

OVERSIMPLIFYING IRAQ'S CHALLENGES: BUSH'S FORT BRAGG SPEECH AND AMERICANS' DECLINING SUPPORT FOR THE WAR

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Recibido: 21-02-2005 / Revisado: 03-04-2005 / Aceptado: 18-06-2005 / Publicado: 21-09-2005

Abstract: This article puts in context why President of the United States of America George W. Bush has been unable to rally American support for his strategy to stabilize and transform Iraq. Since the summer of 2003, when Iraqis started to challenge the authority of the Anglo-American occupation, the White House has been on the defensive, while American support for post-war efforts has dwindled. While developments in Iraq have affected the strategy's execution, the main problem is the president's inclination to oversimplify the challenges American troops and diplomats are facing in Iraq, inviting criticism from journalists, experts on nation-building and lawmakers. In many ways, declining approval of Bush's handling of Iraq results in the public's lack of confidence that the president and his advisors will be able to accomplish its goals in Iraq. To test this argument, the article analyzes the president's address to the nation, delivered primetime on June 28, 2005, showing how Americans are not convinced of the soundness of Bush's strategy.

Keywords: post-war Iraq, public support, presidential leadership, George W. Bush.

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1. ROSY SCENARIOS AND WANING AMERICAN SUPPORT

When it comes to the United States's ability to stabilize and transform Iraq in the near future, is the glass half-full or half-empty? For senior officials in the Bush administration it is half-full, but recent public opinion polls show that Americans do not share this optimism. For instance, a poll conducted by the Pew Charitable Trusts in early June 2005 found that 46 percent of respondents wanted the "immediate withdrawal" of U.S. troops from Iraq. This figure is up 10 percent from a similar poll conducted by the organization prior to the 2004 presidential elections¹. Similarly, only 35 percent of respondents to a more recent *CBS News* Poll, conducted in early September 2005, supported President George W. Bush's handling of Iraq². These polls are not only affecting Bush's popularity, but also his standing within the Republican Party³.

The Bush administration complains that Americans are getting an incomplete story. According to these officials, the problem is that American public opinion has been driven by biased media reports that focus on Iraq's security challenges rather than on the political and economic progress made in the last months⁴. Even though Bush's advisors may

1. "Iraq News Increase Calls for Troop Withdrawal". *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. 13 June 2005. Available from Internet at: <<http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=246>>.

2. "Poll: Katrina Response Inadequate". *CBS News*, 9 September 2005. Available from Internet at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/09/08/opinion/polls/main824591_page2.shtml>. It is difficult to say if these views on Iraq were influenced by the controversy surrounding the government's response to the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. However, an earlier AP-IPSO poll did show that 38 percent of respondents supported the president's handling of Iraq. The only major difference today is really the growing sentiment that the troops should return home. Also, did Cindy Sheehan's protest have an impact? It is difficult to say whether the CBS News poll's results were influenced by these events. On the AP-IPSO poll, see: "Poll: Bush's Iraq Rating at Low Point". *CNN.com*, 5 August 2005. Available from Internet at: <<http://www.cnn.com/2005/POLITICS/08/05/bush.ap.ipsospoll.ap/index.html>>.

3. Nagourney, A.; Kirkpatrick, D., "Bad Iraq War News Worries Some G.O.P. '06 Vote". *New York Times*, 18 August 2005.

4. This was also one of President Bush's complaints. See Woodward, B. *Plan of Attack*. New York, NY, Simon and Schuster, 2004, 424.

be right in this respect, the problem is the White House's failure to manage the expectations of the American people. Since Bush's advisors started to make the case for a policy of regime change in September 2002, the public relations campaign dismissed experts' views that Iraq's transformation along democratic and capitalist lines would be a costly, long and complicated undertaking. Senior administration officials downplayed Iraq's ethnic and religious divisions, emphasizing that the country's middle class would embrace and lead the transformation process. Similarly, Iraq's transformation would not require too much support from American taxpayers, as the Iraqi oil industry could finance these efforts. Finally, the Pentagon, which was in charge of post-war Iraq, maintained that the U.S. military would not be bogged down in Iraq⁵. In fact, Jay Garner, who directed the planning and the execution of post-war reconstruction efforts until mid-May 2003, described the mission as, "three months up and out"⁶.

