big bucket of horse
piss. And meanwhile Saddam is
laughing at us.

LIBBY

Here's something that might make it a
little less excremental. What if we
were to insert a deadline? Something
meet-able, but aggressive.

INT. WHITE HOUSE, ROOSEVELT ROOM - DAY

Powell meets again with Rice, Rumsfeld and Cheney.

CHENEY

Thirty days. He gets thirty days to
make full disclosure of all his
weapons of mass destruction.

RUMSFELD

I actually think that's smart. It
gives the whole thing a sense of
urgency.

RICE

Colin?

He's not happy about agreeing with Cheney, but:

POWELL
I can't see any reason to object.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Powell on the phone with De Villepin.

DE VILLEPIN
The new language is generally more acceptable, and the thirty days provision is something we can accommodate. But --

POWELL
Why is it that every time we agree on something I just know there's going to be a "but" in your next sentence?

DE VILLEPIN
But in the event that Saddam is found to be in material breach of the resolution... we wish to return the issue to the U.N.

POWELL
No, Dominique--

DE VILLEPIN
This cannot simply be a green light for invasion.

POWELL
Let me say this as plainly as I can. A second resolution is a non-starter for the president.

DE VILLEPIN
Then why did he not make that clear in his speech?

POWELL
Because he misspoke. He misspoke!

DE VILLEPIN
That was careless.

POWELL
Yes. Yes, it was careless.

DE VILLEPIN
Extremely careless.

POWELL

But if you knew how close he came --

He trails off.

DE VILLEPIN

Colin?

POWELL

Never mind. Here's the bottom line. If you turn this into a deal-breaker, we'll end up with no resolution at all. Nothing. I know you think you've got the whip hand here. I imagine you're enjoying that quite a bit.

DE VILLEPIN

(offended)

Colin, I assure you--

POWELL

But do you really want to push so hard to avoid war that you make it all but inevitable?

DE VILLEPIN

Then permit me to propose something altogether more subtle...

EXT. WATERGATE BUILDING - DAY

It's still dark as Powell's car pulls up outside the infamous complex. He gets out and hustles inside.

INT. WATERGATE HOTEL, GYM - DAY

Powell talks to Rice as she works out.

POWELL

The French want to change the "or" to an "and".

Rice almost falls off her treadmill.

RICE

I'm sorry?

POWELL

They want to change the "or" to an "and".

RICE

They want to change one word?

POWELL

The "or".

RICE

Because they think this process doesn't already resemble a piece of absurdist theatre?

POWELL

De Villepin really seems to believe it's an important distinction. To constitute a material breach Saddam would have to make a false declaration about his weapons capabilities, and fail to cooperate with the inspections. Not just one or the other.

RICE

Well, when you put it like that it sounds an awful lot like a back-door way of getting two resolutions. I'm not sure I can go to the president with that.

POWELL

But it's not two resolutions. It's not going back to the U.N. and starting over.

RICE

I don't know.

POWELL

Look, maybe we just give the French this one. Would that be so bad? Chances are, if Saddam is going to fail on one part of the resolution, he'll fail on the other part too, so what's the difference?

Rice still looks unconvinced.

POWELL

If he's going to screw with us, he's going to do it in style.

RICE

Okay, *that* I can take to the president.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Powell on the phone with Rice.

RICE
I'm sorry, the president didn't go
for it.

POWELL
What did he say?

RICE
Something about wanting to return
the Statue of Liberty in
unceremonious fashion.

LATER

Powell on the phone with De Villepin.

DE VILLEPIN
Then we have reached an impasse.

POWELL
You're saying it's over?

DE VILLEPIN
You are too much the *pessimiste*,
Colin. Impasse does not have to
mean the end.

That Gallic twinkle again.

DE VILLEPIN
Who knows, maybe it is only the
beginning? We will talk soon.

POWELL
(bitterly)
I look forward to it.

INT. WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM - DAY

Principals' meeting. Tommy Franks gives another of his
PowerPoint presentations.

FRANKS
Another key part of the operation
will be the suppression of Saddam's
Scud missiles. This will entail an
aggressive push by Special Ops into
the following areas.

He points at a map of Iraq.

FRANKS
Here in the south, near Kuwait. And
here on the western border with

FRANKS(cont'd)

Jordan, which is the closest point to Israel.

BUSH

Sounds good. Anything else?

RUMSFELD

(stepping in)

No, sir, that's it for now.

FRANKS

Actually, if I may?

Rumsfeld shoots him a look. Cheney stares at Rumsfeld. Bush is oblivious to these silent exchanges, but Powell notices.

BUSH

Go ahead, Tommy.

FRANKS

Mr. President, I have to tell you that these plans are to a significant degree hypothetical.

BUSH

Well, sure. You never know till you get in there, right?

FRANKS

No, sir, but what I mean is -- the areas I pointed to are where we assume the Scuds are hidden. But we're not basing that on anything more than this is where Saddam launched them in '91. We've been looking for these missiles for ten years now. I'm speaking only for myself, sir, but I haven't physically seen Scud one.

An uncomfortable silence. Bush simply has no idea what to say. Powell signals to Armitage: let's go.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

They walk away from the situation room.

ARMITAGE

Good for Tommy.

POWELL

Yeah. But this whole discourse on W.M.D. -- it's getting to be like talking about the Easter Bunny.

ARMITAGE

So maybe it's time to put a face on
it. Give the president something
tangible to chew on besides
Rumsfeld's fucking flow-charts.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

Powell walks a hallway with HANS BLIX and MOHAMED ELBARADEI.

POWELL

I'd like you to give the president
a concise but realistic assessment
of what inspections will entail.
And I'd like you to do your best to
impress upon him not only how
important these inspections will
be, but that you are confident of
their success.

SUPER: HANS BLIX, HEAD OF THE U.N. INSPECTIONS COMMISSION.

BLIX

We are confident.

SUPER: MOHAMED ELBARADEI, HEAD OF THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC
ENERGY AGENCY.

ELBARADEI

All we ask is that we be given the
time and resources to do our jobs.

They reach a waiting area outside the Oval Office. A
SECRETARY, 50s, meets them.

