

August 31, 2006 10:29 PM ET

## Pentagon Moves Toward Monitoring Media

WASHINGTON (AP) - The U.S. command in Baghdad is seeking bidders for a two-year, \$20 million public relations contract that calls for monitoring the tone of Iraq news stories filed by U.S. and foreign media.



Proposals, due Sept. 6, ask companies to show how they'll "provide continuous monitoring and near-real time reporting of Iraqi, pan-Arabic, international, and U.S. media," according to the solicitation issued last week.

Contractors also will be evaluated on how they will provide analytical reports and customized briefings to the military, "including, but not limited to tone (positive, neutral, negative) and scope of media coverage."

The winner of the contract will likely also be required to develop an Arabic version of the multinational force's web site.

Attempts by The Associated Press to contact officials connected to the project via telephone and e-mail were not successful Thursday night.

The program comes during what has appeared to be a White House effort, before the fifth anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, to take the offensive against critics at a time of doubt about the future of Iraq.

President Bush addressed the American Legion's national convention in Salt Lake City on the issue Thursday, stressing that a U.S. pullout from Iraq would lead to its conquest by America's worst enemies.

He continued a theme set by both Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice when they spoke to the administration-friendly group earlier in the week.

The military last year was criticized for a public relations program in Iraq that included hiring a consulting firm that paid Iraqi news media to carry news stories written by American troops.

Pentagon officials have defended the program as a necessary tool in the war on terror. But critics have said it contradicts American values of freedom of the press.

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