Given the many political and socio-economic challenges the international community has faced in Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti, and East Timor, why did the Bush administration argue it would be able to accomplish its objectives in post-war Iraq so effortlessly? A poll conducted by the Pew Charitable Trusts before the war provides one explanation. Thirty percent of the American people did not agree with Bush's decision to oust Saddam Hussein's regime. More tellingly, the same poll found that support for the use of force had dropped from 64 percent in January 2003 to 59 percent in mid-March⁷. The Bush administration decided to ignore any issues that could have delayed the Pentagon's war plans or "require from the American people a larger mobilization and greater degree of sacrifice than the Bush administration's desire

to have it all: a war to topple a pivotal figure of the 'axis of evil', a normal life in the United States, and a sweeping program of tax cuts"⁸. Even though Bush told Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi that their decision to invade Iraq should not be decided by public opinion polls⁹, which in the case of Italian polls were showing strong anti-war attitudes, the White House wanted to make sure that the president would not lose support for the war at home¹⁰. Consequently, Bush's advisors emphasized that Iraqis would be better off because of the war, making the invasion a just endeavor to liberate Iraqis from many decades of oppression¹¹. More importantly, the Bush administration's public relations campaign in many ways promised more than it could deliver, arguing that the U.S.-led coalition could stabilize and transform Iraq at relatively low costs and in a short amount of time.

While useful before the invasion, this campaign should have been abandoned once the war ended. Indeed, the crowning moment of this campaign was Bush's "mission accomplished" speech on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003¹². Although the president did make it clear that U.S. troops still had to stabilize the country and assist Iraqis establish a representative government, the speech's objective was to celebrate the U.S. military's quick victory, rather than prepare the American people for post-war Iraq's possible challenges. More importantly, Bush and his closest advisors did not make any serious attempts to explain to Americans why their support for Iraq's transformation was vital over the long-term.

Since the summer of 2003, when Iraqis started to challenge the authority of the Anglo-American occupation, the White House has been on the defensive, while American support for post-war

5. For these criticisms, see Yordán, C.L., "Failing to Meet Expectations in Iraq: A Review of the Original U.S. Post-War Strategy". *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, VIII-1 (2004), 52-68.

6. Garfinkel, A. "The Daunting Aftermath: L. Paul Bremer & Co. Have a Different Kind of War on Their Hands". *The National Review*, 55 (28 July 2003), 29.

7. "America's Image Further Erodes, Europeans Want Weaker Ties". *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, 18 March 2003. Available from Internet at: <<http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=175>>.

8. Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq*. New York, Times Book, 2005, 286.

9. Woodward, B., *Plan...*, op. cit., 296.

10. Althus, S.; Largio, D. "When Osama Became Saddam: Origins and Consequences of the Change in America's Public Enemy #1". *PS: Political Science and Politics*, XXXVII-4 (2004), 795-799.

11. Mac Ginty, R. "The Pre-war Reconstruction of Post-war Iraq". *Third World Quarterly*, XXIV-4 (2004).

12. A copy of the speech is available in the following website: <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A2627-2003May1>>.

efforts has dwindled. The president has given a number of speeches on post-war Iraq. Each one has re-emphasized his belief that ousting Saddam Hussein's regime was the right decision, that Iraq's transformation is going to force the transformation and stabilization of the Middle East, and that these efforts will assist the United States win the war on terror. In many ways, these speeches did not really address Americans' growing frustration with the president's handling of post-war Iraq. For Bush's advisors, the speeches were used to highlight the president's steady leadership and to reassure Americans that the nation's efforts in Iraq would not be in vain. However, these speeches, which were written with Ronald Reagan in mind, seem to have awakened Lyndon B. Johnson's ghost. Comparisons between current efforts in Iraq with Vietnam have become commonplace¹³.

2. THE FORT BRAGG SPEECH

Bush's main problem is not necessarily his optimism that the U.S. will succeed in post-war Iraq; it is his inclination to oversimplify the many challenges the United States is trying to address in Iraq today. In turn, this oversimplification leads experts, lawmakers and even some advisors to question the president's understanding of the situation in Iraq and his strategy's viability. As the gap between Bush's rosy perceptions and realities in Iraq widen, the critics loudly voice their concerns, forcing the public to question the president's credibility and the strategy's soundness¹⁴. Rather than searching for a new public relations campaign, the White House looks for ways to bring advisors and lawmakers in line and to further discredit the critics.