SECRETARY

Excuse me, sir. They're asking for
you in the situation room.

POWELL

Thanks.
(to Blix and ElBaradei)
We're a few minutes early so I
should be back before they send you
in. You don't mind?

BLIX

Of course not.

Powell leaves them. They stand there, looking nervous.

At that moment, Scooter Libby just happens to stroll past the
waiting area and just happens to notice them there.

LIBBY
Excuse me, Dr. Blix? Dr. ElBaradei?
I'm Scooter Libby, the vice
president's chief of staff.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - DAY

Powell enters to find a couple of MILITARY ANALYSTS at
computers, but no one else.

POWELL
What's going on?

ANALYST
Sir?

POWELL
Where is everyone?

INT. CHENEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Libby ushers in Blix and ElBaradei. Cheney greets them.

CHENEY
Gentlemen, thank you for stopping by.

They shake hands.

ELBARADEI
Of course.

Blix goes to take a seat.

CHENEY
No need to sit, I'm not going to
keep you.

Blix stands again, awkwardly.

CHENEY
Let me get straight to the point.
If weapons inspections are carried
out but fail to produce results in
a timely manner, this admin-
istration stands ready to discredit
both the substance of those
inspections, and the credibility of
the agents who conduct them.

Blix and ElBaradei stare back at him, stunned.

INT. OVAL OFFICE WAITING AREA - DAY

Powell hurries back to find Blix and ElBaradei waiting for him. Before he can say anything, the Secretary calls them in.

SECRETARY

The president will see you now.

They enter the Oval Office.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Powell sits glumly at his desk. Armitage enters.

ARMITAGE

How did it go?

POWELL

Terribly. They were too polite to say it but I'm sure Cheney got to them. They barely answered the president's questions and now he's more skeptical than ever.

ARMITAGE

I'm sorry, sir, it was a bad idea.

POWELL

No, we got outmaneuvered, that's all. Damn it, we've got to get the French on board or this whole thing is going to fall apart.

INT. RICE'S OFFICE - DAY

Powell and Rice.

POWELL

What if we look at this in a purely political context? The mid-terms are coming up. Wouldn't the president love to have something he can call a victory?

RICE

Not if it can be spun as the U.N. scoring one over us.

POWELL

"Agreement reached at the United Nations." That's all the headlines are going to say. I'll be amazed if a single member of congress

POWELL(cont'd)
actually reads all the language,
let alone anyone in Peoria.

Rice nods. Makes sense.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Powell on the phone with De Villepin. Armitage and Wilkerson look on.

POWELL
You got your wish, Dominique. We
are willing to change the "or" to
an "and."

DE VILLEPIN
I am with the president at this
very moment. Let me put it to him.

He puts him on hold.

POWELL
Goddamnit.

WILKERSON
What happened?

POWELL
He put me on hold.

They wait.

POWELL
What the hell are they talking
about? We're giving them what they
wanted.

ARMITAGE
If they're going to screw with us
now I will personally raise an army
and storm the beaches.

De Villepin comes back on the line.

DE VILLEPIN
Colin?

POWELL
Yes.

DE VILLEPIN
The president gives his approval.
We have our resolution.

Powell punches the air. Armitage and Wilkerson high five.

INT. UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL - DAY

REPRESENTATIVES from fifteen member nations sit at the Security Council's horseshoe-shaped table. Behind them, the huge PER KROHG PAINTING of a phoenix rising from the ashes.

The COUNCIL PRESIDENT addresses the chamber.

PRESIDENT

The 4,644th meeting of the United Nations Security Council is hereby convened on this day, November 8th 2002, for the consideration of Resolution 1441.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE, ROSE GARDEN - DAY

Bush addresses the PRESS CORPS. Powell stands next to him.

BUSH

I'd like to thank Secretary Powell for his leadership, his good work, and his determination.

INT. SECURITY COUNCIL

PRESIDENT

False statements or omissions in the declarations submitted by Iraq pursuant to this resolution and failure by Iraq at any time to comply with and cooperate fully in the implementation of this resolution shall constitute a further material breach of Iraq's obligations.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN

BUSH

The outcome of the current crisis is now known: the full disarmament of weapons of mass destruction by Iraq will occur.

INT. SECURITY COUNCIL

PRESIDENT

All in favor...

Hands go up around the table: Bulgaria, Cameroon, Colombia...

EXT. ROSE GARDEN

BUSH
The only question for the Iraqi
regime is to decide how.

FOX NEWS REPORT

FOOTAGE of Blix and ElBaradei arriving in BAGHDAD.

FOX REPORTER
Quite simply, these inspections
will determine whether or not
there's a war. Hans Blix described
it as a new chapter, but it's also
Saddam's last chance.

Blix giving a press conference outside the U.N. in Baghdad.

BLIX
We will inspect, and we will report
cooperation and lack of cooperation.

INT. CHENEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Cheney and Libby watch the report, both grim-faced.

ON TV: Footage of an IRAQI NEWS ANCHOR reading a statement.

FOX REPORTER (ON TV)
State-run TV read out a letter from
Saddam Hussein to parliament,
explaining why he had agreed to
comply with the U.N. resolution,
despite its advice to say no.

SADDAM HUSSEIN meeting with his CABINET.

FOX REPORTER (ON TV)
Iraq, he said, had nothing to hide.
But Saddam's dilemma now is that
within thirty days he has to come
up with a full disclosure of
weapons he insists he doesn't have.

Libby turns off the TV.

CHENEY
So. Now we're in the inspections
business.

LIBBY
It's a shame.

CHENEY
I don't trust him.

LIBBY
Saddam?

CHENEY
Blix. The Swedes are a duplicitous people. That's just a matter of historical fact.

INT. ARMITAGE'S OFFICE - DAY

Some time later. Armitage works at his desk. Powell enters.

POWELL
Listen, what are you hearing from your friends at Langley?

ARMITAGE
I'm hearing a lot of colorful language that you might characterize as anti-Swedish.

POWELL
I'm hearing the same thing. He's withholding information -- giving them locations but not details of the inspections.

ARMITAGE
Yeah.

POWELL
Should we be worried?

