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Before Iraq Plan Unveiled, Reporters Said It Was Unpopular, Wouldn't Work & War Was "Lost Cause"

TV's Pre-Emptive War Against Iraq "Surge"

By the time President Bush delivered his Iraq speech Wednesday night, the news media had spent several days engaged in what the military calls "preparing the battlefield." The media's air war against the plan to try to actually win the Iraq war assured that most of Bush's audience would have already heard journalists claiming the new mission is wrong-headed and doomed to failure.

■ **"Like a folly."** Last Tuesday on NBC's *Today*, anchor emeritus Tom Brokaw argued that the way Saddam Hussein was executed revealed Iraq as "a deeply divided country along tribal lines," and that sending more troops would "seem to most people...like a folly." Brokaw added: "I think a lot of people who are raising their hands to join the armed services are wondering, 'I'm giving my life for *that*!'"

■ **"Wrong Way Corrigan."** The next morning on *Today*, political analyst Chris Matthews declared the President's plan dead on arrival: "I expect it will be treated the way Richard Nixon's invasion of Cambodia was reacted to. The American people aren't gonna like it." Matthews insisted that the voters wanted to end, not mend, Bush's Iraq policies and "for the President to go Wrong Way Corrigan on this thing and to increase the number of troops, take us deeper into Iraq, would be to reject the opinion of the American people."

■ **"Absolutely no difference."** This week, as more details of the President's plan were revealed, the anti-surge drum-beat got louder. On CBS's *Early Show*, co-host Harry Smith asked Baghdad reporter Lara Logan if extra troops would make a difference. "The best thing we have is to look at what has happened already. When the U.S. brought in 12,000 more troops into Baghdad last summer, it made absolutely no difference," Logan replied. "In fact, security here in Baghdad got even worse."

■ **"Lost Cause?"** On Tuesday's *Today*, NBC's White House reporter David Gregory suggested even White House insiders have lost faith. "As the President prepares to start a new phase of the war in Iraq, the White House is fending off charges that key figures in the administration have concluded the war is lost." NBC's graphic headline

In the days before Bush announced his plan to win in Iraq, reporters suggested it could not work.

read "Lost Cause? Can U.S. Win the War In Iraq?" Gregory also cited unnamed "critics" to suggest Bush's motives were psychological: "U.S. commanders who opposed adding troops to Iraq have been replaced, prompting critics to charge the President's resolve has become stubbornness."

■ **Roll call of critics.** On Wednesday's *Good Morning America*, Diane Sawyer confronted White House aide Dan Bartlett: "I just want to run through a partial roll call of the number of people who have either opposed what the President is going to do, or expressed serious reservations." As she read off names such as Colin Powell and Chuck Hagel, their names and faces scrolled over her right shoulder. "I could go on and on," Sawyer told Bartlett. "What don't they get? What don't they understand?" Bartlett objected, saying some of the generals she listed as critics "helped devise this plan."

■ **"Breaking Point."** On yesterday's *Today*, co-host Meredith Vieira doubted that the U.S. military could meet the challenge: "The cornerstone of his plan is sending around 20,000 additional U.S. troops into the war zone. But is the military stretched to the breaking point already?" Reporter Jim Miklaszewski suggested it was: "The pace of two wars has left two-thirds of the Army's combat brigades rated 'Not Ready to Fight.'"

■ **"The cost has been enormous."** Uniquely last night, CBS's Katie Couric decided to introduce Bush's speech by repeating the war's terrible toll: "Four years into the war, the cost has been enormous. More than 3,000 American military killed, more than 22,000 wounded. The dollar cost, close to \$400 billion." Emphasizing her point, CBS posted each demoralizing statistic as a full-screen graphic.

The new plan may succeed, or it may fail. But the media's mantra these past few days has been that failure seems inevitable, so we shouldn't even try. — *Rich Noyes*

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