

Eye On Community

Bush ups the ante in standoff with Iran

By JOHN MILLER

Staff Writer
jmm833@psu.edu

WASHINGTON- President Bush spent nearly two months after his Republican Party lost control of Congress last November formulating a new strategy to regain support for the war in Iraq, an effort plagued by continuous sectarian violence between rival Muslim tribes and illegal militias.

In a nationally televised speech January 10, Mr. Bush proposed to send nearly 22,000 additional to regain control of Baghdad. He also cautioned Iran and Syria to stop supplying insurgents with arms and explosives responsible for the deaths of countless Iraqi civilians.

The President renewed his threat to Tehran last week by authorizing the military to capture and, if necessary, kill any Iranian agents found in Iraq. This could be partly in response to the capture of five Iranian agents over the holiday season, all suspected of being affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, an intelligence agency of which the US has compared to the SS of Nazi Germany.

"We will disrupt the attacks on our forces. We will interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to

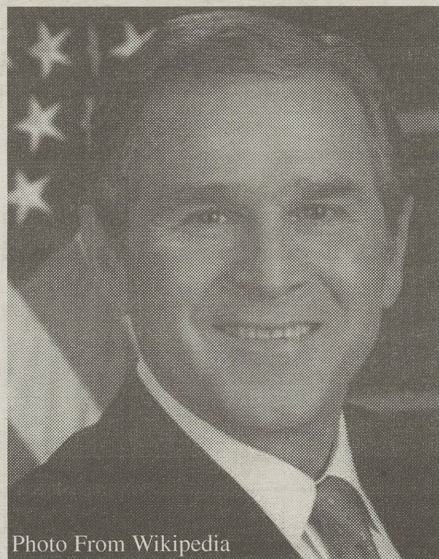


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our enemies in Iraq," Mr. Bush said.

In addition the President ordered the deployment of a second aircraft carrier group to show the United States' seriousness about keeping the Iranians from destabilizing Iraq.

The day after the President announced his somewhat recycled plan B for victory in Iraq, William Arkin, a national security columnist for the Washington Post, suggested that the President would do almost anything to achieve peace, even if that means risking a major confrontation with Iran.

"When the President pledged to 'seek out and destroy the networks supporting

our enemies in Iraq," Arkin wrote. "To me, that means the threat of strikes on targets in those two countries."

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wouldn't confirm Mr. Arkin's and many other critic's statements but she didn't deny them either when talking to Matt Lauer of 'The Today Show'.

"Obviously the President is not going to take options off the table," Rice said. "The Iranians need to know, that the United States is not finding it acceptable and is not going to simply tolerate their activities to try and harm our forces or to destabilize Iraq."

The Bush Administrations stands by their latest policy of stopping the Iranians from infiltrating Iraq with the use of deadly force despite no direct evidence that any Iranian agents have attacked US forces. This had previously not been authorized. Mr. Bush implemented the plan last fall.

CIA Director Michael Hayden defended the program before the Senate recently stating it was necessary to counter the training and supply of insurgents of the Shitte militias in Baghdad. Similar initiatives are under way to combat other terrorists groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Palestinian linked group Hamas.

Operation "Catch and Release" as referred to by Bush Administration officials was created to contain the Iranian supplies flowing in and out of the country while also urging the Iranian government

under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to give up its uranium enrichment program. Ahmadinejad insists the program is for peaceful usage. He has also called for the 'death' of America and Israel.

Senior Administration officials are hoping the crackdown will persuade Iran to back down from Iraq and perhaps even abandon their nuclear ambitions.

However some members of the Intelligence community have expressed concern over this latest change in policy.

"We were making no traction with 'catch and release'," a senior counterterrorism official said in a recent interview with the Washington Post.

"This has little to do with Iraq. It's all about pushing Iran's buttons. It is purely political," another official said.

The President's new stance on Iran is that if they continue to interfere in the affairs of its neighbor the United States will take pre-emptive action. The Patriot missile battery aimed at Iran would seem to be the logical first step.

Should the Iranians decide to test Bush's resolve and escalate their role it is conceivable that the US would target Iran's military and paramilitary resources as part of the War on Terror. This would allow the indefinite detaining and imprisonment of Iranian conspirators as enemy combatants, thus potentially shipping them off to Guantanamo or one of the CIA's 'secret prisons'. That might make them think twice.

