

commentary

from other pens...

In anti-terror war, pentagon, FBI little help

By George Gedda

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The high school textbooks say the president of the United States runs the executive branch of government and rides herd on a vast bureaucracy assigned to carry out his directives.

That's not quite the way it works, say Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, who describe the travails of President Clinton in trying, often unsuccessfully, to get the Pentagon and the FBI to pursue Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terrorist network.

The authors, both Clinton-era National Security Council experts on terrorism, share their thoughts in a new book, "The Age of Sacred Terror."

They say Clinton wanted to do something about al-Qaida operations in Afghanistan late in his second term, his cruise missile attacks on the group's facilities in August 1998 having achieved little.

He approached Gen. Hugh Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and said, "It would scare the (expletive) out of al-Qaida if suddenly a bunch of black ninjas rappelled out of helicopters in the middle of their camp. It would show those guys we're not afraid."

The Pentagon feared a debacle similar to April 1980 when President Carter dispatched helicopters to Iran in hopes of rescuing 52 American hostages. The result was the incineration of two helicopters and the deaths of eight servicemen.

The authors suspect that Pentagon reservations about the Clinton plan ran deeper. The Pentagon, they point out, had an uneasy relationship with Clinton virtually from Day 1, when the White House began pushing to end discrimination against homosexuals by the military.

They quoted a senior political appointee at the Pentagon as saying that Defense was "particularly unwilling to go out on a limb for Clinton."

The authors say, Thomas Pickering, No. 3 at the State Department under Clinton, worried someone at Defense would put out the story that the Clinton plan would "hazard the lives of young Americans in a wild goose chase. The Pentagon has a great capacity to let things leak to keep from doing them."

Lee Edwards, who follows presidential politics at the Heritage Foundation, says all presidents have had difficulty with balky bureaucracies.

He recalled that President Truman, shortly before Dwight D. Eisenhower's succession in 1953, said, "Poor Ike. He's going to come in, give an order and think it's going to be carried out."

Paul Light, an analyst at the Brookings Institution, said he was not surprised Clinton found resistance at the Pentagon. "DoD fights everybody," Light said, using the shorthand term for the Pentagon. For a president to get a bureaucracy to move, sometimes he has to use a two-by-four."

Norman Ornstein, of the American Enterprise Institute, said the culture of the Pentagon and the FBI is "to be suspicious of everybody else and to be proprietary about everything they do."

Benjamin and Simon say Clinton had difficulty with what they described as the independent streak of FBI Director Louis Freeh.

The authors say the FBI "was at its most difficult in refusing to share investigative material that had a critical bearing on foreign policy."

The agency, despite a wealth of information, "contributed nothing to the White House's understanding of al-Qaida," they wrote.

Freeh insisted his hands were often tied because of rules requiring confidentiality in cases involving criminal investigations.

Anger over the pre-Sept. 11, 2001, performances of the FBI and other federal agencies prompted congressional inquiries last month.

On Oct. 9, after "Sacred Terror" was completed, Freeh offered a defense before Congress of the FBI's role in the counterterror effort.

"There is an absolute misperception if there is a notion we have a culture where information is not shared," Freeh told a congressional hearing.

He said the FBI could have done better if Congress had approved the request in 2000 for an additional 864 people. He said he got five.

"To win a war, it takes soldiers," he said.

EDITOR'S NOTE — George Gedda has covered foreign affairs for The Associated Press since 1968.



Bush has mandate that Dems should respect

Suppose, after campaigning as furiously as he did, President Bush had fallen short on Election Day — say, just holding the House and losing Senate seats. Democrats would surely say they'd been vindicated and Bush rebuffed.

Well, the opposite happened. Bush did what no president in 140 years has done except Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1934 — gain both House and Senate seats in a midterm and recapture control of the Senate in the process.

In addition, the predicted massive Democratic takeover of governorships didn't occur. In fact, the partisan balance of control of statehouses may still tilt GOP. For sure, Republicans picked up every governorship rated as close when Bush campaigned.

So, Bush won a mandate Tuesday in a way he didn't in 2000. It's not a huge one, to be sure, but one that Democrats need to respect.

The 2002 election shifted the country's political center of gravity off the 50-50 dead-even position where it stood after the 2000 election — the one that allowed Democrats to think they were entitled to obstruct Bush's agenda.

Even if it wasn't exactly in voters' heads when they cast their ballots, what they did on Election Day was to vote against divided government and to give Republicans the chance — and the responsibility — to get things done.

A Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Election Day phone poll shows, in state after state, voters were highly conscious of the fact that they were voting not only for a Senate candidate, but also for control of the Senate.

In most states, more than 50 percent of voters said party control was "very important" in determining how they cast their ballots, and more than 20 percent said it was "somewhat important."

Clearly, a majority of those who cast ballots this year want Republicans to run the government. It's probably not a big majority, but it beats no majority. The country evidently does not want gridlock



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any longer.

