

Pentagon propaganda program orders soldiers to promote Iraq war while home on leave

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Good soldiers follow orders and hundreds of American military men and women returned to the United States on holiday leave this month with orders to sell the Iraq war to a skeptical public.

The program, coordinated through a Pentagon operation dubbed “Operation Homefront,” ordered military personnel to give interviews to their hometown newspapers, television stations and other media outlets and praise the American war effort in Iraq.

Initial reports back to the Pentagon deem the operation a success with dozens of front page stories in daily and weekly newspapers around the country along with upbeat reports on local television stations.

“We’ve learned as a military how to do this better,” Captain David Diaz, a military reservist, told his hometown paper, The Roanoke (VA) Times. “My worry is that we have the right military strategy and political strategies now but the patience of the American public is wearing thin.”

When pressed by the paper on whether or not his commanding officers told him to talk to the press, Diaz admitted he was “encouraged” to do so. So reporter Duncan Adams asked:

“Did Diaz return to the U.S. on emergency leave with an agenda — to offer a positive spin that could help counter growing concerns among Americans about the U.S. exit strategy? How do we know that’s not his strategy, especially after he discloses that superior officers encouraged him to talk about his experiences in Iraq?”

Replied Diaz:

“You don’t. I can tell you that the direction we’ve gotten from on high is that there is a concern about public opinion out there and they want to set the record straight.”

Diaz, an intelligence officer, knows how to avoid a direct answer. Other military personnel, however, tell Capitol Hill Blue privately that the pressure to “sell the war” back home is enormous.

“I’ve been promised an early release if I do a good job promoting the war,” says one reservist who asked not to be identified.

In interviews with a number of reservists home for the holidays, a pattern emerges on the

Pentagon's propaganda effort. Soldiers are encouraged to contact their local news media outlets to offer interviews about the war. A detailed set of talking points encourages them to:

- Admit initial doubts about the war but claim conversion to a belief in the American mission;
- Praise military leadership in Iraq and throw in a few words of support for the Bush administration;
- Claim the mission to turn security of the country over to the Iraqis is working;
- Reiterate that America must not abandon its mission and must stay until the "job is finished."
- Talk about how "things are better" now in Iraq.

"My worry is that we have the right military strategy and political strategies now but the patience of the American public is wearing thin," Diaz told The Roanoke Times.

"It's way better now (in Iraq). People are friendlier. They seem more relaxed, and they say, 'Thank you, mister,'" Sgt. Christopher Desierto told his hometown paper, The Maui News.

But soldiers who are home and don't have to return to Iraq tell a different story.

"I've just been focused on trying to get the rest of these guys home," says Sgt. Major Floyd Dubose of Jackson, MS, who returned home after 11 months in Iraq with the Mississippi Army National Guard's 155th Combat Brigade.

And the Army is cracking down on soldiers who go on the record opposing the war.

Specialist Leonard Clark, a National Guardsman, was demoted to private and fined \$1,640 for posting anti-war statements on an Internet blog. Clark wrote entries describing the company's commander as a "glory seeker" and the battalion sergeant major an "inhuman monster". His last entry before the blog was shut down told how his fellow soldiers were becoming increasingly opposed to the US operation in Iraq.

"The message is clear," says one reservist who is home for the holidays but has to return and asked not to be identified. "If you want to get out of this man's Army with an honorable (discharge) and full benefits you better not tell the truth about what is happening in-country."

But Sgt. Johnathan Wilson, a reservist, got his honorable discharge after he returned home earlier this month and he's not afraid to talk on the record.

"Iraq is a classic FUBAR," he says. "The country is out of control and we can't stop it. Anybody who tries to sell a good news story about the war is blowing it out his ass. We don't win and eventually we will leave the country in a worse shape than it was when we invaded."

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