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Bush gets the cold shoulder

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WITH rain washing New York and with calls to "Drop Bush, not bombs" from protesters outside the United Nations building, US President George W. Bush appealed for help from the international community even as he remained unrepentant, adding that invading Iraq was the right thing to do.

He did not get the response nor the support he had expected. He was rebuked by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and chided by Russian President Vladimir Putin over going to war without UN backing as they echoed French and German concerns over "collective action".

He was criticised at home with the Washington Post describing his speech as a "failed address".

No country, not even members of the "coalition of the willing" offered to send additional troops or contribute financially for the reconstruction of Iraq. The UN, in the face of additional hostilities, has further reduced its personnel in Iraq.

With his ratings falling, poverty rising and unemployment up at home and the situation in Iraq deteriorating, Bush tried to paint a rosy picture.

"The Iraqi nation needs our help," he pleaded before the General Assembly adding that the world was safer with Saddam Hussein removed from power.

Others disagreed and even Washington issued a new alert for its citizens of possible terror attacks as security around the country was stepped up.

Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, whose country has suffered terrorist attacks, said: "The war has created far many more problems than those it intended to solve," adding that "unilateralism carries heavy costs".

French President Jacques Chirac who had angered Washington for his staunch opposition to the invasion continued to irritate and prick the US when he said at the UN that "in an open world, no one can live in isolation, no one can act alone in the name of all, and no one can accept the anarchy of a society without rules".

Chirac, who received greater applause than Bush, declared that multilateralism "is a guarantee of legitimacy and democracy".

Counterpoints and rebukes to the US President's speech came from almost everyone who stood before leaders attending the 58th session of the UN General Assembly on the banks of the East River.

Perhaps in one of his harshest rebukes, Annan accused the US of endangering world peace with its unilateral and pre-emptive policy. He said the logic of states that "reserve the right to act unilaterally, or in ad hoc coalitions, is dangerous, representing a fundamental challenge to the principles on which, however imperfectly, world peace and stability have rested for the last 58 years".

With support for his Iraq policy slipping at home and with Iraqis viewing Americans as "occupiers" and not "liberators", Bush said "let us move forward".

But the past was not easily forgotten as suspicion of the real motive for invasion - weapons of mass destruction - has not been found. A report by an American leading the hunt for the weapons says his team had not found any since the fall of Saddam.

Appealing for troops and money from the international community, Bush said the US was rehabilitating infrastructure power plants, water and sanitation facilities, bridges and airports and rebuilding schools,

hospitals and providing medicine.

But he failed to point out that much of the food, medicine and other necessities did not get to the people because of prior sanctions.

Calling on "all nations of good will" to support the reconstruction and political transformation of Iraq, Bush failed to convince the opponents of the invasion.

Democratic presidential hopeful General Wesley Clark said the administration acted with "tragic arrogance" which "really hurts us" and that Bush in his UN address failed to "bring people together in this policy".

Bush maintained that he was right in attacking Iraq but now says he had done so to defend the peace and "credibility of the UN". But the world body did not ask Washington to defend its credibility nor act on its behalf.

The US and its allies defied the UN Security Council in their march on Baghdad.

Bush maintained that he was right to attack pre-emptively, adding that "nations of the world must have the wisdom and the will to stop grave threats before they arrive".

But Annan said the pursuit of war without an explicit Security Council mandate and pre-emptive action "could set precedents that resulted in a proliferation of the unilateral and lawless use of force, with or without justification".

Now Washington wants the very same world body that, in the words of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has "its organs cut out, dissected and reshaped" and has been rendered "impotent and its agencies turned into national organs of the powerful" to help out.

But Washington is not prepared to "allow the world body to assume responsibility for the civilian nation-building process" nor is it willing to allow the Iraqis to take over from the 25 unelected members of the Governing Council appointed by the US.

It wants legitimacy from the Security Council for a new government in Baghdad and for the American occupation.

Many leaders, including France's, called for a timetable or road map for the Iraqi representative administration and Iraqi sovereignty.

Putin emphasised that "only direct participation of the UN in the reconstruction of Iraq will give its people an opportunity to independently decide their future".

Following his meeting with Bush at Camp David over the weekend, Putin said that Moscow was interested in seeing the transfer of power in Iraq "occurring as soon as possible", adding that it should be "based on a solid legal and administration base and should go stage by stage".