Armitage shrugs: "what do you want me to say?"

POWELL
Should we?

ARMITAGE
Look, the C.I.A. is for sure spying on Blix, Cheney for sure had them do it, and Blix for sure knows it's happening. Can you honestly blame the guy for not wanting to put out before he's ready, when they're acting like *he* is the one with weapons hidden under his bed?

POWELL
But if he keeps this up, if they think he's stonewalling, that could jeopardize the whole operation.

ARMITAGE

It's a waiting game now though, sir. Blix isn't going to release anything at least until after Saddam makes his declaration. We have to bide our time a little bit.

POWELL

What is this? You're learning patience in your old age?

Armitage grins.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE, BULLPEN - DAY

Armitage, Wilkerson and other STAFFERS pore over copies of an enormous DOCUMENT -- Saddam's W.M.D. declaration.

ARMITAGE

Would it have killed them to summarize this?

Powell comes out of his office.

POWELL

All right. What have we got?

WILKERSON

There's nothing here, sir. Most of it is just copies of information they already declared in the '90s. It's old news and irrelevance and a whole bunch of obfuscation.

ARMITAGE

But what if it's --

He trails off.

WILKERSON

What if it's what?

Armitage doesn't want to say it.

POWELL

What if all this is simply the truth? What if there's really no there there?

(beat)

Either way, I'm finding a new respect for the French. We can argue back and forth about this --

(the document)

But it doesn't mean anything on its own. They made sure of that.

ARMITAGE
On that point, sir --

He notices other STAFFERS close-by, pretending not to listen.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE

The three of them huddle out of anyone else's earshot.

ARMITAGE
Tenet met with the president this morning to talk about W.M.D.

WILKERSON
Why would that happen?

ARMITAGE
They want to have a case ready in the event that Blix doesn't come through quickly enough for the president's liking.

POWELL
How strong was the case?

ARMITAGE
I'm told the president actually pushed him pretty hard. He wasn't buying it at first.

WILKERSON
But?

ARMITAGE
Tenet pushed back, said it was a sure thing. He said it was a slam dunk.

WILKERSON
He said that? He actually said those words?

ARMITAGE
He didn't just say it, he jumped up off the couch like Magic fucking Johnson.

WILKERSON
When was the last time you heard the director of central intelligence talk about *anything* with that kind of certainty?

POWELL

They can't just circumvent the inspections process.

ARMITAGE

No, but Blix doesn't have the last word. If the president wants to say: "here, see? We caught him moving trucks full of chemicals out of X facility the day before the inspectors went in, that's why they didn't find anything" -- that's it. Failure to declare, failure to cooperate, away we go. Everybody have a nice fucking war.

Powell slumps in his chair. He looks miserable.

POWELL

All of this was for nothing. We drove ourselves half-mad fighting for a resolution that Saddam is almost bound to contravene. If anything, we made invasion *more* likely, not less.

ARMITAGE

That's not true, sir. This thing still has to play out.

Powell shakes his head, he doesn't buy it.

ARMITAGE

Get on the phone with Blix. Excuse the expression, but you've got to put a rocket under his ass.

LATER

Powell on the phone with Blix.

BLIX

This is not a process that can be rushed.

POWELL

I understand that, Dr. Blix. But you have to realize what the political ramifications are here. It would be enormously helpful if you could do more to stress the aggressiveness of the inspections.

BLIX

The inspections have been nothing
if not aggressive.

POWELL

Maybe. But I have to tell you, the
president is getting a little sick
of seeing grinning Iraqi officials
leading camera crews around
whitewashed, empty warehouses.

BLIX

All right. I will discuss this with
my team.

POWELL

Thank you, I appreciate it.

INT. POWELL HOME, GARAGE - DAY

Powell tinkers with another one of his old cars. A small TV
plays CNN in the background.

After some spluttering, the engine starts to PURR. Powell
looks pleased, but it doesn't altogether lift his mood.

He notices the TV. Blix on the news. He turns up the volume.

BLIX (ON TV)

My team is working harder than
ever, we have increased the number
of inspections, and we continue to
insist on unconditional access.

POWELL

Okay.

BLIX (ON TV)

But for now we are looking forward
to returning to our families for
the holidays.

Powell can't believe what he's hearing.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

Bush and Rice. The president looks unusually tired.

BUSH

This pressure isn't holding
together.

RICE

No, sir. I don't believe it is.

BUSH

How do they shut down for Christmas?
I mean, everyone loves Christmas. I
love Christmas. But how much longer
do they think I can wait?

RICE

I agree, sir. It's a poor decision.
It looks like they're unserious
about the inspections.

Bush goes to the window and stares out. For a moment it seems
like he might have forgotten Rice is still here. Eventually,
he turns back to her.

BUSH

Condi, I haven't asked you directly
about this before.

RICE

No, sir.

BUSH

Not because I don't value your
opinion.

RICE

I understand.

BUSH

Because I didn't want to put you on
the spot until it was the right
time to put you there. I'm asking
you now.

RICE

You're asking me if I think you
should go to war?

BUSH

Yeah.

Rice doesn't hesitate. She's been waiting for this question
and she knows her answer.

RICE

Mr. President, I believe that to
carry out coercive diplomacy, you
have to back it up with a credible
threat. You made the threat; you
have to follow through on it. You
have to go to war.

INT. RICE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Rice works at her desk. KNOCK on the door. It's Powell.

RICE
Colin. Come in.

POWELL
The president asked to see me.
Thought I'd stop and say hi on my
way over.

RICE
Of course.

An awkward beat.

POWELL
They didn't say what it was
concerning. Any ideas?

RICE
No.

Powell looks at her. He knows she's lying.

POWELL
It's unusual. To bring me in this
late, I mean. I'm not sure I can
remember the last time I spoke to
him in the Oval Office and it was
after lunch.

He laughs. Rice smiles, a little weakly.

Powell doesn't know what else to say. There's a sadness in
his eyes: he can't get an honest response from her even now.

POWELL
Well, I should head on in there.

He starts to leave.

RICE
Colin -- I just wanted to say.
You've done a terrific job these
last few months.

Powell nods, unsure exactly what to make of that.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

Powell and Bush.

