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## A Deadbeat President Hawks His Dead-end War

By Jason Vest, [AlterNet](#)

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In his first speech to the nation from the White House since he announced the bombing of Baghdad, President Bush rattled his begging bowl with vigor and conviction on television screens across America. "Yet we will do what is necessary, we will spend what is necessary, to achieve this essential victory in the war on terror, to promote freedom and to make our own nation more secure," he declared, as he hit Congress up for a whopping \$87 billion handout.

Indeed, it was hard to decide what was more appalling about Bush's address: The shamelessness with which he appealed for more deficit spending or the divorced-from-reality conviction with which he parroted his speechwriter's spin. The Pentagon source who called me moments after the speech, however, was unimpressed. "The gall," he seethed. "I'd like to give that son-of-a-bitch an eighty-seven billion dollar enema."

Sadly, our president is far more likely to get his giant-sized appropriation. Congress – after letting fly with a bit of theatrical tongue-lashing – will likely accede to Bush's request, forking over precious taxpayer money to fund mostly military and intelligence operations that are long on cost and short on actual details.

But while the White House will get what it wants from an enabling Congress, it's still not going to have as easy a go of it at the United Nations, especially not with Germany and France. The two nations are just as unhappy this week as they were last Thursday, when the U.S. turned in a draft Security Council resolution that gave the Iraq a U.N. imprimatur but ceded very little control. Indeed, Secretary of State Colin Powell didn't exactly endear himself to the Germans and the French by affecting a pose for public consumption that fell somewhere between exaggerated disbelief and unconvincing bonhomie. "If they have suggestions," he said of German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques Chirac's objections to the U.S. plan, "we would be more than happy to listen to them."

That tune's been called before. It is unlikely that Schroeder and Chirac have forgotten how the Iraq saga unfolded: beginning with a deceptively sweet

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lilt ("If we are an arrogant nation they will resent us; if we're a humble nation, but strong, they'll welcome us," said Bush); segueing after 9/11 into a vaguely martial cadence of exclusivity and duplicity; then building to a crescendo with neoconservatives effusing over a "paradigm shift" in the world order, confidently sounding the death-knell for obstreperous "Old Europe" and the insufficiently accommodating UN.

Yet for all the flinty resolve that accompanied phrases like "coalition of the willing," the Bush administration finds itself back at the despised UN. But in characteristic fashion, it is defaulting to its arrogance-as-usual mode despite its ever-mounting problems. While this wrong-headed chutzpah would be cause enough for the UN to turn its back on the administration, there are two more important reasons not to accede to its ill-conceived terms.

The first is fairly obvious. Granting a patina of respectability and an infusion of deferential assistance to an occupier that doesn't know what it is doing in Iraq is only likely to make matters worse. Indeed, if the Pentagon's track record thus far is used as a barometer, the U.S. has done little to merit the primacy it so arrogantly insists upon. Paul Wolfowitz's March 27 assertion that Iraq "can finance its own reconstruction, and relatively soon" has proven to be a gem of absolute stupidity, idealistic dementia and/or brazen disingenuity.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's inchoate proposal for more Iraqis to take up the security slack doesn't exactly inspire confidence – and seems ironic in light of Iraqi administrator J. Paul Bremer's earlier decision to dismantle the Iraqi military and police over the objections of the U.S. Army. And for all the administration's bluster about "handing over" power to the Iraqis, the draft proposal's characterization of the Iraqi Governing Council as a "principal body" of administration still under control of Bremer seems a little far-fetched. The IGC is represents less a mechanism for rapid democratic transition than the imperial relationship between the likes of Lord Cromer and his khedive in Cairo.

The second reason to turn down the United States terms is arguably more esoteric, but just as compelling. In a heady moment earlier this year at a Brown University forum, the influential Pentagon adviser, Richard Perle, was all but dancing on the grave of the United Nations. Labeling the United Nation's reluctance to rubberstamp the Iraq invasion a "failure of courage," Perle held that such cowardice should be punished with nothing less than the dissolution of the Security Council.

Accepting the US draft proposal essentially rewards the temerity of neoconservatives whose ambition is to re-fashion the United Nations to suit their imperial needs. "My preference," Perle said on Apr. 1, "would be to convene a new charter conference for the United Nations and see whether we can reconstitute the United Nations so as to recognize the terrorist threat and so as to empower the international community to deal with it ... until that time, no American president will have any choice but to use the power of the United States when there is a threat that cannot be dealt with effectively by the international community."

To the neocons, the choice facing Annan and his brethren was simple: either

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the United Nations reconstitutes itself with the U.S. as its unquestioned master, or who knows where and when the US military might show up in the name of "securing a safer world." That's a euphemism, as we have seen, for a full-scale invasion (devoid of realistic post-conflict planning) in ostensible (but hardly credible) pursuit of weapons of mass destruction that may or may not be there, and that might, however improbably, find their way to various "evildoers" *du jour*.

However graceless the Bush administration's return to the United Nations may be, its mere presence before the body is an admission of failure. Indeed, Perle was so confident of what post-Saddam Iraq would reveal that he confidently proclaimed, "(W)hen the war is over ... there will be chance to judge what we did and why we did it and how it came out."

Failure, however, should not be rewarded. Not when the President of the United States declines to explain to his own people why no weapons of mass destruction have been found, and takes no responsibility for a monumental failure of planning that continues to drain the blood, spirit and treasure of both the American and Iraqi people.

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