

Violence in Iraq puts Bush 'on the defensive'

Although Bush's approval ratings have steadied, recent attacks in Iraq weigh heavily on the White House

By William Neikirk and Bob Kemper
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

WASHINGTON — The wave of violence in Iraq over the past few days has not only dealt a setback to the American occupation, but has also raised the political risks for President Bush as he seeks to rebuild and pacify the country.

With Paul Bremer, the U.S. administrator on Iraq, at his side, the president on Monday blamed the recent attacks on people "desperate" to prevent progress in the country. "The more successful we are on the ground, the more these killers will react," Bush said.

Yet the severity of the attacks reverberated loudly in Washington, where the conflict's potential impact

on next year's presidential race is on the minds of many, particularly if the violence of the past two days foreshadows an escalation in casualties and costs.

The concern in GOP circles is such that one prominent Republican strategist said many party faithful hope that the administration can provide an "achievable" deadline for withdrawing U.S. troops by next summer. But that "decision-can keeps getting kicked down the street," he said.

"The continuing attacks and escalation of attacks continue to put the president on the defensive," said Merle Black, political science professor at Emory University. "But we are a year from the election. It could get better, it could get worse. But as these attacks have continued, it gives material to his political opponents."

Bush's popularity declined after the postwar violence erupted, although his approval rating has steadied in recent weeks and now hovers around 50 percent. As violence escalates,

though, Iraq threatens to become an even heavier political weight on the White House.

Bush's political vulnerability to developments in Iraq will depend on whether Democratic candidates have an alternative plan acceptable to most Americans, said Democratic political consultant Jim Duffy.

But Duffy also said Bush could help himself politically with some "truthful accounting," admitting that his administration miscalculated the strength of the opposition and that there are not enough troops in Iraq to do the job.

Republican political consultant Whit Ayres said while there is greater concern within the GOP about the war's effect on next year's elections, foreign policy will be at the top of the campaign agenda and "generally, Republicans are trusted far more than Democrats to deal with national security issues."

Potentially more damaging, the renewed attacks come shortly after the

administration staged a public relations offensive to play up positive developments in Iraq, with Bush accusing the media of filtering out the good news. A leaked memo from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld calling the challenge in Iraq a "long, hard slog" also undercut the White House rhetoric.

In comments Monday, administration officials treated the violent incidents of the past few days as an aberration.

"We'll have rough days such as we've had the last couple of days," Bremer said. "But the overall thrust is in the right direction, and the good days outnumber the bad days. And that's the thing we need to keep in perspective."

Still, Republican political consultant Scott Reed said the question many political leaders are asking is, "Do we have enough troops to do the job right now? Forget about the \$87 billion (cost of a bill to help Iraq and Afghanistan). Do the job, finish it, that's the question right now. I be-

lieve that is the drumbeat that will be coming up."

Some compared Iraq to the Vietnam War — not in terms of the death toll, which still pales in comparison to Vietnam, but because top administration officials are speaking optimistically while reports from the field suggest otherwise.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who was a prisoner of war in Vietnam, told Newsweek after the Rumsfeld memo was made public that "this is the first time that I have seen a parallel to Vietnam in terms of information that the administration is putting out versus the actual situation on the ground."

Many analysts agreed that the situation in Iraq has yet to reach the point that the American people would view it as a quagmire that could damage the president's chances for re-election.

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Critics say country-of-origin food labels to hurt economy

The labels are slated to cost \$3.9 billion in the first year, but USDA says they may not provide substantial benefits

By Andrew Martin and Paul Singer
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

WASHINGTON — A new law requiring retailers to display labels identifying the country of origin on most meat, produce and peanuts may cost as much as \$3.9 billion to implement in its first year while having "negligible" benefits, according to an analysis released Monday by the Department of Agriculture.

The "country of origin" rules, which are slated to go into effect Sept. 30, 2004, are also expected to raise prices for consumers and cut into demand for U.S. exports, the analysis concludes.

The country-of-origin label was

meant to give consumers more information about the food they buy and was expected by advocates to increase the demand for food produced by U.S. farmers.

The law requires producers to keep detailed records of the origin of foods from the farm to the store shelf and requires retailers to display country-of-origin information at the point of sale. Penalties for violations can be as high as \$10,000 per incident.