BUSH
I want you to know how much I
appreciate your hard work lately.

POWELL
Of course.

BUSH
You've done a terrific job.

Powell reacts. That phrase again.

BUSH
But I've come to a realization. The
inspections aren't going to get us
there. They're just not going to
work the way we want them to.

Powell nods, resigned to what's coming.

BUSH
Colin.... Colin, I really think I'm
going to have to do it.

A long, awful silence.

POWELL
You're sure about this?

BUSH
Yeah.

POWELL
Your mind is made up?

BUSH
It's made up.

POWELL
You understand, once again, sir --
you do understand the consequences?

BUSH
I understand, you've told me. But I
think I have to do this. My gut is
telling me I have to do it.

POWELL
You're going to own this country--

BUSH
Yeah--

POWELL
Its people --

BUSH
Yeah, I get it. I get it.

POWELL
With respect, Mr. President, you
can't possibly know what it means
to actually fight in a war.

Bush stares at him.

POWELL
That was out of line.

BUSH
No kidding.
(beat)
But if anyone can say it... Finish
your point.

POWELL
I think I've said enough already.

BUSH
I said finish it.

POWELL
All right. The point is this. I
don't believe we're simply going to
roll into Baghdad and be welcomed
as liberators. This is a country
that's unified only by its
subjection to tyranny. When you
remove that--

BUSH
I'm not expecting it to be easy.

POWELL
No, but Mr. President, I'm saying
you have to have it settled in your
mind that this is the right thing
to do, and know that you'll be
placing our troops in a theatre
where civil war is not out of the
question.

Bush nods, as if thinking this over. But his demeanor does
not really change. Powell senses he hasn't broken through.

BUSH
Colin, I value your wisdom, you
know that.

POWELL
(flatly)
Yes, sir.

BUSH

But now I want to know that you're with me. Because I think I have to do this and I want you to be with me on it.

(no response)

So I'm asking you. Are you with me? Because we're going to have to sell this thing. Go out and sell it to the American people. We've got a great case, it's real strong. But the people don't know it yet, so we're gonna have to tell 'em.

Powell realizes where this is heading and the blood is draining from his face.

BUSH

This actually was Dick's idea. He thought you'd be best.

POWELL

Did he?

BUSH

You're popular, you're well liked, you're credulous.

POWELL

Credible.

He's not sure if that was a Bushism, a Freudian slip, or what.

BUSH

Right. So Dick suggested it, but it's my decision to ask you. Colin, it's time to put your soldier's hat back on.

POWELL

(distant)

My soldier's hat?

BUSH

Yeah, your hat, your war uniform. I don't mean -- not *literally* put it on. But you know we're not debating it anymore, and I need you to go out and sell this thing. Be our point man on this.

(beat)

Will you do that for me?

POWELL
(long pause)
That's no small thing you're asking.

BUSH
I know that. But I'd like your answer now.

POWELL
I'm sorry, Mr. President. I'm not prepared to make a decision like this without giving it more than a moment's consideration.

A tense beat.

BUSH
Okay. I respect that. But do your thinking quick -- we need to get boots on the ground. Get in there and get this over with before the summer comes. Hot as hell in the summer time out there in that desert.

INT. POWELL'S CAR, TRAVELING - NIGHT

Powell sits in back, staring out at nothing, the weight of the world on his shoulders.

POWELL
(to the DRIVER)
Pull over a minute, please.

EXT. VIETNAM MEMORIAL - NIGHT

Powell walks slowly alongside the wall. It's deserted on this bitter night and his SECRET SERVICE DETAIL gives him space.

He stops. Reads the inscribed NAMES silently to himself. Trying to extract some new meaning from this awful catalogue of his fallen cohorts.

INT. POWELL HOME, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Powell lies awake in bed as Alma sleeps next to him. After a moment, she wakes.

ALMA
You shouldn't sit up worrying like this.

POWELL
You don't think I have cause to
worry?

She does, of course. An uneasy silence.

POWELL
I know what you're thinking. You
were right.

ALMA
I wasn't thinking that.

POWELL
I wouldn't blame you if you were.
You tried to warn me and look what
happened. I got sucked in. I got
sucked in and he played me for a
fool.

ALMA
That's not true.

POWELL
Isn't it? If I do this, he gets
what he wants. If I *don't* do it, he
gets what he wants -- with the
added bonus of forcing me out of
the administration. Either way,
it's a *coup de grace*. Three-and-
half decades of military service,
but all anyone'll remember me for
is whether or not I gave a *speech*.

ALMA
I can't tell you which way to turn
here.

POWELL
I'm not asking you to.

ALMA
But I can tell you this: if *Dick
Cheney* is part of the equation when
you make this decision, if something
he said or did is even a factor at
the back of your mind -- well, that
will be a sorry state of affairs.

Powell has no response. That hit home.

EXT. THE MALL - DAY

Powell and Armitage walk briskly alongside the Carp Pond.
It's a bright morning, but clearly very cold.

Powell appears to have shaken off his despondency and has a new sense of purpose about him.

ARMITAGE
I hate to complain--

POWELL
Is that a fact?

ARMITAGE
I hate to complain, but I think my testicles are about to freeze off.

POWELL
Keep the pace up, keep the blood flowing. Your testicles will be fine.

They walk on.

ARMITAGE
You can do it. You know that? If it's what you want, you can do it with your head held high.

POWELL
It's not that simple.

ARMITAGE
It's a civilian job. It's not like walking away from the Army.

POWELL
I know. I understand that -- on an intellectual level, I understand it.

ARMITAGE
I appreciate how agonizing this decision must be--

POWELL
I'm not ready to make it yet.
That's the simple fact.

Powell stops before they get close to a group of TOURISTS.

POWELL
Richard, I wanted to talk to you privately because, well -- look, you've been more than just a deputy these last few months. I've served in my career with some of the finest men and women you could ever hope to meet. No one's been more loyal than you. No one's been a better friend.

POWELL(cont'd)

(off his embarrassment)
I know that's corny. It also happens to be the truth. But now I need to know that I'll have your full support going forward.

ARMITAGE

You're asking me if *I* want to step aside?