While Americans' growing impatience with the president has worried Bush's advisors, it was the criticisms of senior Republican lawmakers that forced the White House to re-think its public re-

lations campaign. In mid-June 2005, Bush invited the 55 republican senators for a breakfast to talk about Iraq. Two of the most vocal critics were Senators Ted Stevens of Alaska and John Warner of Virginia. According to Richard Waiffe and Holly Bailey of Newsweek, they "pressed Bush 'to make a better case' about why the United States remains in Iraq and to 'not let people think things are going better than they are'"¹⁵. Days after the breakfast, Bush decided to deliver a prime time speech to explain how his administration is trying to stabilize and transform Iraq. Even though Scott McClellan, Bush's Press Secretary, stressed that the speech would "not signal any change in military or diplomatic strategy"¹⁶, the intention of the speech was to re-assure Americans that the administration would succeed in Iraq, to bolster support for the current strategy, and to ask Americans for their patience.

The speech took place on June 28, 2005 in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Two reasons explain why this military installation was to serve as the backdrop for Bush's speech. First, it reminded Americans of the many sacrifices the troops and their families have made since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Second, North Carolina is home to Representative Walter B. Jones, a republican who co-sponsored a resolution in mid-June 2005 that demands the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq by October 2006¹⁷. These reasons are important as Bush's speech stressed the link between Iraq's stabilization and transformation with the wider war on terror, maintaining that Iraq is the central front in this war. Bush also wanted to end the debate on timetables to withdraw troops from Iraq. The president made it clear that U.S. forces will leave Iraq once Iraqis establish a responsible government that can end the insurgency and address the country's socio-economic challenges. Bush summarized the strategy with the following statement: "As the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down"¹⁸.

13. For a good analysis that assesses the possible comparison between nation-building efforts in Iraq and South Vietnam and how the White House has managed these missions, see Record, J.; Terrill, A., *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities and Insights*. Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2004.

14. The logic of this argument is informed by the following studies: Larson, E., *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Public Support for U.S. Military Operations*. Santa Monica, RAND Corp., 1996; and Feaver, P.; Gelpi, C., "A Look at Casualty Aversion: How Many Deaths Are Acceptable? A Surprising Answer". *Washington Post*, 7 November 1999.

15. Waiffe, R.; Bailey, H., "Osama and Saddam". MSNBC.com, 29 June 2005. Available from Internet at: <<http://msnbc.msn.com/id/8404125/site/newsweek>>.

16. Stevenson, R., "Bush to Tell Why He Sees a 'Clear Path to Victory'". *New York Times*, 28 June 2005.

17. Talev, M.; Allegood, J., "Jones Seeks Iraq Exit Plan". *News & Observer*, 17 June 2005.

18. "President Addresses Nation, Discusses Iraq, War on Terror," Ft. Bragg, NC, 28 June 2005, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/06/20050628-7.html>>.

Unlike past speeches, the president's tone was initially somber. He admitted that the "work in Iraq is difficult and it is dangerous". Bush also acknowledged that while his administration has made a lot of progress in Iraq in the last months, the "progress has been uneven". However, as Bush started to describe the strategy to stabilize and transform Iraq, his words were more optimistic. In this regard, he emphasized that his strategy has already produced success and that with more time it would assure America's interests in Iraq. To make his case, the president explained in detail the strategy, which he divided into two parts. The first deals with the country's stabilization, while the second focuses on Iraq's political transformation. Taken together, the strategy, as Bush put it, would "lay a solid foundation for a free and stable Iraq", ensuring that the country would become an "ally in the war on terror, and beacon of hope in a part of the world that is desperate for reform"¹⁹.

To stabilize Iraq, Bush stated that he was not going to increase the number of U.S. troops in Iraq. With the advice of U.S. commanders on the ground, he explained that sending more troops would undermine the Pentagon's "strategy of encouraging Iraqis to take the lead in this fight". The president stressed that "Iraqi security forces are at different levels of readiness". Although Bush did not say when Iraqi forces could "fight the enemy on their own", he unveiled three "new steps" that will speed-up the training process. First, the U.S. military commanders are "partnering coalition units with Iraqi units" in different operations throughout Iraq. Second, U.S. commanders are "embedding coalition 'transition teams' inside Iraqi units" to monitor these units' performance during battle operations and to provide the necessary skills that these forces need to operate independently of coalition forces. Finally, the U.S. military and its coalition partners are working with the Iraqi government to develop "command and control structures" and to train the civilian and military leaders of the new Iraq to ensure that they "can effectively manage their forces in the fight against terror"²⁰.