But the USDA study found "little evidence that consumers are likely to increase their purchase of food items bearing the U.S. origin label." The price tag is also double what the government had originally anticipated.

Ultimately, the Agriculture Department found that if country-of-origin labeling would produce additional profits for American farmers, processors and

retailers, they would have done it voluntarily already. As evidence, the report states that no one has participated in a voluntary country-of-origin program for meat producers, offered by the USDA for the past three years.

The report comes as the country-of-origin labeling program — originally passed as part of the 2002 Farm Bill — is under attack from a variety of sources.

As the costs of the program have become apparent, food companies, grocery stores and meat packers have mounted a campaign to repeal it.

The House of Representatives passed legislation in July barring USDA from spending any money to implement the program as it applied to meat. This would leave an unusual scenario in which the law would remain in effect, but for meats, the government would have little way to

make sure the industry complied.

The House attached that spending ban to the USDA appropriations bill for next year, which the Senate is expected to take up in the next few weeks.

The USDA report, which was attached to detailed rules for the new labeling program, was seized on by opponents of country-of-origin labeling as proof that it would be unduly burdensome and hurt, rather than help, the U.S. economy.

"This is going to destroy our exports," said Jon Caspers, an Iowa pork producer who is president of the National Pork Producers Council. He predicted that the legislation will force U.S. pork producers out of business because of the higher costs of doing business.

National Cattlemen's Beef Association President Eric Davis added, "it will be all but impossible for produc-

ers to improve their bottom line under this mandatory law."

But Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) said the program should move forward.

Grassley said the USDA's cost analysis was higher than a previous analysis — which predicted the program would cost \$2 billion in the first year — "due to the USDA's reliance on self-serving industry information."

The USDA analysis did conclude that "consumers may desire (country-of-origin labeling) not out of any intrinsic value they place knowing the country of origin, but because it represents to them a proxy for product safety or quality." But it found that in general, customers are unlikely to be willing to pay more for domestic foods.

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STUDENT

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experiences with his career in law.

Bryan Chastain grew up in Bend where he attended Mountain View High School and played on his high school's varsity golf team.

"He was an excellent, excellent golfer," his father said, adding that Bryan Chastain had been on his way home from playing golf when the accident occurred.

Bryan Chastain's brother-in-law and friend since high school, Dan Tadlock, said it seemed like his friend could do anything.

"He had his finger in every possible hobby you can think of," he said, adding that Bryan Chastain's many hobbies were a reflection of how passionate he was about life.

Bryan Chastain married Tadlock's sister, Brenda, six years ago, and Tadlock said the transition from friend to brother-in-law could have been tougher if it wasn't for Bryan Chastain's good nature.

"He was a people person," he said.

Tadlock said he has many fond memories of growing up in Bend with his friend, such as the time the two tied a water ski rope to the back of a Subaru and used it to ski around a

snowy parking lot at 2 a.m.

Bryan Chastain worked in Eugene at The Shutterbug and was also employed as an apartment manager in the McKenna Estates apartments. His co-workers said he always livened up a day at work with his humorous antics.

"I remember just going home and just talking about Bryan all the time," said Chris Sloan, a co-worker at The Shutterbug. "I just laughed until my stomach hurt."

Sloan said it was easier to list the hobbies Bryan Chastain didn't have an interest in.

"Everything he did, he did very well," she said. "From playing the gui-

tar to speaking Chinese to fixing everything."

She said Bryan Chastain was always handy to fix things in the camera store.

"He was like MacGyver, except better," Sloan said.

Valerie Eitnier, also a co-worker, said she remembers Bryan Chastain taping The Shutterbug's fliers to his clothes, making a paper suit out of them one day when work was slow.

"I just think he was a really happy, funny guy," she said.

Bryan Chastain was also passionate about his education, and Tadlock said he was the first member of his family

to attend college.

Jane Gordon, associate dean for students and program affairs at the law school, said Bryan Chastain stood out among other students because he was so friendly and outgoing.

"He was really excited about being in the law school," she said.

Assistant Law Professor Suzanne Rowe said she will remember Bryan Chastain for his fabulous smile.

"We're going to miss him terribly," she said.

Contact the higher education/student life/student affairs reporter at chelseaduncan@dailyemerald.com.

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