POWELL

I'll understand if that's what you feel you have to do.

ARMITAGE

I'm ready to do it, sir. I was hoping to follow your lead.

POWELL

That's not what I'm putting on the table.

Armitage considers this. But it's not a hard decision.

ARMITAGE

No. Of course not, are you kidding? I'm with you as long as you need me.

POWELL

Good.

They start walking again.

ARMITAGE

Anything to get out of this shrivelling cold.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE, BULLPEN - DAY

As Staffers bustle around it, a TV plays CNN. Footage of AFGHAN FIGHTERS on the move. The chyron reads: "TALIBAN RESURGENT? EVIDENCE OF NEW JIHAD AGAINST U.S. TROOPS".

The door to Powell's office is closed --

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE

Powell, Wilkerson and Armitage study copies of a thick, top-secret INTELLIGENCE DOCUMENT.

WILKERSON

Some of these claims aren't even sourced. Are we supposed to just take their word for it?

ARMITAGE
And the language of the thing. It's
histrionic.

WILKERSON
(to Powell)
What do you want to do?

Powell shakes his head, frustrated. But then he has an idea.

POWELL
The French are about to assume
presidency of the security council.

ARMITAGE
Haven't we been hearing about it.

POWELL
I told them I wouldn't attend the
meeting. It's MLK Day.

WILKERSON
They'd have to understand that.

POWELL
I just changed my mind. We'll move
forward on the speech, but no one's
closed off the diplomatic route. No
one's told us to stop. Maybe
there's another gasp in this.

A KNOCK on the door and Amy enters.

AMY
Sir, the vice president for you.

Powell picks up the phone.

POWELL
Dick.

CHENEY
Colin, I wanted to thank you for
agreeing to do this.

POWELL
I haven't agreed to anything yet.

CHENEY
(surprised)
But the president asked you?

POWELL
He did.

CHENEY

You realize what it will mean if you refuse?

POWELL

I'm clear on the nature of the situation. Is there something I can help you with?

CHENEY

The document Scooter sent over--

POWELL

I have it in front of me.

CHENEY

All the key intelligence is there. You'll find it compelling.

POWELL

We're giving it every consideration.

CHENEY

Good. When can the president expect your decision?

POWELL

I'm sure you'll be the first to know.

He hangs up before Cheney can push him any further.

POWELL

(the document)

Toss it.

WILKERSON

Sir?

POWELL

If they don't have the evidence, that makes the decision for us. I'm not about to go selling snake oil at the United Nations. But I can't tell one way or the other from reading this alarmist propaganda. Toss it.

Armitage happily slam dunks his copy in a trash can.

POWELL

We're going to start from scratch. As soon as I get back from New York, I want a room at Langley. I want every piece of information and every source they've got. And I

POWELL(cont'd)

want the director with me right
there in the room.

INT. UNITED NATIONS, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A private, informal meeting of the Security Council.

De Villepin holds court at the head of the table, clearly
enjoying his new position of authority.

DE VILLEPIN

France has long been at the
forefront of the global fight
against extremism, and my
government intends to use the honor
of presiding over this council as
an opportunity to continue to
expand our historical leadership on
this grave issue.

Powell exchanges a look with Jack Straw, who rolls his eyes.

DE VILLEPIN

Now, although the purpose of this
meeting was to focus on
international terrorism, I feel
compelled to relate this to the
current situation.

That got Powell's attention.

DE VILLEPIN

It is a matter of some concern that
a military strike in Mesopotamia
would have consequences for our
efforts to curb the activities of
the terrorists. Rather than
suppressing them, my fear, the fear
of my government, is that it will
only embolden them.

Powell reacts, irritated.

INT. FRENCH AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - DAY

DIPLOMATS and POLITICIANS mingle and drink Champagne. Powell
talks with Straw.

POWELL

I came here thinking there might
still be a chance to make this
work. But the French only appear to
have hardened their line.

STRAW
Where is Dominick? This is his
party after all.

Powell's cell phone RINGS. He answers.

POWELL
Richard?

ARMITAGE (O.S.)
Find a TV.

INT. AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, FOYER - DAY

Powell and Straw find a TV playing CNN.

ON TV: De Villepin gives a press conference outside the U.N.

DE VILLEPIN (ON TV)
If war is the only way to resolve
this problem, we are going down a
dead end.

POWELL
What the hell is he doing?

DE VILLEPIN (ON TV)
Already we know for a fact that
Iraq's weapons of mass destruction
programs are being largely blocked,
even frozen. We must do everything
possible to strengthen this
process. We believe that today
nothing justifies envisaging
military action. Nothing! *Rien!*

Powell can only shake his head in dismay and disbelief.
That's the end of that.

EXT. C.I.A. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

To establish.

TENET (O.S.)
This information is one-hundred-
percent reliable.

INT. C.I.A., BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

Tenet briefs Powell. Armitage and Wilkerson are here too, as
well as a number of C.I.A. ANALYSTS and LAWYERS.

TENET

It's been corroborated by four different sources, including a chemical engineer, a civil engineer, and two high-ranking military defectors.

They're looking at a SATELLITE PHOTOGRAPH, projected on a screen. It's unclear exactly what it shows -- a desert area with indeterminate buildings dotted around.

POWELL

I'm looking at this and I see... I don't know what I see.

TENET

Well, the area *here*. The different shading on the ground, the pattern of it. The proximity to the facility *here*, which we know produced mustard gas used by Saddam against the Kurds. All of this is indicative of attempts to cover a chemical spill, most likely caused by a rushed effort to transport the chemicals from the vicinity.

POWELL

George, I'd like you for a moment to imagine me repeating what you just said in front of a worldwide television audience of half a billion people, many of whom may not have trained as intelligence analysts.

(beat)

Scrap it.

TENET

This is good intel.

POWELL

I said scrap it. What else?

INT. C.I.A., HALLWAY - DAY

They take a break. Powell huddles with Armitage. Wilkerson is on his cell phone nearby.

POWELL

This is a mess.

ARMITAGE
Yeah, but you're taking the right
approach. You've got to press them
on every detail.

Wilkerson hands Powell the phone.

