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Sun Aug 24, 11:05 AM ET

 Add [Politics - Reuters](#) to My Yahoo!*By Carol Giacomo, Diplomatic Correspondent*

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - As the 2004 election nears, President Bush ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) could face an international "perfect storm" -- more attacks in Iraq ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) and Afghanistan ([news](#) - [web sites](#)), an overextended deployment of U.S. troops eager to come home and blackening clouds over the Middle East, North Korea ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) and Iran.



Reuters Photo

The confluence of world events will test Bush's foreign policy leadership even as he must concentrate on the U.S. economy and other domestic issues that could determine whether he wins a second term.

Although most Americans still have a favorable opinion of the president, his job performance rating has slipped to 52 percent positive and 48 percent negative in a recent poll of 1,011 likely U.S. voters by Zogby

International. This compares with a post-Sept. 11, 2001, peak rating of 82 percent positive.

The president and his top aides have repeatedly insisted that their course in Iraq is the right one.

But last week's bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad, which killed 24 people, has provoked demands for a reassessment of U.S. Iraq policy.

Meanwhile:

-- Renewed Israeli-Palestinian violence may have scuttled a U.S. peace plan for the region.

-- Six-party talks in Beijing this week raise both peril and promise in dealing with the North Korean nuclear crisis.

-- A U.S. push to have the United Nations ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) address concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions could provoke a crisis.

STORM BREWING

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"A perfect storm (on security) is brewing for the rest of the year," said one military planner, referring to a catastrophic clash of three storms that menaced the U.S. Northeastern coast in 1991.

In Iraq, a major lightning rod is the issue of troops -- whether the 139,000 U.S. military on the ground should be supplemented with more Americans or foreign forces.

In a letter to Bush last week, Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Chuck Hagel, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the Baghdad attack showed the "urgent need" for more foreign forces in Iraq.

They urged Bush to find a way to broaden the U.N.'s role, so leaders of countries that opposed the war can have the "political cover" to justify post-war cooperation.

"It is worth enhancing the role of the United Nations because it will allow us to share the huge risk and expense of securing, policing, and reconstructing Iraq -- tasks that will take tens of thousands of troops and tens of billions of dollars over many years," the senators wrote.

More compelling to the White House, perhaps, may be the stance of William Kristol and Robert Kagan, neo-conservatives who helped create the intellectual climate that propelled Bush's decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein ([news](#) - [web sites](#)).

In The Weekly Standard, which Kristol edits, they warned that the future of U.S. world leadership and security is at stake in Iraq but Bush has "failed to commit resources to the rebuilding of Iraq commensurate with these very high stakes."

TOO FEW TROOPS

There are too few U.S. troops and too little money committed to Iraq and another \$60 billion and two army divisions are needed, they said.

"This is the time to bite the bullet and pay the price. Next spring, if disaster looms, it will be harder. And it may be too late," they wrote.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has insisted that no more troops are required, just that the United States must hasten preparations for Iraqis to take over security duties.

Nevertheless, Washington has revived discussions with the United Nations on a resolution to encourage countries like France, Turkey, Germany and India to send troops and resources.

Military planners say if the U.N. did pass a resolution that France and others approved, it could take eight weeks for troops from those countries to arrive on the ground in Iraq.

That would bring them to Iraq's one working port and airport about the time thousands of U.S. forces are due to rotate out.

But as the administration remains adamantly opposed to sharing power in Iraq with the United Nations, agreement may be impossible, or at least a

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