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## President Bush guarantees Iraq's move to democracy

Bush says American troops will remain in the country after the June 30 handover

By Ron Hutcheson  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — Under pressure to spell out a clear strategy in Iraq, President Bush on Monday promised to give Iraqis "full sovereignty" on June 30 and offered to demolish the Iraqi prison at the heart of the prisoner-abuse scandal.

In remarks Monday night, Bush said U.S. troops would remain in the country under U.S. command even after Iraqis take control of their domestic affairs next month.

But some key questions remained unanswered. With a little more than five weeks to go before the handoff to an interim Iraqi government, U.S. officials don't know who will take over in Iraq or how long U.S. troops will

stay. The Bush plan calls for the election of a permanent Iraqi government by the end of 2005.

"America's task in Iraq is not only to help Iraq defeat an enemy, it is to give strength to a friend — a free, representative government that serves its people and fights on its behalf," Bush said in remarks planned for the U.S. Army War College. "And the sooner this goal is achieved, the sooner our job will be done."

Bush's offer to demolish the Abu Ghraib prison would destroy a facility with a grim past. The prison was used as a torture chamber by Saddam Hussein, but was more recently the scene of abuses inflicted on Iraqi captives by U.S. soldiers.

Army officials also announced Monday that Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, who commanded the military police at the prison, was relieved of her command and suspended from active duty. Pentagon officials are considering charges against her.

Bush's prime-time speech was part of a concerted White House effort to calm fears that Iraq is descending into chaos. A growing insurgency, a spate of deadly terrorist attacks and bitter infighting among Iraqis allied with the United States have cast doubt about the prospects for democracy and American resolve to finish the job.

"We will persevere, and defeat this enemy, and hold this hard-won ground for the realm of liberty," Bush said.

The speech was also intended to shore up Bush's political standing at home. With less than six months to go before the November election, three new polls released Monday showed growing doubts about the Iraq war and increasing dissatisfaction with Bush's performance.

The president's record 90 percent approval rating after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, plummeted to 47 percent in a Gallup poll completed Sunday. The last three incumbent presidents who fell below 50 percent approval at this stage in their terms all failed to win re-election.

In a CBS News poll, 65 percent of Americans said the country is on the wrong track, the highest level of dissatisfaction since the network began polling on that issue in the mid-1980s. And a Washington Post-ABC News poll found that 58 percent of Americans disapprove of his handling of the conflict in Iraq, the highest dissatisfaction level since the war started in March 2003.

While acknowledging the difficulties in Iraq, Bush expressed confidence that the country will make the transition

from dictatorship to democracy. As he has in the past, he cast the conflict as a key test in the broader war on international terrorism.

"Our terrorist enemies have a vision that guides and explains all their varied acts of murder," he said. "Our actions, too, are guided by a vision. We believe that freedom can advance and change lives in the greater Middle East, as it has advanced and changed lives in Asia, and Latin America, and Eastern Europe and Africa."

In keeping with Bush's plan, the draft U.N. resolution would give the interim Iraqi government control over most domestic government functions, including contracts related to the rebuilding effort. It would also return control of oil revenues to Iraqis.

But the document is vague on the precise powers that Iraqi authorities will have over Iraqi military forces and their relationship to the 150,000-strong U.S.-led coalition force, which will remain in the country. The resolution calls on the U.S.-led force to operate in "close coordination" with the interim government, but U.S. officials have ruled out suggestions that the new government be given veto power over military operations.

That could set the stage for a diplomatic tussle with Germany, Russia and particularly France, which are eager to put limits on the U.S. military presence, European diplomats said.

A U.S. diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the interim Iraqi government, which is supposed to be formed by the end of May, is expected to send a letter to the United Nations requesting the continued presence of coalition forces.

Secretary of State Colin Powell said recently that the United States would leave Iraq after June 30 if asked. Other senior officials have told Congress that Iraqi forces would be able to "opt out" of specific military operations if they choose to.

The resolution says the coalition's mandate in Iraq will be reviewed in a year, or earlier if requested by the interim Iraqi government.

The Gallup poll of 1,002 voters from Friday to Sunday had a margin of error of 4.5 percentage points. The CBS News poll of 1,113 adults, conducted Thursday through Sunday, had a margin of error of 3 percentage points. The Washington Post-ABC News poll of 1,005 adults, conducted Thursday through Sunday, had a margin of error of 3 percentage points.

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## LOAN RATES

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and prevailing commercial-paper rates — would be better spent elsewhere.

"They want to move taxpayer dollars to programs that help get low- and middle-income students to and through school as opposed to continuing financial aid after they've left school," said Martha Holler, a Sallie Mae spokeswoman. Sallie Mae supports the move to a variable-rate program.

Loan rates aren't necessarily going down for everyone. Parents holding older PLUS loans may

well see their rates rise.

"If you're a parent with PLUS loans issued before July 1, 1998, most likely the rates are going to rise substantially ... a quarter- to a half-percentage point based on the data I saw," Scherschel said.

That's because those loan rates are tied to a different index, which will be set at the end of June. Scherschel recommends borrowers call their primary lenders to assess whether consolidating those loans now — before the rate hike — may make sense.

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