WILKERSON
Secretary Rice.

POWELL
(taking the phone)
Condi.

INTERCUT WITH RICE IN HER OFFICE.

RICE
How's it going in there?

POWELL
We're making progress.

RICE
Good. It has been five days.

POWELL
There's a lot to work through.

RICE
Anything I can tell the president?

POWELL
Not yet, no.

RICE
He's getting anxious.

POWELL
I'm sorry to hear that.

RICE
And really it was a courtesy.

POWELL
Excuse me?

BUSH
He could have demanded your answer
there and then. We've tried to be
accommodating.

POWELL
Well, I'm afraid you'll have to
accommodate me a little longer.

He hangs up, fuming.

INT. C.I.A., BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

Back to work. A heightened air of tension in the room.

TENET
This is something we intercepted
just a few days after the
inspectors went in.

He signals to an ANALYST, who plays an AUDIO RECORDING of two IRAQI MEN talking.

Powell listens. Looks to Wilkerson in desperation.

WILKERSON
George?

TENET
Yes, Larry?

WILKERSON
They're speaking *Arabic*.

TENET
Yeah. Well, what they're discussing
is the removal of nerve gas.

WILKERSON
From a facility?

TENET
From an inventory of substances
being held at a particular
facility.

WILKERSON
So they're not discussing the
actual gas?

TENET
Not as such.

WILKERSON
So who's to say they're not removing
it from the list because it isn't
actually there anymore? Maybe it
hasn't been there in years.

TENET
No. Like I said, this was just
after the inspectors returned. It's
obviously a cover-up.

He looks to Powell for a decision.

POWELL
Get me a clean translation. Maybe
we can use it. What else?

Tenet places a small VIAL filled with a WHITE SUBSTANCE on
the table in front of Powell.

POWELL
What's this?

TENET
Anthrax.

Powell looks at him: are you kidding me?

TENET
Not actual anthrax. It's baking
soda.

POWELL
(fighting to stay calm)
Okay. What's it for?

TENET
It's a prop. Makes the moment more
vivid. The idea that something this
small could shut down Capitol Hill.

POWELL
George, can I speak with you
privately, please?

INT. TENET'S OFFICE - DAY

Powell confronts Tenet, the stress of the situation getting
the better of him.

POWELL
Adlai Stevenson--

TENET
Okay--

POWELL
Adlai Stevenson went to the U.N.
during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

TENET
I know.

POWELL
When the Soviets denied the
existence of the missiles, do you
know why no one believed them?

TENET

Because he had photographs.

POWELL

He had photographs of the damn missiles!

TENET

Colin, I know what happened when Adlai Stevenson went to the U.N. But this isn't 1962, Saddam isn't the Soviet Union and it's not the Cold War anymore. And you know what else? Our intelligence is higher caliber than anything they had back then, and my agents risk their necks every day to get it.

POWELL

I'm not attacking the quality of your field work.

TENET

You have to piece it together. You have to build the argument. Isn't that the whole point of this speech? Isn't that why they asked you to do it? No, it's not going to be an Adlai Stevenson moment. Christ, I wish it would be! But this is the twenty-first century and people don't just leave their nuclear warheads out on the lawn for all the world to see.

A long pause as they both cool off.

POWELL

Let's get back in there. But George, I'd like to be clear about one thing. If I do give this speech, you're going to be sitting right there with me.

Tenet nods, but he looks at least a little scared.

INT. C.I.A., BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

Powell and Tenet return to the room. An expectant silence. Powell picks up the "anthrax" vial, considers it.

POWELL

Okay, we'll use this. What else?

INT. CHENEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Cheney and Libby.

CHENEY

This is absurd. We gave him the case.

LIBBY

I wrote that document myself.

CHENEY

And now he's dithering over it, tinkering away like it's one of his goddamn vintage cars.

LIBBY

We're going to have to speed this up. Sir? We're going to have to.

Cheney hesitates. Then gives his assent with a quick nod.

INT. LIMO, PARKED - DAY

Outside a hotel, Powell talks to Armitage on his cell phone.

POWELL

(to phone)

Tenet has a point. It's not 1962.

ARMITAGE (O.S.)

Okay, so he has a point. Is that enough?

POWELL

I think the intel is good enough for me to make the case, yes. I'm still not saying I'll do it.

Annemarie slides into the back of the car next to him, looking stunning in her wedding dress. She's annoyed to see Powell on the phone.

The car pulls away.

ARMITAGE

Sir, for the record -- my position on this hasn't changed.

POWELL

I know.

ARMITAGE
With your head held high, sir.
That's all I'm saying.

Annemarie is losing patience.

POWELL
Richard, I'll have to call you
later.

He hangs up, but that's not enough for Annemarie, who
snatches the phone from his hand.

POWELL
Hey!

She leans forward and passes it to the Secret Service Agent,
ROGER, 40s, in the front passenger seat.

ANNEMARIE
Roger, take this for me?

ROGER
I'd be happy to.

Roger turns off the phone, pockets it.

POWELL
Roger--

ANNEMARIE
I'd let it go, Dad. He's got a gun.

Powell can't bear this, but he also knows this is not the
moment to cross his daughter. He fumes silently for a moment
before relaxing into the situation.

POWELL
You look beautiful.

ANNEMARIE
Thank you.

POWELL
I don't want to give you away.

She smiles, a little choked up.

EXT. WEDDING HOTEL - NIGHT

A TV NEWS VAN pulls up near the entrance. The CREW gets out
and starts setting up equipment.

Another van approaches.

INT. HOTEL, LOBBY - NIGHT

As in the opening sequence, Armitage and Wilkerson watch the news report on TV.

CNN REPORTER (ON T.V.)
...In exclusive breaking news this evening, sources within the administration have told CNN that Secretary Powell will indeed appear before the UN Security Council, and he is expected to do so within a matter of days.

ARMITAGE
Oh, fuck me.

INT. BAR AREA

Powell has a beer with Mike as the party flows around them.

MIKE
What happens if we're invaded?

POWELL
Tonight?

MIKE
Yeah. I mean, is there a rear admiral or someone who *isn't* here, just in case? Like when they do the State of the Union and the secretary of agriculture gets hidden away in a bunker.

