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*Editor's Note | George W. Bush's speech on Sunday asked Americans to prepare for a longer engagement than expected, and asked the world to help him clean up his mess in Iraq. Essentially, the rhetoric about "Mission Accomplished" was badly flawed and ill-timed, as this speech evidenced clearly. That statement came 130 days ago, from the deck of an aircraft carrier. One wonders whether Bush regrets now having splashed his bravado across the planet, and whether the war itself is worth the hundreds of billions of dollars and American lives it will cost. "Iraq is now the central front" in the War on Terror, said Bush, and we will do whatever is necessary to win that war (which we had been told was over in Iraq) to make America safer. "We will do what is necessary, we will spend what is necessary," said Bush. The connection, again, was made by Bush between Iraq and 9/11, despite the clear fact that no such connection exists. The connection was made over and over and over again in this speech. The connection is a lie, too often repeated. Bush described "great progress" in this war. One wonders which fight he has been watching. Buried in the speech was a plea for help telegraphed to the international community. He described this plea as the "duty" of the civilized world. In other words, Bush wants the rest of the planet to clean up his mess. Simultaneously, Bush told the Iraqi people that security was their responsibility, and not his. On the whole, there have been few Presidential speeches in American history so full of deliberate obfuscations and untruths. The stench of desperation is strong. - wrp*

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**Bush Seeks an Exit Strategy as War Threatens His Career**  
The Observer

Sunday 07 September 2003



The President will make a dramatic U-turn on Iraq in a TV broadcast tonight to try to salvage his hopes of re-election amid Americans' growing hostility to the casualties and chaos. Report by Paul Harris in New York, Jason Burke and Gaby Hinsliff

George Bush will attempt tonight to convince the American people that he has a workable 'exit strategy' to free his forces from the rapidly souring conflict in Iraq, as Britain prepares to send in thousands more troops to reinforce the faltering coalition effort. Frantic negotiations continued this weekend in New York to secure a United Nations resolution that would open the way for other countries to deploy peacekeeping troops to help after Bush - with one eye on next year's presidential election - signalled a change of heart on America's refusal to allow any but coalition forces into Iraq.

The President has been left with little practical choice. Concern among the American public has reached such a pitch that, with his approval ratings plummeting, he will deliver a televised address to the nation tonight to reassure them that they do not face another Vietnam. With their sons and daughters dying daily in guerrilla attacks, Americans may now be becoming more frightened of being bogged down in a hostile country than of the terrorist threat against which Bush has pledged to defend them.

Meanwhile in London, with MPs due to return to Westminster tomorrow after the long summer recess in no mood to be generous, the Prime Minister faces fresh scrutiny of Britain's role in the rapidly souring peace. Bush's change of heart over the UN is potentially good news for Tony Blair, who has long discreetly tried to persuade him down this route: if successful, it could eventually allow Britain to scale back its troops, and help repair the diplomatic rift with the European Union caused by the abandoning of the UN process before the war.

In the short term, however, troop numbers will have to rise instead. Geoff Hoon, the embattled Defence Secretary, will make a statement to the Commons tomorrow. He is expected to confirm the departure of up to 2,000 British soldiers to the Basra area: the first 120 soldiers are leaving Cyprus this weekend. With routine defence questions tabled for the Commons tomorrow as well, and two debates on defence later this week, rebel Labour MPs will be queuing up to condemn the handling of the peace where once they condemned the war.

The question now being asked on both sides of the Atlantic is how

the allies could find themselves in such trouble. One key mistake both Washington and London made was to assume that, once Baghdad fell, countries such as France and Germany, which had stood on the sidelines, would relent and offer peacekeeping troops. They underestimated the unexpected domestic popularity of anti-war leaders.

'That was the diplomatic advice. That was what we believed would happen, and it didn't,' said one Whitehall source. 'What we were unable to read was how popular the decision [to stay out of Iraq] would be in the long run for the leaders who took it.'

In New York, diplomats were upbeat last night about the chances of securing a UN resolution allowing troops to operate under a UN mandate but with the US retaining operational command. One source in the office of the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said such an agreement could 'transform the occupation'.

Complications remain, however. The French and, to a lesser extent, the Germans are playing it tough, aware that they have Bush over a barrel, British sources say. 'They can squeeze more concessions out of Bush at the moment and they know it,' one source said.

Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, who flew to Lake Garda in Italy for an informal meeting with his European Union counterparts late last week, is attempting to mediate between EU governments and the White House, but have want a fundamental shift in US policy on Iraq. Sticking points include a firm timetable for handing over power to Iraqi authorities, drawing up a constitution and holding elections.

Other anti-war nations, such as Russia, China and Germany, have signalled that they expect a deal. 'It is a remarkable change for the better,' Chile's UN ambassador and Security Council member Heraldo Munoz told The Observer.

After being sidelined in the build-up to the war the UN is now moving centre stage, but it the risks of becoming embroiled in a dangerous, unpredictable mission means few nations will be willing to take casualties without securing serious concessions. 'The US has come seeking assistance and there will be a price for it,' said one senior UN diplomat.

But Bush has now accepted the warnings of his Secretary of State Colin Powell and the more hawkish Under Secretary John Bolton that there will be a worse price if he doesn't back down. Bush's approval

ratings have sunk to around 55 per cent - around 20 points lower than those of his father after the 1991 Gulf War.

Bush Senior still went on to lose the next election: and the American economy is more fragile now than it was then. The nation can ill afford the extra \$60 billion the White House is expected to ask Congress to occupy and rebuild Iraq next year, and sabotage to Iraqi oil pipelines and infrastructure means oil revenues will not rescue them.

Although the polls show Bush would still beat any likely Democrat contender, Bolton argues that approval ratings are a better guide. Voters feel it is unpatriotic to threaten to vote against a President during a war, so the polls could underestimate Bush's plight.

The Democrats, who once saw Iraq as their weakness, now scent blood: last week's live televised debate between eight Democratic candidates echoed to easy potshots at the President, with front-runner Howard Dean saying it was time for troops to come home.

Yet more than Bush's political survival resting on the outcome of the talks: with less domestic support than Bush for the war to start with, Blair is even more vulnerable to public anger if British casualties go rising. A leaked memo from Straw, published in the Daily Telegraph last week, warned that up to 5,000 extra British troops might be necessary or the Iraqi mission risked failure.

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**Jump to TO Features for Monday 08 September 2003**

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