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Pentagon report reveals catalogue of failure By Neil Mackay, Investigations Editor

THE Pentagon has admitted that the war on terror and the invasion and occupation of Iraq have increased support for al-Qaeda, made ordinary Muslims hate the US and caused a global backlash against America because of the "self-serving hypocrisy" of George W Bush's administration over the Middle East.

The mea culpa is contained in a shockingly frank "strategic communications" report, written this autumn by the Defence Science Board for Pentagon supremo Donald Rumsfeld.

On "the war of ideas or the struggle for hearts and minds", the report says, "American efforts have not only failed, they may also have achieved the opposite of what they intended".

"American direct intervention in the Muslim world has paradoxically elevated the stature of, and support for, radical Islamists, while diminishing support for the United States to single digits in some Arab societies."

Referring to the repeated mantra from the White House that those who oppose the US in the Middle East "hate our freedoms", the report says: "Muslims do not 'hate our freedoms', but rather, they hate our policies. The overwhelming majority voice their objections to what they see as one-sided support in favour of Israel and against Palestinian rights, and the long-standing, even increasing support, for what Muslims collectively see as tyrannies, most notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan and the Gulf states.

"Thus when American public diplomacy talks about bringing democracy to Islamic societies, this is seen as no more than self-serving hypo crisy. Moreover, saying that 'freedom is the future of the Middle East' is seen as patronising ... in the eyes of Muslims, the American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq has not led to democracy there, but only more chaos and suffering. US actions appear in contrast to be motivated by ulterior motives, and deliberately controlled in order to best serve American national interests at the expense of truly Muslim self-determination."

The way America has handled itself since September 11 has played straight into the hands of al-Qaeda, the report adds. "American actions have elevated the authority of the jihadi insurgents and tended to ratify their legitimacy among Muslims." The result is that al-Qaeda has gone from being a marginal movement to having support across the entire Muslim world.

"Muslims see Americans as strangely narcissistic," the report goes on, adding that to the Arab world the war is "no more than an extension of American domestic politics". The US has zero credibility among Muslims which means that "whatever Americans do and say only serves ... the enemy".

The report says that the US is now engaged in a "global and generational struggle of ideas" which it is rapidly losing. In order to reverse the trend, the US must make "strategic communication" - which

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Driving sports car equivalent to cutting down three mature oak trees ... every day

includes the dissemination of propaganda and the running of military psychological operations - an integral part of national security. The document says that "Presidential leadership" is needed in this "ideas war" and warns against "arrogance, opportunism and double standards".

"We face a war on terrorism," the report says, "intensified conflict with Islam, and insurgency in Iraq. Worldwide anger and discontent are directed at America's tarnished credibility and ways the US pursues its goals. There is a consensus that America's power to persuade is in a state of crisis." More than 90% of the populations of some Muslims countries, such as Saudi Arabia, are opposed to US policies.

"The war has increased mistrust of America in Europe," the report adds, "weakened support for the war on terrorism and undermined US credibility worldwide." This, in turn, poses an increased threat to US national security.

America's "image problem", the report authors suggest, is "linked to perceptions of the US as arrogant, hypocritical and self-indulgent". The White House "has paid little attention" to the problems.

The report calls for a huge boost in spending on propaganda efforts as war policies "will not succeed unless they are communicated to global domestic audiences in ways that are credible".

American rhetoric which equates the war on terror as a cold-war-style battle against "totalitarian evil" is also slapped down by the report. Muslims see what is happening as a "history-shaking movement of Islamic restoration ... a renewal of the Muslim world ...(which) has taken form through many variant movements, both moderate and militant, with many millions of adherents - of which radical fighters are only a small part".

Rather than supporting tyranny, most Muslim want to overthrow tyrannical regimes like Saudi Arabia. "The US finds itself in the strategically awkward - and potentially dangerous - situation of being the long-standing prop and alliance partner of these authoritarian regimes. Without the US, these regimes could not survive," the report says.

"Thus the US has strongly taken sides in a desperate struggle ... US policies and actions are increasingly seen by the overwhelming majority of Muslims as a threat to the survival of Islam itself ... Americans have inserted themselves into this intra-Islamic struggle in ways that have made us an enemy to most Muslims.

"There is no yearning-to- be-liberated-by-the-US groundswell among Muslim societies ... The perception of intimate US support of tyrannies in the Muslim world is perhaps the critical vulnerability in American strategy. It strongly undercuts our message, while strongly promoting that of the enemy."

The report says that, in terms of the "information war", "at this moment it is the enemy that has the advantage". The US propaganda drive has to focus on "separating the vast majority of non-violent Muslims from the radical- militant Islamist-Jihadist".

According to the report, "the official take on the target audience [the Muslim world] has been gloriously simple" and divided the Middle East into "good" and "bad Muslims".

"Americans are convinced that the US is a benevolent 'superpower' that elevates values emphasising freedom ... deep down we assume that everyone should naturally support our policies. Yet the world of Islam - by overwhelming majorities at this time - sees things differently. Muslims see American policies as inimical to their values, American rhetoric about freedom and democracy as hypocritical and American actions as deeply threatening.

"In two years the jihadi message - that strongly attacks American values - is being accepted by more moderate and non-violent Muslims. This in turn implies that negative opinion of the US has not yet bottomed out

Equally important, the report says, is "to renew European attitudes towards America" which have also

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been severely damaged since September 11, 2001. As "al-Qaeda constantly outflanks the US in the war of information", American has to adopt more sophisticated propaganda techniques, such as targeting secularists in the Muslim world - including writers, artists and singers - and getting US private sector media and marketing professionals involved in disseminating messages to Muslims with a pro-US "brand".

The Pentagon report also calls for the establishment of a national security adviser for strategic communications, and a massive boost in funding for the "information war" to boost US government TV and radio stations broadcasting in the Middle East.

The importance of the need to quickly establish a propaganda advantage is underscored by a document attached to the Pentagon report from Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy defence secretary, dated May.

It says: "Our military expeditions to Afghanistan and Iraq are unlikely to be the last such excursion in the global war on terrorism."

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