POWELL
I wouldn't worry, Mike. I think we've got it covered.

A beat.

POWELL
Let me ask you something.

MIKE
Sure, Dad. What's on your mind?

POWELL
You ever wish you were still in the Army?

MIKE
Every day. You know I do.

POWELL
Even now?

MIKE
Of course. But listen -- when those doctors told me I'd never serve again, I thought my whole life was over. But that's just the point: my life very nearly did end with that accident, and here I am now, watching my little sister getting married.

POWELL
But if things had turned out differently--

MIKE
If I was still a soldier?

POWELL
Yeah.

MIKE
And if we're about to go to war?

Powell nods.

MIKE
Come on, Dad. You have to ask me that?

POWELL
I'd like to hear you say it.

MIKE
I'd go wherever they sent me, I'd fight whoever they told me to fight, and I'd be honored to do it. I'd be proud.

That's the answer Powell was expecting, and it seems to solidify something in his mind.

Just then, Alma, Armitage and Wilkerson enter on the other side of the room, talking heatedly. Powell sees them and knows immediately that something's wrong.

He looks into the ballroom, sees Annemarie dancing.

POWELL
Mike, do me a favor.

MIKE
Sure.

POWELL
Keep an eye on your sister.

MIKE
Why, what's going on?

POWELL
Just keep her dancing, okay?

EXT. HOTEL ENTRANCE

More NEWS CREWS and REPORTERS have arrived. A whole crowd of them now, blocking the entrance.

INT. BAR AREA

Powell huddles with Armitage and Wilkerson.

ARMITAGE
The report is false. Deny it.

WILKERSON
It's not that simple. If you deny it now it'll be seen as a finite signal you oppose invasion.

POWELL
If I deny it now the president's going to want my resignation.

A tense beat. Powell looks again at Annemarie dancing.

POWELL
I can't think in here with this music.

EXT. HOTEL BALCONY

Powell steps out. Takes a deep breath.

He looks down and sees the gathering pack of journalists.

EXT. HOTEL ENTRANCE

Wilkerson comes out of the hotel.

WILKERSON
You guys don't miss a beat, do you?

JOURNALIST #1
Larry, is he coming out?

WILKERSON
No. So you might as well go home

JOURNALIST #1
We were told to expect a statement.

WILKERSON
Are you out of your mind? His kid
just got married.

JOURNALIST #2
That's what they told us.

WILKERSON
Who did?

JOURNALIST #2
It came out of the press office.

WILKERSON
Shit.

EXT. BALCONY

Armitage joins Powell. They stand in silence for a moment.

ARMITAGE
It was a beautiful wedding.

POWELL
Wasn't it?

ARMITAGE
It's a low move to pull this now,
even by Cheney's standards.

POWELL
Yeah.

He just shrugs, he's got nothing more to say about Cheney.

ARMITAGE
You want me to leave you alone?

POWELL
No. You got me into this, you can
stand her and suffer through it
with me.

Armitage smiles ruefully, but then turns serious again.

ARMITAGE
Look, you know my feelings. This
war is going to happen. That
doesn't mean it's right. The

ARMITAGE(cont'd)

statement it would make if you were to resign now. It would be powerful, sir. It would really mean something.

POWELL

What would it mean to the troops though? If I get on my high horse and wash my hands of the whole thing, are they going to follow my lead? Are they going to walk away because they don't happen to like the deployments they get handed? I'm a soldier, Richard. I will never not be a soldier. And I may not fight in this war, but I can't turn my back on the men and women who will.

Armitage nods. He understands.

EXT. UNITED NATIONS - DAY

The sun rises over the East River. Flags hang in the still, freezing air.

SUPER: FEBRUARY 5TH, 2003.

A brief moment of calm. Then --

MEDIA CIRCUS

NEWS CREWS swarm around the U.N. compound. COPS everywhere, directing traffic, trying to marshal the chaos.

ANTI-WAR PROTESTERS, their numbers visibly swelled since Bush's speech, spill past barricades and block the street.

A long line of TV NEWS REPORTERS, speaking excitedly in a dozen languages --

REPORTERS

*With less than an hour to go...
The world holds its breath as we
wait to hear what Secretary Powell
will reveal...
Will this be Powell's "Adlai
Stevenson moment"?...
Can he convince the skeptics that
war in Iraq is the answer?...*

INT. UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL - DAY

De Villepin and Straw walk through the chamber. WORKMEN rig and test equipment: giant screens, lights, speakers.

DE VILLEPIN
This is not for our benefit, I
feel.

STRAW
Oh? How do you mean?

DE VILLEPIN
This is for the Hollywood movie
fans, no?

Straw can't argue with that. It *does* have the feel of a
soundstage being prepped.

INT. WALDORF HOTEL, LOBBY - DAY

SECRET SERVICE AGENTS all over the place. Powell sits with
Alma on a couch. He plays nervously with something in his
hands. The vial of "anthrax."

Wilkerson approaches.

WILKERSON
Sir, we're ready.

INT. POWELL'S CAR, TRAVELING - DAY

Nearing the U.N. Powell catches sight of the Anti-war
Protesters, now some distance away behind a POLICE CORDON.

He looks away and Alma squeezes his hand to reassure.

INT. UNITED NATIONS, BACKSTAGE - DAY

Powell waits in the wings as the Security Council chamber
fills up. Tenet joins him.

TENET
Just wanted to wish you luck.

POWELL
George, you know it's not too late.
If there's anything I'm about to
say that you're not completely
confident in --

TENET
Nothing. I stand by every claim.
You're going to do great.

He leaves him.

Powell has the speech in his hand. He flicks through it. Not reading it, nervous. When he looks up, Cheney's there.

POWELL

Have you come to wish me luck too?

CHENEY

No. I'm sure you don't want that.

Powell just looks at him.

CHENEY

All the same, you should know that this will not go unappreciated.

POWELL

We'll let history be the judge, shall we?

CHENEY

History will look kindly on this day. It's an admirable thing you're about to do.

POWELL

Okay.

CHENEY

It's admirable, it's moral.

