

Bush is stumbling from one disaster to the next

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and a lot of other people into a very deep hole, writes
Gene Kerrigan in Washington

THINGS got a little scary in Washington DC last week. Not so much because of anything George W Bush did, but because of what happened when it became obvious how woefully out of his depth the man is. Bush's long-awaited announcement of a troop "surge" in Iraq was, as expected, a desperate example of fiddling while Baghdad burns. Within minutes, Michael Ledeen, a well-connected warmonger, posted a hopeful note on a right-wing website: "Did we just declare war on Iran and Syria?"

Ledeen is a senior "think-tank" propagandist who has been linked to various powerful people, from the Reagan administration in the old days to Bush's close associate Karl Rove. Ledeen seized on a paragraph in, Bush's speech where the president promised to "interrupt" the flow of insurgent support from Iran and Syria and "seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies".

Surely, Ledeen reasoned, this meant attacking networks inside Iran and Syria? Yippee! The war goes supersize!

Separately, DC liberals were nervously considering a rumour whizzing through intelligence and diplomatic circles - that Bush had indeed signed a secret Executive Order authorising military operations against Iran and Syria.

The right was hopeful, the liberals fearful. Such is the mess that Bush has made that any imaginable madcap escapade is possible. It became hopelessly clear that

the president of the United States is stumbling from one disaster to the next, leaving a trail of blood behind him. It's not enough that we have to ~ worry about the consequences of the clueless clown's insane Iraq adventure. Now, uneasy American commentators are reminding each other of -Richard Nixon, more than 30 years ago, in the months before he resigned over the Watergate scandal. Distracted and anguished, Nixon prowled the White House corridors late at night, drunk and talking to the portraits of former presidents.

Back then, senior administration officials quietly asked senior military people to



think twice if the president should suddenly issue any bizarre military orders.

So it is today, with an isolated loser in the White House, sucking his thumb and playing

God with the lives of millions. The fear that he might abruptly do something crazy - invade somewhere, bomb something or set fire to the West Wing - isn't fanciful.

Bush has dug himself, and a lot of other people, into a very deep hole. He's angry and frightened and ignorant.

There was a time when we were scolded for scoffing at George W Bush. It was a sign of our political immaturity, we were told. After all, no way a blundering fool gets to be president of the United States. Behind the bumbling- image, we were assured, there was an astute mind. And behind him, guiding him, was a team of experienced and even more astute realists. We might not agree with his policies, but he was an intelligent, well-informed politician, with a command of the issues. No one believes that anymore. Even the neo-conservative warmongers who pushed him towards his illegal invasion have turned on Bush, in an *effort* to salvage their own threadbare reputations. The media pundits, the cheerleaders of war, now tiptoe to the other side of the stage. The Republicans snub him, The Democrats, who dutifully backed Bush's mad adventure, now daringly savage him.

The American voters, who just two years ago gave Bush a renewed mandate, have pushed his poll ratings well down into the 30s. No one wants to be mates with a loser.

Bestriding the anger and patriotism aroused by the atrocities of 9/11, Bush led the charge to war, intending to reshape the Middle East. The plan ticked all the right-wing boxes: small army, big bombs; install hand-picked Iraqi government; shovel billions into the private sector, to favoured corporations such as Halliburton and Blackwater Security.

Inexperienced right-wing zealots were appointed to run the country. Beloved right-wing policies that the public wouldn't accept in the US (such as the "flat tax") were forced on Iraq. People equipped with a *cartoon version* of international politics and juvenile notions of war got to experiment on a whole

country. Most of the US public were happy to wave the flag - having been falsely assured by an obedient media that Saddam was about to get nukes, and he was connected to al-Qaeda and 9/11.

(Remember all those articles about how the "Islamofascists" were coming to slaughter us in our beds, if we didn't slaughter them first? And how this had nothing to do with decades of Western activity in their countries - it was because they just plain hate us, because they hate democracy?)

Bush and his media cheerleaders, it turned out, were ignorant about the realities of Iraq. Two months before the invasion, speaking with Americans of Iraqi descent, Bush was surprised to hear there were differences between Sunni and Shiite. He said he thought the Iraqis were all Muslims.

The conflict unleashed by this fool has now killed more than 600 000 Iraqis and 3 000 Americans.

It has swallowed trillions of dollars and no one knows how to end it: Iraq abounds with ruthless people who know exactly what they want and who they have to kill to get it. The entire region is on edge. The view of the US as a superpower that can impose its will anywhere, anytime, now seems a childish notion. Now, most Americans just want to forget Iraq, *to get out*. But that's not so easy.

A while back, the Washington establishment sought to intervene. A "study group" of establishment elders, most of them buddies of George W's daddy, examined the problem.

They were desperate. The traditional solution has been to support a local thug who will ruthlessly suppress all dissent. Unfortunately, Saddam was otherwise engaged. (Pity the egotistical fool stopped taking orders - God be with the days we

could all do business with him and turn h
blind eye to his murdering.)

The Vietnam solution (just walk away and
let the **chips** fall where they may) wasn't
on. Iraq is an oil rich country in a volatile
and strategically important region.

The Washington "study group" ended up
suggesting a US withdrawal, while
seeking to involve Iran and Syria as some
kind of self interested honest brokers, to
impose a version of stability.

Offered only a political solution that
would plainly admit that he'd made a pig's
mickey of his job, Bush came up with
another pathetic military solution - a
miserable "surge", which means only
extending the tours of duty of soldiers al-
ready skeptical and exhausted.

His minions cry that the US's credibility is
on the line. So, more Iraqis and more
soldiers must die to protect the long-
vanished "credibility" of a nation painfully
discovering that it isn't as powerful as it
liked to think.

is unfettered. And his kind of folks love a
bit of shock and awe.

Surge here, maybe bomb there? The
response has been despairing. US voters -
when they think about it at all - just want
it **over**, one way or another. The massive
Iraqi casualties hardly figure in the public
debates, just the 3 000 dead soldiers,
slaughtered for no good reason in a war
launched on lies. The Democrats oppose
the "surge", but very carefully. They care
about Iraq, they care about the US - but
mostly they care about the 2008 election.

And it's dawning on them all that for the
next two years they're stuck with a
floundering fool, petulant and powerful,
who might well do something even more
dangerous. - *Independent on Sunday*

Bush ogles Iran. His ground troops may
be stuck in a quagmire, but his air power