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Outcry in Germany as anti-Semitic film sells out

By Tony Paterson in Berlin

(Filed: 26/02/2006)

A virulently anti-Semitic film about the Iraq war has provoked a storm of protest in Germany after it sold out to cheering audiences from the country's 2.5 million-strong Turkish community.

Valley of the Wolves, by the Turkish director Serdan Akar, shows crazed American GIs massacring innocent guests at a wedding party and scenes in which a Jewish surgeon removes organs from Iraqi prisoners in a style reminiscent of the Nazi death camp doctor Joseph Mengele.

Bavaria's interior minister admitted last week that he had dispatched intelligence service agents to cinemas showing the film to "gauge" audience reaction and identify potential radicals.

Edmund Stoiber, the state's conservative prime minister, has appealed to cinema operators to remove what he described as "this racist and anti-Western hate film" from their programmes.

The £6 million film, the most expensive Turkish production ever made, had already proved a box office hit in Turkey, where it first opened last month at a gala attended by the wife of the country's prime minister.

The production went on general release in Germany a fortnight ago and has had full houses ever since. More than 130,000 people, most of them young Muslims, saw the film in the first five days of its opening. At a packed cinema in a largely Turkish immigrant district of Berlin last week, Valley of the Wolves was being watched almost exclusively by young Turkish men. They clapped furiously when the Turkish hero of the film was shown blowing up a building occupied by the United States military commander in northern Iraq.

In the closing sequence, the hero is shown plunging a dagger into the heart of a US commander called Sam, played by Billy Zane. The audience responded by standing up and chanting "Allah is great!"

Afterwards, an 18-year-old member of the audience said: "The Americans always behave like this. They slaughtered the Red Indians and killed thousands in Vietnam.

"I was not shocked by the film, I see this on the news every day."

The nature of the film and the enthusiastic reception given to it by young Muslims, has both shocked and polarised politicians and community leaders.



US soldiers storm a wedding party in a scene from the film

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Bernd Neumann, the culture minister in Chancellor Angela Merkel's government complained last week that the reaction to the film "raises serious questions about the values of our society and our ability to instil them".

Kenan Kolat, the head of Germany's Turkish community, insisted that a ban on the film would make matters worse. "If it is withdrawn, it will raise levels of identification with the film," he said. "A democracy must be able to endure films that it doesn't approve of."

Alin Sahin, the film's distributor in Germany, argued: "When a cartoonist insults two billion Muslims it is considered freedom of opinion, but when an action film takes on the Americans it is considered demagoguery. Something is wrong."

But those arguing for a ban on Valley of the Wolves appeared to have won a partial victory last week when Cinemaxx, one of Germany's largest cinema chains, announced that it was withdrawing the film.

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