

Bush: Islamic radicals seek to spread empire

BY TOM RAUM
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Bush said Thursday the United States and its allies had foiled at least 10 serious plots by the al-Qaida terror network in the last four years, including plans for Sept. 11-like attacks on both U.S. coasts.

In a speech designed to revive flagging public support for the war in Iraq, the president also said the U.S. and its partners have stopped at least five more efforts by al-Qaida to case targets or infiltrate operatives in the United States.

"Because of this steady progress, the enemy is wounded, but the enemy is still capable of global operations," Bush said. "Our commitment is clear: We will not relent until the organized international terror networks are exposed and broken, and their leaders held to account for their acts of murder."

Bush said Islamic radicals are seeking to establish a "radical Islamic empire that spans from Spain to Indonesia" with Iraq serving as the main front. He singled out Iran and Syria as "allies of convenience" for Islamic radicalism.

Pentagon officials released a letter Thursday evening they said was writ-

ten from one terrorist leader to another that they said confirmed administration assertions that Iraqi insurgents have a detailed plan to force U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and create an Islamic state there.

The White House initially would not give details of the 10 plots that Bush mentioned in his morning speech before the National Endowment for Democracy, saying some information remained classified. But in the evening, the White House released a fact sheet with a brief, and vague, description of each.

Three targets cited were in the United States, including plans to use hijacked airplanes to attack the West Coast in mid-2002 and the East Coast in mid-2003. The White House said at least one planner of the West Coast attack was a key figure behind the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001.

The third was the case of Jose Padilla, a former Chicago gang member who converted to Islam and allegedly plotted with top al-Qaida commanders to detonate a radioactive "dirty bomb" in a U.S. city. Padilla, whose plot never materialized, was designated an enemy combatant by Bush and is being held without criminal charge at a Navy brig in

South Carolina.

The White House said the other seven attacks included plans to bomb several sites in Britain in mid-2004; attack Westerners at several places in Karachi, Pakistan, in spring 2003; attack Heathrow Airport using hijacked commercial airliners in 2003; carry out a large-scale bombing in Britain in spring 2004; attack ships in the Arabian Gulf in late 2002-0303; attack ships in the Straits of Hormuz, a narrow part of the Persian Gulf where it opens into the Arabian Sea, in 2002; and attack a tourist site outside the United States in 2003.

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman would only broadly characterize the intercepted letter that the Defense Department released, which he said was written by Osama bin Laden deputy Ayman al-Zawahri to the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He would not say where, when or how it was obtained, or who intercepted it, but he said the Pentagon is confident it is authentic.

Whitman said the letter demonstrates "that there is this detailed planning and intent on the part of the insurgents in Iraq to one day control that country and to really try to extend their extremism to neighboring countries. It demonstrates to me they

clearly understand the importance and significance of the battle in Iraq right now."

In the letter al-Zawahri urges Zarqawi — who has declared war on Iraq's Shiite Muslim majority — to avoid bombing mosques and slaughtering hostages so as not to alienate the masses, Whitman said. He also said that al-Zawahri asked Zarqawi for some financial support.

Polls show declining American support for the war that has thus far claimed the lives of more than 1,940 members of the U.S. military. Bush's policy faces a crucial test in Iraq's Oct. 15 referendum on a new constitution, a vote that Bush has said terrorists will try to derail.

In remarks clearly aimed at those seeking a withdrawal of U.S. troops, Bush said: "There's always a temptation in the middle of a long struggle to seek the quiet life, to escape the duties and problems of the world and to hope the enemy grows weary of fanaticism and tired of murder."

"We will keep our nerve and we will win that victory," he said.

Democrats challenged Bush's arguments on the Iraq mission. "The president went into Iraq under a false premise, without a plan and has totally mismanaged our involvement," said

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif. "Now he is trying to justify his actions with a series of excuses."

Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., said Bush "continues to invent a false link between the war in Iraq and the tragedy of Sept. 11."

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said Bush "has offered America a false choice, between resolve and retreat."