Bush explained that the United States also had a

responsibility of ensuring that "the hopes Iraqis expressed at the polls in January (2005) are translated into a secure democracy". The president stressed that Iraqis were writing a constitution that would protect "freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and equal justice under the law". Bush also made it clear that the constitution-writing committee included Sunnis "who opposed the January elections". While the president did not say it, this reference was probably included to show that the U.S. was winning the struggle for 'hearts and minds' and establishing a political process that could weaken the insurgency. Even though the president did not make mention of the timetable included in the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), which serves as Iraq's interim constitution, Bush stated that Iraqis would have "a chance to vote" on a draft of the permanent constitution in a referendum. If approved, Iraqis will hold a new election for a permanent government. "By taking these critical steps and meeting their deadlines, Iraqis will bind their multiethnic society together in a democracy that respects the will of the majority and protects minority rights"²¹.

Bush concluded the speech by stressing the connection between current efforts in Iraq and the war on terror: "We fight today because Iraq now carries the hope of freedom in a vital region of the world, and the rise of democracy will be the ultimate triumph over radicalism and terror". He called on Americans to thank the men and women serving in the armed forces, while commending those soldiers that have re-enlisted, asking others to re-enlist, and calling on young Americans to consider "a military career"²².

As noted above, public opinion polls since the president's Fort Bragg speech have demonstrated that American support for Bush's handling of Iraq did not increase. This is surprising because the White House drafted the speech with the help of Duke University political scientists, Peter Feaver and Christopher Gelpi. As experts on public opinion and war, they argued that Bush had to provide steadfast leadership by clearly explaining why the strategy was going to succeed. Feaver and Gelpi

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

argued that “public signs of doubt or pessimism” may increase public calls for the withdrawal troops. Other presidential advisors, informed in part by Feaver and Gelpi's works, believe that public opinion starts shifting when the public believes political leaders are not completely behind the mission²³. This speech was written with these ideas in mind. So, why did Bush fail to mobilize support for his administration's Iraq strategy?

3. BULLIED BY DETAILS

Gelpi, who believes that Bush's speech failed to sway public opinion, explained that the speech should have included a set of “incremental goals” or benchmarks Iraqis and U.S. commanders need to meet in order to show the public that the strategy is succeeding. He believes that the American people remained supportive of the Iraq effort despite extensive violence when “they saw incremental goals being met -- first the handover of partial sovereignty last summer, and then the democratic elections in January.” As an example, Gelpi believed that the president could have set “targets for how many Iraqi security forces would be trained by certain dates”²⁴.

Gelpi's criticism is critical because it highlights the White House's inclination to oversimplify the challenges the United States faces in Iraq. While it is true that the president could have included a number of benchmarks in his speech, that would have forced Bush to level with the American people. This would have forced him to inform Americans of the challenges that will test the nation's resolve and even probably highlight some of the errors his administration has made in the past. In many ways, delivering this speech may be too much to ask for; it goes completely against the president's leadership style, which is based on his optimism and his

faith in the administration's ability to meet key national security goals²⁵. After all, Bush is reluctant to admit that he or his advisors have made mistakes, so any speech that may raise doubts about past decisions or actions is strongly avoided.

Nevertheless, Gelpi is right on what Americans were expecting from the speech. It was too simplistic. It needed a dose of reality. For instance, the president presented three steps the U.S. military would take to speed-up training for Iraqi security forces. While this strategy may work, Americans are expecting that the training will end in the next months. Out of the 160,000 forces that have received training, around 78,000 are Iraqi troops and 94,000 are police or paramilitary police²⁶. The United States still needs to train 100,000 forces, as the U.S. military believes that Iraq will need around 273,000 forces to provide security throughout the country.

How quickly will these forces be able to operate independent of the U.S.-led Multinational Force? The Pentagon refuses to publicly answer this question. It has given Congress an answer via classified reports. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is reluctant to share this information with the American people because he believes this information could be used by insurgents against Iraqi forces, delaying the training program²⁷. Nevertheless, a glimpse of how long it will take to train the troops was revealed in a Washington Post story, published in May 2005, based on a classified report. According to the story, U.S. commanders assessed “81 Iraqi army battalions” and determined that only three were “able to conduct operations independently”. In a more recent report, only three dozens battalions from the existing 110 are “‘capable’ of conducting counter-insurgency operations”, but with the U.S. military providing logistical support²⁸. As a result,

23. Baker, P.; Balz, D., “Bush Words Reflect Public Opinion Strategy”. *Washington Post* 30 June 2005. For a more detailed analysis of Gelpi and Feaver's views, see: Feaver, P.; Gelpi, C. and Reifler, J., “Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq” [document on line] Available from Internet at: <<http://www.duke.edu/~gelpi/iraq.casualties.pdf>>.

