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NIGHTLY NEWS

WITH TOM BROKAW

Top terrorist hunter's divisive views



General casts military, anti-terror efforts in religious terms

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By Lisa Myers and the NBC Investigative Unit
NBC NEWS

Oct. 15 — A highly decorated general who is one of the leaders of a secretive new Pentagon unit formed to coordinate intelligence on terrorists and help hunt down Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and other high-profile targets has a history of outspoken and divisive views on religion — Islam in particular, NBC News has learned.

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Lisa Myers
NBC CORRESPONDENT

HE'S A HIGHLY decorated officer, twice wounded in combat — a warrior's warrior.

The former commander of Army Special Forces, Lt. Gen. William "Jerry" Boykin has led or been part of almost every recent U.S. military operation, from the ill-fated attempt to rescue hostages in Iran to Grenada, Panama, Colombia, Somalia.

This summer, Boykin was promoted to deputy undersecretary of defense, with a new mission for which many say he is uniquely qualified: to aggressively combine intelligence with special operations and hunt down so-called high-value terrorist targets including bin Laden and Saddam.

But that new assignment may be complicated by controversial views Boykin — an evangelical Christian — has expressed in dozens of speeches at churches and prayer breakfasts around the country. In a half-dozen video and audiotapes obtained by NBC News, Boykin says America's true enemy is not bin Laden.

In June 2003, Boykin spoke to a church group over a slide show:

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"Well, is he [bin Laden] the enemy? Next slide. Or is this man [Saddam] the enemy? The enemy is none

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showed you here. The enemy is a spiritual enemy. He's called the principality of darkness. The enemy is a guy called Satan."

Why are terrorists out to destroy the United States? Boykin said: "They're after

us because we're a Christian nation."

NBC News military analyst Bill Arkin, who's been investigating Boykin for the Los Angeles Times, says the general casts the war on terror as a religious war: "I think that it is not only at odds with what the president believes, but it is a dangerous, extreme and pernicious view that really has no place."

During a January church speech in Daytona, Fla., Boykin recalled a Muslim fighter in Somalia who bragged on television the Americans would never get him because his God, Allah, would protect him: "Well, you know what I knew, that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol."

The Somali was captured, and Boykin said he told the man: "Mr. Atto, you underestimated our God."

In a phone conversation, Boykin tells NBC he respects Muslims and believes the radicals who attack America are "not true followers of Islam."

Boykin also routinely tells audiences that God, not the voters, chose President Bush: "Why is this man in the White House? The majority of Americans did not vote for him. Why is he there? And I tell you this morning that he's in the White House because God put him there for a time such as this."

Boykin tells NBC News that, given his new assignment, he is curtailing such speeches in the future. He says, "I don't want ... to be misconstrued. I don't want to come across as a right-wing radical."

Lisa Myers is NBC News' senior investigative correspondent.



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