Again, in state after state, the poll shows that approval of Bush is sky-high — 75 percent in Arkansas, 66 percent in Colorado, 77 percent in Georgia, 69 percent in Minnesota, and 72 percent in Missouri, New Hampshire and New Jersey.

The Fox poll suggests that Bush's approval rating among actual voters was higher than it was among registered voters or likely voters in pre-election polling, where it tended to be in the low 60s.

Democrats can say that Bush's polls are artificially inflated by reaction to the war on terrorism, but it's also a fact that the Fox poll showed his approval ratings survived a widespread feeling in all the key states — more than 70 percent — that the economy is either "only fair" or "poor."

What Democrats will do now is a big question. Undoubtedly, there will be huge fight in the party, with liberals claiming that their candidates were too accommodating toward Bush on taxes and Iraq, depressing turnout of base voters.

On the other hand, Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle (D-S.D.) and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) would have been hard-pressed to call for repeal of Bush's tax cuts or vote against him on the Iraq war resolution.

Gephardt, particularly, decided as a matter of conscience to support Bush on the war and, on tax policy, they both were in a bind because most vulnerable Democratic candidates were fighting in states and districts that Bush carried in 2000.

The Fox poll did establish, however, that Democrats across the country are deeply opposed to the Iraq war — 78 percent in Arkansas, 84 percent in Colorado, 78 percent in Minnesota, 80 percent in

Missouri and 77 percent in New Hampshire.

This suggests that Democratic presidential candidates who voted with Bush on the war — Gephardt and Sens. Joe Lieberman (Conn.), John Edwards (N.C.) and John Kerry (Mass.) — may have a tough time in primaries against former Vice President Al Gore, who has taken a strident anti-Bush stand on both foreign and domestic policy.

What stance will Democrats take toward Bush in the 108th Congress? On some issues — like permanent extension of his tax cuts — they will may try to filibuster and obstruct because to do otherwise would give away the heart and soul of Democratic ideology.

But on other issues — including homeland security, judicial nominations, medical malpractice and prescription drug coverage for seniors — Democrats ought to respect the Bush mandate.

They should fight for what they believe in, but use the filibuster judiciously, lest they provide Bush with another juicy target in 2004.

Bush and Republicans have won the chance to show whether their economic, domestic and foreign policies will work for the country.

The Fox poll shows that, while they support Bush now, voters are by no means wedded to him looking toward 2004. In state after state, voters were not ready to say they plan on voting to re-elect Bush in 2004 — just 36 percent in Arkansas, 33 percent in Colorado, 40 percent in Georgia, 28 percent in Minnesota and 34 percent in New Jersey.

The percentage of voters saying they planned to vote against Bush was significantly smaller in each state, but invariably pluralities said they would wait and see how things go before deciding.

Instead of being the "parity party" with the GOP, Democrats have been reduced to being the opposition for the next two years. They have a duty to oppose, but if they obstruct, they'll pay a penalty — as will the GOP if it overplays its winning hand.

Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill.

What does it mean to have the GOP in control

What does it mean, the Republican Party in control of White House, Senate and House of Representatives all at once?

The Democrats are so stunned they can't tell you. Liberal commentators rant on and on about the threat of the GOP turning the nation to the right.

It is a momentous shift in political power, but it may turn out to be not that big a deal.

George Bush has done the impossible. His party has gained seats and power in a midterm election, something that almost never happens.

But he doesn't have the kind of majority that Lyndon Johnson won in the 1964 election. That resulted in the greatest expansion of government since the New Deal, creating problems we're dealing with still, and not even Republicans should be trusted with that kind of power.

Mr. Bush doesn't have enough votes to make sweeping changes. The Democrats will be subdued, but they'll have a say. The majority — just a couple of votes in the Senate — will have to deal with them to get things done.

The GOP victory will change a lot of things, however.

Dozens of judges will be confirmed by a Republican Senate tired of endless Democratic delays. It's about time.

The Democrats apparently thought they could hold off until Mr. Bush got tired of the fight or a Democrat was elected to succeed him. Now the natural progression of judicial change will take



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place, and the new judges on the whole will be more conservative. Don't look for abortion to be outlawed next year, however.

The change does bode well for permanent tax cuts and other parts of the Bush program. Moves toward war with Iraq will become easier, though it's still unlikely that a war will happen.

What happened? Why did people choose to back a president they'd only barely elected two years ago?

Maybe they were tired of indecision. Since the drawn-out 2000 election, there's been little certainty about who was in charge in Washington.

Maybe people just decided that they wanted someone in the driver's seat.

More likely, though, there's just been a shift to the right by the whole country. People may have decided they like Mr. Bush's program of tax cuts, tough action abroad and a more active defense at home.

They know the economy is not the best, but they also know that started before the Democrats left office.

There may also be a lingering effect from the

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