24. Baker, P.; Balz, D., “Bush Words...”, op. cit.

25. My views are informed by the “maverick” model developed by Thomas Preston to assess presidential leadership in foreign policy. For Preston, “maverick” presidents include Harry S Truman and Lyndon B. Johnson. For more information, see Preston, T. *The President and His Inner Circle: Leadership Style and the Advisory Process in Foreign Affairs*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2001, 5-31.

26. Borger, J., “Iraqi Forces Nowhere Near Being Able to Fight Insurgency on Their Own, Senate Told”. *Guardian*, 22 July 2005.

27. Burns, R., “Rumsfeld Says Progress Being Made”. *Associated Press*, 21 July 2005.

28. Jaffe, G., “Gauging Iraqi Readiness Centers on Feel”. *Wall Street Journal*, 16 August 2005.

U.S. troops will likely play a major role in Iraq until the end of 2006 or mid-2007. Are Americans satisfied with this reality?

Bush's speech was more optimistic on the political side of his strategy. After all, his administration had accomplished three important goals in the last year: the transference of power to the Iraqi interim government, the holding of elections for the Transitional National Assembly and the negotiation of an agreement that secured Sunni participation in the constitution-writing process. Tangible results, as Gelpi notes, probably explain why a majority of Americans supported Bush's Iraq strategy, though it is important to note that opposition started to grow as these objectives were being met. But, his description of Iraq's path to democracy did not mention the many landmines that could wreck the transformation process.

For instance, Bush mentioned that the January 30 elections show that Iraqis want democracy. But, Iraqis overwhelmingly voted for political parties representing their own ethnic or religious background. At the time of the speech, the most difficult challenge was drafting a constitution that reflected the interests of Iraq's main ethnic and religious groups. While many experts believed that the constitution could not be finished by August 15, as stipulated by the TAL, or write a document that reflected a consensus between Iraq's communities, Bush expressed confidence that the Iraqis were going to meet this deadline. As noted above, the president mentioned that Iraqis would ratify the constitution via a popular referendum on October 15, but he failed to tell the American people that if the document was not ratified, the constitution-writing process would start again, forcing new elections for a new transitional government.

To be fair to Bush, he had no reason to talk negatively about the referendum because the constitution-writing committee was supposed to write a document all parties would support. The TAL includes a provision that enabled the National Assembly to extend the constitution-writing process and the life of the transitional government by six months. Though some Iraqi leaders did consider this option, the Bush administration made it clear that it would

not tolerate the extension. The U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad was ordered to work with Iraqi leaders to hammer out a document that would preserve the Bush administration's timetables.

Although the Iraqis failed to meet the August 15 deadline, the National Assembly accepted the draft constitution on August 28. As noted earlier, the president made a reference of Sunni participation in the constitution-writing process in his speech. Kurd and Shiite leaders, tired of Sunni intransigence on many contentious issues, decided to steamroll the constitution through the National Assembly. Sunnis have vowed to defeat the constitution in the referendum. According to the TAL, if two-thirds of voters in three of Iraq's 18 governorates vote against the draft constitution, the transitional government must dissolve and new elections must be held for the National Assembly, starting the constitution-writing process once again. It is difficult to say whether the constitution will be ratified. Iraq's Sunni community is a majority in four provinces. Although Sunnis have been registering to vote in the referendum in large numbers, many Iraqis believe that they not have the necessary votes in these provinces²⁹. In the end, the constitution may be ratified, but at the expense of further alienating the Sunni community and intensifying the insurgency. If the constitution is rejected by the Sunnis, Kurds and Shiite leaders may think-through their options, changing the dynamics of the process of political transformation and increasing the chances of civil war.

Shortly before the speech, a *Washington Post-ABC* Poll found that a majority of respondents did not "believe the [Bush] administration's claims that impressive gains are being made against the insurgency" or that Iraq would be a stable democracy in the next year³⁰. However, a majority of the survey's respondents made it clear that withdrawing U.S. troops in Iraq was a mistake. These attitudes did not change much after the speech. A Gallup Poll conducted after the speech showed that 58 percent of respondents believe that the Bush administration does not have a "clear plan for handling the situation in Iraq". Like the *Washington Post-ABC* Poll, this survey also found little support for

29. Knickmeyer, E.; Aldin, S., "Sunnis Won't Defeat Charter, Iraqi Vice President Asserts". *Washington Post*, 20 August 2005.

