



## **Bush Is Expected to Address Specifics on Iraq**

Posted GMT 6-16-2005 14:48:10

White House officials acknowledged yesterday that the public's gloomy mood about the Iraq war is forcing President Bush to take a more assertive and public role to reassure nervous Americans and Republican lawmakers about the White House plan for victory.

Bush had hoped the successful January elections in Iraq would boost the popularity of the conflict and allow him to distance himself from it. But his aides have concluded that recent events in Iraq have contributed to an erosion in support for the president -- and that he needs to shift strategies. Bush's new approach will be mostly rhetorical, however, as the White House does not plan any changes to the policy or time frame for bringing home the 140,000 U.S. troops, as some lawmakers are demanding.

"The president takes seriously his responsibility as commander in chief to continue to educate the American people about the conduct of the war and our strategy for victory," said Dan Bartlett, a senior adviser. As part of the new focus, Bush will meet with Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari at the White House for the first time next week and dedicate several speeches to the war, including a major address on the first anniversary of Iraq's sovereignty this month, White House officials said.

Bush, who had hoped to spend this summer focusing on Social Security, is instead being forced to defend his economic record and war policies in the face of growing uneasiness among the public and Republicans in Congress. His poll numbers on his handling of Iraq have dropped to all-time lows, as numerous lawmakers, including some Republicans, have accused him of not offering honest assessments about the strength of the insurgency and the slow pace of training battle-ready Iraqi forces.

"The war has gone on longer and more violently than people envisioned," Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) said. "We always accentuated the positive and never prepared the public for the worst. . . . People are dying in larger numbers than we thought, and the insurgency seems to be growing stronger, not weaker." The result, Graham said, is that Bush "ill-prepared the public for the trial and tribulations" of planting a new democracy in the heart of the Middle East. Graham said the public's sour mood is infecting some GOP senators, especially those facing reelection in 18 months.

Bush will streamline his message on the two issues White House strategists blame for the president's lower-than-ever poll numbers. "In the coming weeks, the president will sharpen his focus on the two big issues facing the American people: growing our economy and winning the war," Bartlett said.

A top White House official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Bush is not dropping Social Security, but believes he needs to show voters he has a plan to lower gasoline prices and prevail in Iraq. "These are two powerful forces" shaping views of Bush, the official said.

Nearly six in 10 Americans in a Gallup poll released this week said they support withdrawing some or all U.S. troops from Iraq, the highest level ever recorded for that question. Several lawmakers who supported the war are considering backing a resolution that calls on Bush to do that.

Bush, however, offers a generally optimistic view of Iraq that aides say comes from what he sees as substantial long-term progress. The president considers the January elections that allowed the United States to turn over more control of security one of the biggest triumphs of the broader battle against terrorism. He also believes the Iraqis are moving closer to a deal to form a new government and are creating a functioning security force that will eventually allow the United States to pull out.

Bush has no plans to change his upbeat assessment of Iraq, where fresh waves of attacks since the beginning of last month have killed nearly 100 Americans and many more Iraqis. Vice President Cheney recently said the insurgency is in its "last throes," an assertion he did not back away from when asked this week, contradicting reports that Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.) and Rep. Curt Weldon (R-Pa.) brought back from a trip to Iraq.

"In my judgment, this gap between rhetoric and reality is in large part responsible for the sharp decrease in public support for our efforts in Iraq," Biden said in a letter to colleagues yesterday. "Americans believe we are not leveling with them about Iraq and that we have no coherent strategy for success. I fear the end result will be to take away from our troops one of their most important weapons: the support

of the American people."

Biden said military leaders in Iraq told him the United States is at least two years away from training an Iraqi army that can stand on its own. Some military experts say it will take even longer. Bush plans to address the progress of troop training soon. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Cheney have said 160,000 Iraqi troops are functioning, a number many dispute. In a slight shift from what Cheney has been saying, Bush will say that some of the Iraqi troops are more prepared than others, a top official said.

Even some Democrats say Bush could turn things around if he spoke frankly about what has been done and the obstacles to finishing the job.

Bush has often avoided commenting on the situation in Iraq in deference to the fledgling government, concerned he might complicate its work. "The idea of giving them space was the right move, but we also have to take into consideration his responsibility to educate the American people," the top official said.

Still, White House officials say Bush's fate is tied to events on the ground. They said Bush is pushing hard for the Iraqi government to meet this year's deadlines for writing a new constitution and finalizing a government.

By Jim VandeHei  
Washington Post

© 2011, Assyrian International News Agency. All Rights Reserved. [Terms of Use.](#)