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MRC Study: Five Times More Coverage of Bush's Rhetoric Than Iran, Iraq or North Korean Policies

Condemning Bush, Not Interested In Evil

In the three weeks since President Bush labeled Iran, Iraq and North Korea an "axis of evil" which threatens the free world, the ABC, CBS and NBC evening news programs have spent relatively little time reporting on the nature and threat posed by those regimes, emphasizing the "controversy" over the statement itself, a Media Research Center study has determined.

MRC analysts reviewed all 37 network stories which discussed the "axis of evil" on *World News Tonight*, the *CBS Evening News* and *NBC Nightly News* from January 30 (the day after Bush's State of the Union address) through February 19. Only five of those stories (14%) focused on Iraq, Iran or North Korea themselves, compared with 73% whose main focus was negative reaction to the President's declaration. In framing their stories, reporters invariably cast the "axis" comment as incendiary and counter-productive. Out of 19 "talking heads" invited by reporters to react to the administration's policy, 89 percent condemned Bush's statement. (This excludes both the summarized views of Iraqi, Iranian and North Korean officials, plus administration explanations of the "axis" policy.)

None of the three networks has spent much time reporting on the nature of the Iranian, Iraqi and North Korean regimes. Instead, they've showcased critics of Bush's rhetoric.

■ **On January 30**, NBC's Jim Miklaszewski showed both a Republican (Senator Chuck Hagel) and a Democrat (former Rep. Lee Hamilton) condemning Bush's statement, but broadcast no supportive soundbites. That same night, ABC's Jim Wooten described the Iranians as "genuinely astonished" by the "axis of evil" label. "Thousands of Iranians took part in pro-U.S. demonstrations here after September 11," he declared, but "whatever goodwill may have been generated, they say, has now evaporated in the heat of the indictment from President Bush."

■ **On January 31**, ABC's Terry Moran waited in vain for a presidential retraction: "The President didn't back down from his threats against the countries he's dubbed the axis of evil....The President's rhetoric continues to escalate."

■ **On February 11**, all three anchors linked Bush's remark to government-organized protests in Iran. CBS's Dan Rather credited the rally as being "the biggest anti-American

demonstration there in years." Peter Jennings called the rally "gigantic," adding that "millions of people do not like being referred to as evil" — shifting the focus of Bush's statement from the totalitarian regime to its victims. Wooten described Iran as "probably the most democratic Islamic country on earth, with an elected president and parliament. And yet, its Supreme Leader...is a Muslim cleric — unelected, yet in terms of authority, unchallenged." A democracy with an unchallenged Supreme Leader?

■ **On February 15**, NBC's Andrea Mitchell, in a story on Secretary of State Colin Powell, declared that "the 'axis of evil' rhetoric [is] not supported by most diplomats."

■ **On February 16**, as Bush left for Japan, South Korea and China, NBC's Brian Williams misleadingly declared him "en route to a part of the world he recently branded, as you'll recall, an 'axis of evil.'" ABC's Mark Litke highlighted "angry South Koreans, and not just the usual student demonstrators, also accusing Bush of arrogance for taking the path of confrontation with the North."

■ **On February 18**, CBS's John Roberts reported that in South Korea, "radical students denounced President Bush as a death merchant." He then summarized an interview with an ex-Clinton administration official: "Veteran negotiator Bob Gallucci, who in 1994 convinced North Korea to put its nuclear program on hold, says the harsh rhetoric is a prescription for deadlock."

■ **On February 19**, ABC's Jennings talked about Bush's "belief" that North Korea is a threat: "Mr. Bush believes the North is not only repressive, but dangerous....The President's belief is causing some anxiety in the South." ABC and NBC quoted only Bush critics; CBS's Roberts was the only reporter who revealed that many Koreans support the President: "Mr. Bush is getting full support from opposition lawmakers, who argue the North needs to be seen for what it is." — *Rich Noyes*

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; **Brent Baker**, **Rich Noyes**, Editors; **Jessica Anderson**, **Brian Boyd**, **Geoffrey Dickens**, **Patrick Gregory**, **Ken Shepherd**, **Brad Wilmouth**, Media Analysts; **Kristina Sewell**, Research Associate; **Liz Swasey**, Director of Communications. For the latest liberal media bias, read the *CyberAlert* at www.mrc.org