POWELL

All right, Dick --

CHENEY

It's patriotic.

Powell almost laughs -- it would be funny if it wasn't so disturbing. Cheney looks confused.

POWELL

No, Dick. No -- let me tell you: the kids who'll die in this war. Those kids, they're the patriots. Not you, not me either. But maybe if you say it enough times, folks'll think you understand. They might even think it applies to you. Dick Cheney. Serves his country. A patriot. I've got news for you, Dick. You're not fooling me. I don't believe you're fooling many people at all. Maybe the only person you are fooling, is you.

INT. SECURITY COUNCIL - DAY

Powell walks to his seat. Polite APPLAUSE around the hall.

He sees the rest of them sitting there: Bush, Rice, Rumsfeld. Tenet in the seat directly behind his.

He sits. Organizes his papers. Takes a sip of water. He's still shaken from his confrontation with Cheney.

But then, a little stiffly at first, he begins.

POWELL

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary
General, distinguished colleagues,
I would like to begin by expressing
my thanks for the special effort
that each of you made to be here
today.

LATER

Powell finds his rhythm: methodical, forceful. The way he presents the case, it *is* convincing.

POWELL

Let me say a word about satellite
images before I show a couple. The
photos that I am about to show you
are sometimes hard for the average
person to interpret, hard for me.
But as I show you these images, I
will try to capture and explain
what they mean, what they indicate
to our imagery specialists. Let's
look at one.

A SATELLITE PHOTOGRAPH, much like the one they studied earlier, is projected on screens around the hall.

POWELL

This one depicts a weapons munition
facility at a place called Taji.
This is one of about sixty-five
such facilities in Iraq. We know
that this one has housed chemical
munitions. Here, you see fifteen
munitions bunkers in yellow and red
outlines. The four that are in red
squares represent active chemical
munitions bunkers. How do I know
that? How can I say that? Let me
give you a closer look.

LATER

He has been speaking for a while now, but the audience continues to hang on his every word.

POWELL

When Iraq finally admitted having biological weapons in 1995, the quantities were vast.

He holds up the "anthrax" vial.

POWELL

Less than a teaspoon of dry anthrax, a little bit about this amount -- this is just about the amount of a teaspoon -- less than a teaspoon full of dry anthrax in an envelope shut down the United States Senate in the fall of 2001. Iraq declared 8,500 liters of anthrax. If concentrated into this dry form, that amount would be enough to fill tens upon tens of thousands of teaspoons. And Saddam Hussein has not verifiably accounted for even one teaspoon-full of this deadly material.

LATER STILL

His voice is strained now, every word an effort.

POWELL

We wrote Resolution 1441 not in order to go to war, we wrote 1441 to try to preserve the peace. We wrote 1441 to give Iraq one last chance. Iraq is not so far taking that one last chance.

He continues --

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Powell is alone at his desk.

POWELL (O.S., CONT'D)

We must not shrink from whatever is ahead of us. We must not fail in our duty and our responsibility to the citizens of the countries that are represented by this body. Thank you.

Silence. Powell just sits there, lost in thought.

The office is packed up, everything in boxes.

SUPER: JANUARY 19TH, 2005. 22 MONTHS AFTER THE START OF OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. ONE DAY BEFORE BUSH'S SECOND INAUGURATION.

With some effort, Powell gets up, gathers the last few things from his desk, drops them in a box.

A KNOCK and Alma enters.

ALMA

Hi.

POWELL

(pleasantly surprised)

What are you doing here?

ALMA

Oh, I thought maybe you could use a hand.

POWELL

You didn't have to. They've got someone coming to collect all this anyway. I don't know why, it'll just take up space in the garage.

ALMA

Well, I'll walk out with you then. Are you ready?

Powell takes a last look around the office.

POWELL

I always assumed I'd know when it was the right time to leave.

ALMA

You said from the start you'd do this job for one term and that would be it.

POWELL

Yes. I'm not saying now is too soon. Now I'm just another card in the re-shuffle.

(quietly)

I could have left and it would have meant something.

A long pause. Alma doesn't know what to say.

POWELL
All right. Let's go.

BULLPEN

They step out of his office. The place is deserted.

POWELL
Didn't anyone want to say goodbye?

He holds back, troubled.

ALMA
Colin? What is it?

POWELL
Something Larry told me once. He said -- he said if I ever strayed from my mission the people who work in this building would find a way to let me know.

He looks almost helplessly across the empty office.

ALMA
Come on.

She gently takes his arm.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Powell looks exhausted, a spent force. He loosens his tie. Alma straightens it again. Before he can react, the elevator doors open --

INT. LOBBY

The place is packed. The entire State Department staff. A "THANK YOU" banner hangs from a crowded mezzanine balcony.

As Powell steps out of the elevator, a mighty CHEER goes up. He looks overwhelmed. Alma is beaming.

The crowd parts, letting him through to where a small podium has been set up. He steps up onto it. Everyone quiets down.

POWELL
I know the last thing you want to hear from me now is another speech.

Some nervous LAUGHTER. But it wasn't really meant as a joke.

POWELL

So let me just say this. I leave this post after forty years of government service. Thirty-five of those years were in the United States Army. I am proud that I have had this chance to serve my country once again. I am proud to have served with all of you. You are the foot soldiers in the battalion.

(beat)

Now get back to work.

APPLAUSE and CHEERS as he steps down into the crowd. Armitage is there. Wilkerson. A hug from Amy. And as he accepts the well-wishes of his staff, the following words appear:

"COLIN POWELL'S SPEECH AT THE U.N. WAS WIDELY CREDITED WITH SHIFTING PUBLIC OPINION IN THE UNITED STATES IN FAVOR OF WAR.

SHORTLY AFTER LEAVING THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, ACKNOWLEDGING THAT NO WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION HAD BEEN FOUND IN IRAQ, POWELL CALLED THE SPEECH A "BLOT" ON HIS RECORD.

ON OCTOBER 19TH 2008, POWELL APPEARED ON "MEET THE PRESS" TO ENDORSE BARACK OBAMA FOR PRESIDENT.

HIS APPROVAL RATINGS WENT THROUGH THE ROOF."

FADE OUT.