24 scores with Conservatives, angers Muslims

By JOHN MILLER

Staff Writer
jmm833@psu.edu

LOS ANGELES- '24' debuted eight weeks after 9/11. The Patriot Act was making its way through Congress. The nation was healing. They needed a hero. And they found one in Jack Bauer.

The following takes place between Midnight and 1:00 a.m. on the Day of the California Presidential Primary.

On day one, Jack managed to stop Serbian terrorists from killing the then Senator David Palmer. Bauer returned to CTU on days two and four to divert Islamic extremists from using, first, a stolen nuclear bomb and then, one attached to a U.S. strategic warhead. He battled biological and nerve agents on days three and five, only to be kidnapped and thrown in a Chinese prison last May.

The popular FOX drama's message over five days in the world of Jack Bauer has been loud and clear: Bauer is a terrorists' worst nightmare, but at the conclusion of the sixth's season's two night season premiere last month a bright flash of light and a mushroom cloud rising above L.A., the terrorists became the viewers' worst nightmare, especially those who are Muslims.

Just days after the episode aired FOX executives were dealing with protests from Muslim interest groups complaining the Emmy award winning drama to be

anti-Muslim, USA Today reported. It wasn't the first time either.

Engy Abdelkader, a member of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee based out of New Jersey is at the center of these boycotts.

"I found the portrayal of American Muslims to be pretty horrendous," she told USA Today in a recent interview. "It was denigrating."

"The overwhelming impression you get is fear and hatred for Muslims," said Rabiah Ahmed, a spokeswoman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

The network responded with a statement saying '24' is anti-terrorism, not anti-Muslim. After a similar protest in January 2005, FOX ran a commercial featuring Kiefer Sutherland who urged viewers not to mistake the show's story lines as an attack on the Muslim community.

However, Sohail Mohammed, an immigration lawyer also from New Jersey, believes the message will not be sufficient.

"Somewhere, some lunatic out there watching this will do something to an innocent American Muslim because he believes what he saw on TV," Mohammed also told USA Today.

Despite the growing opposition from minority parties '24' continues to dazzle its audience, some of which are neo-conservatives and Bush cronies.

Last summer the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, sponsored a



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panel discussion in Washington D.C. "24" and America's Image in Fighting Terrorism: Fact, Fiction, or Does it Matter?

Among the seminar's main points was that '24' tries to stay true to the times that we live in while still trying to keep the audience begging for more.

"The show is a tragedy," said Joel Surnow, co-creator of '24.' "It's optimistic in that we do get the bad guys, but there's always a price to pay."

That price unfortunately requires killing off characters like lovable President Palmer, Tony Almeida, and analyst Edgar Stiles. And that was just last season.

"You have to care about the people that are paying the price or the show doesn't work," Surnow added.

Members of the cast that attended the conference were Gregory Itzin, Carlos Bernard, and Mary Lynn Rajsuk.

"I got into acting to avoid politics of any sort so I could remain in a fantasy world," says Rajsuk.

Rajsuk makes a good point. '24' is a fantasy world which this season has portrayed an America under siege suffering from eleven weeks of non-stop suicide bombings in its major cities. It begs the

question: Could the shows' producers be reinforcing President Bush's contention that we must fight the terrorists abroad instead of on the home front? Maybe they are. Nobody said Hollywood doesn't practice free speech.

The moderator of the program was conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh who asked the panel if real world events influence the writing of the show.

"We read the same newspapers that everybody else does," answered executive producer Howard Gordon.

Homeland Security secretary Michael Chertoff was also present at the June 2006 event. He as well as Vice President Dick Cheney and former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld have also confessed to being fans of '24'.

Judging by the 33 million viewers who tuned in to see the start of Jack Bauer's sixth day as savior of the world, '24' for the most part has been welcomed back from a seven month hiatus with open arms. And for a few moments when Jack got off the plane after 20 months of torture at the behest of the Chinese, he sure looked like Jesus before the crucifixion.

"This is going to get much worse," the new President Palmer said. "Get me Jack Bauer."

'24' airs Mondays at 9:00pm on FOX.