

# Bush defends Iraq war, gives voters 'a choice'

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush swung his reelection bid into high gear, defiantly defending the invasion of Iraq and urging voters to keep the war on terrorism on track by giving him a second term.

"We face a choice. We can go forward with confidence and resolve, or we can turn back to the dangerous illusion that terrorists are not plotting and outlaw regimes are no threat to us," he said in his annual State of the Union speech Tuesday.

Addressing a joint session of Congress and millions of television viewers three years to the day after taking office, Bush hoped to snatch the spotlight from opposition Democrats vying to challenge him in the November 2 election.

The result was a wide-ranging

speech in which he signalled support for a possible effort to ban homosexual marriage, claimed credit for the reviving US economy, and fiercely defended the US-led March invasion of Iraq.

But while Bush unveiled a doubling of monies aimed at promoting democracy in the Middle East, he did not once mention the conflict pitting Israel against the Palestinians or reassert his support for creating a Palestinian state.

On Iraq, he charged that those who pushed for explicit UN approval of the war or worried about opposition from traditional allies like France and Germany would have imperilled US security over "the objections of a few."

"America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our country," said Bush, who also brushed aside the embar-

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