Bush said Islamic extremists hope to use "the vacuum created by an American retreat" to gain control of Iraq and use it as a base for launching attacks against other countries.

"The murderous ideology of the Islamic radicals is the great challenge of our new century," he said. "Like the ideology of communism, our new enemy teaches that innocent individuals can be sacrificed to serve a political vision."

"The militants believe that controlling one country will rally the Muslim masses, enabling them to overthrow all moderate governments in the region, and establish a radical Islamic empire that spans from Spain to Indonesia," Bush asserted.

"Against such an enemy, there's only one effective response: We never back down, never give in and never accept anything less than complete victory," Bush declared.

IN BRIEF

Confidant Karl Rove gives additional testimony

WASHINGTON — Presidential confidant Karl Rove will testify for a fourth time before the federal grand jury investigating the leak of a CIA officer's identity even though prosecutors have warned they can no longer guarantee he will escape indictment, lawyers said Thursday.

Rove's offer was accepted by Special Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald in the last week as the grand jury wraps up its work and decides whether Rove, Vice President Cheney's Chief of Staff I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby or any other presidential aides should face criminal charges.

Rove's lawyer said Thursday that Fitzgerald has assured him that he has made no decisions yet on charges and that his client has not received a so-called target letter, usually the last step before a grand jury's indictment.

"I can say categorically that Karl has not received a target letter from the special counsel," attorney Robert Luskin said. "The special counsel has confirmed that he has not made any charging decisions in respect to Karl."

Outspoken warlord critic wins in Afghan election

KABUL, Afghanistan — A 27-year-old woman who is a defiant critic of Afghanistan's powerful warlords won one of the first seats declared

Thursday in provisional results from landmark parliamentary elections, a key step in the nation's transition to democracy.

The U.N.-Afghan election body reported "serious" cases of fraud, including ballot-box stuffing after election day. It excluded 299 polling stations from the vote count, but declared the Sept. 18 poll was still credible.

President Hamid Karzai and NATO's chief diplomat, meanwhile, expressed confidence that a planned deployment of 6,000 NATO troops into volatile southern provinces would happen next year — a move that could eventually free up thousands of American forces.

Some NATO members, including France and Germany, are reluctant for the peacekeeping force, currently deployed in the more stable north and west, to become embroiled in counterinsurgency operations against Taliban-led rebels in the south, currently handled by a separate U.S.-led coalition. They also object to plans to put both missions under NATO command.

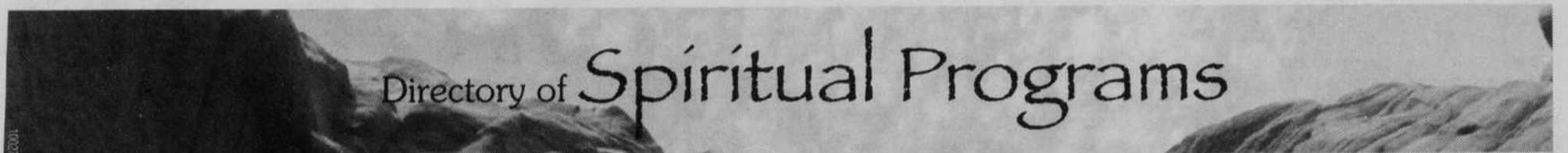
Cervical cancer vaccine tests 100 percent effective

An experimental vaccine to prevent the most common forms of cervical cancer proved 100 percent effective in a two-year test on more than 10,000 girls and women, drug maker Merck & Co. says.

Merck is hoping to win Food and Drug Administration approval for the vaccine, Gardasil, and put it on the market as soon as late 2006. It would be the first vaccine to prevent cervical cancer, a disease caused almost exclusively by a highly common sexually transmitted virus called the human papilloma virus, or HPV.

Doctors expect the vaccine to be routinely offered to women — and men, too, because they can spread the virus to partners — before they become sexually active, though the practice is certain to run into opposition from conservatives and religious groups.

—The Associated Press



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