30. Morin R.; Balz, D., "Survey Finds Most Support Staying in Iraq: Public Skeptical About Gains Against Insurgents". *Washington Post*, 28 June 2005.

withdrawing the troops³¹. In many ways, a *New York Times*'s editorial captured America's general attitude to the speech:

"Sadly, Mr. Bush wasted his opportunity last night, giving a speech that only answered questions no one was asking. He told the nation, again and again, that a stable and democratic Iraq would be worth American sacrifices, while the nation was wondering whether American sacrifices could actually produce a stable and democratic Iraq"³².

In many ways, Bush's Fort Bragg speech should have been more forthright. Rather than trying to simplify a mission that many Americans consider to be complex, he should have prepared Americans for possible difficulties that would have affected the Bush administration's timetables. Even though the president has said U.S. troops will stay in Iraq as it is necessary, the speech's contents seemed to hint that the administration would achieve its interests in a matter of months, rather than a matter of years. Thus, his rosy scenarios were an invitation to journalists, experts on nation-building, and politicians familiar with Iraq to question Bush's strategy and his understanding of the situation in Iraq. If the speech's objective was to re-assure Americans that everything was under control and that American interests in the region would be met, then Bush failed to sway public opinion. Even worse, growing public dissatisfaction has forced many lawmakers to openly question the administration's Iraq strategy, re-enforcing the critics and undermining Bush's ability from successfully achieving Iraq's stabilization and transformation.

4. REGAINING AMERICA'S CONFIDENCE

The most surprising aspect of Bush's public relations campaign is that even though Bush's approval ratings have plummeted since he delivered the Fort Bragg speech, many of his remarks and comments on Iraq still use many of the speech's sentences and phrases³³. It is actually too late to re-package the strategy and present it as something new to

the American people. Developments in Iraq have shown that the Bush administration must come-up with a new strategy. Bush's main challenge will be to regain Americans' trust. Iraq will not only hurt his capacity to address other international threats, but also test his ability to implement his domestic agenda. This is even more critical after the federal government's poor handling of emergency operations in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the Mississippi coastline.

Regaining America's confidence will be hard and Bush and his advisors could start by crafting a new strategy for Iraq. The strategy must acknowledge the problems with the past strategy and it should not be limited to how Iraq should be stabilized and transformed. A new plan should also show a change in how the White House does business. For instance, it is time for Bush to meet with members of Congress and put together a plan that the Democratic and Republican leadership of Congress can support. More significant, it is time to ask Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to step down. Many of the senior advisors responsible for post-war Iraq have left the administration. Dismissing Rumsfeld will show the president's commitment to develop a new plan³⁴.

Furthermore, Bush should go to the United Nations (U.N.) and publicly ask for its support. The U.N. stands for many ideals the U.S. upholds. The U.N. may be in a better position to craft a political strategy that can bring Sunni leaders to the negotiation table. If the Sunni community believes that it has a stake in the future Iraq, they will start turning against insurgents and possibly foreign jihadists. Finally, the U.S. must send more troops to Iraq. Stabilizing Iraq will be the only way that moderate politicians will have the courage to challenge extremist voices in their country, increasing the chances that Iraq will become a democratic nation that can inspire further calls for reforms across the Middle East.

31. Poll questions and data for both the Gallup Poll of 29-30 June 2005 and the *Washington Post-ABC Poll* of 23-26 June 2005 are available at <<http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq2.htm>>.

32. Editorial, "President Bush's Speech about Iraq". *New York Times*, 29 June 2005.

33. See for instance "President Meets with Defense and Foreign Policy Teams" (Crawford, TX, 11 August 2005). Available from Internet at: <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/08/20050811-1.html>>.

34. It could also limit Vice President Richard Cheney's influence in the National Security Council. For more on Cheney's influence, see Rothkopf, D., *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power*. New York, Public Affairs, 2005, 389-441.

If Democrats and Republicans support a new strategy and Bush can convince leaders from other nations to publicly support this strategy, Americans will give the president a second chance. Iraq's stabilization and transformation is a vital national security interest. While a new strategy is needed,

the president should not try to oversimplify Iraq's challenges. By explaining the complexity of the mission and reiterating the importance of the goals, Bush will be able to sway public opinion to his favor and increase the chances that the U.S. will successfully meet its interests in post-Saddam Iraq.