

ABC's 'The Path to 9/11' Is Outstanding

by Govindini Murty
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I recently attended an advance screening of ABC's outstanding, epic miniseries "The Path to 9/11" (airing this September 10-11), and I came away enormously impressed. Writer/producer Cyrus Nowrasteh ("Into the West"), director David Cunningham ("To End All Wars"), and the whole production team have done a magnificent job in presenting the complex events leading up to 9/11 with accuracy, fairness, and artistry.

The writing, acting, directing, editing, cinematography, and overall story-telling are first-rate. "The Path to 9/11" is fast-paced and thoroughly gripping the entire way. The five-hour miniseries (aired over two nights) is based on the 9/11 Commission report, and also on ABC News correspondent John Miller's book, "The Cell." ABC is going to air the first three hours on Sunday, September 10, and the final two hours (which culminate in a shattering depiction of 9/11) on Monday, September 11.

Let me start by saying that "The Path to 9/11" is one of the best, most intelligent, most pro-American miniseries I've ever seen on TV, and conservatives should support it and promote it as vigorously as possible.

This is the first Hollywood production I've seen that honestly depicts how the Clinton administration repeatedly bungled the capture of Osama Bin Laden. One astonishing sequence in "The Path to 9/11" shows the CIA and the Northern Alliance surrounding Bin Laden's house in Afghanistan. They're on the verge of capturing Bin Laden, but they need final approval from the Clinton administration in order to go ahead. They phone Clinton, but he and his senior staff refuse to give authorization for the capture of Bin Laden, for fear of political fall-out if the mission should go wrong and civilians are harmed. National Security Adviser Sandy Berger in essence tells the team in Afghanistan that if they want to capture Bin Laden, they'll have to go ahead and do it on their own without any official authorization. That way, their necks will be on the line - and not his. The astonished CIA agent on the ground in Afghanistan repeatedly asks Berger if this is really what the administration wants. Berger refuses to answer, and then finally just hangs up on the agent. The CIA team and the Northern Alliance, just a few feet from capturing Bin Laden, have to abandon the entire mission. Bin Laden and Al Qaeda shortly thereafter bomb the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, killing over 225 men, women, and children, and wounding over 4000. The episode is a perfect example of Clinton-era irresponsibility and incompetence.

The miniseries also has a scene in which the CIA has crucial information identifying some of the 9/11 hijackers in advance of 9/11, but refuses to share the information with the FBI because of the "wall" put up by certain Democrat officials to prevent information sharing between government agencies. The CIA is depicted as sitting in a meeting with the FBI (with John O'Neil present), and showing the FBI surveillance photos of terrorism suspects - some of whom will later turn out to be the 9/11 hijackers. The CIA asks the FBI for help in identifying the men in the photos, but refuses to give the FBI any of the information they have on who the men are. John O'Neil protests that it's impossible for the FBI to help the CIA identify the men if they won't provide any information whatsoever on them. When O'Neil tells the FBI to keep the photos so they can at least work on them, the CIA becomes hostile to O'Neil and takes the photos back. Tragically,

John O'Neil himself will later die in the 9/11 attacks, in part because agencies like the CIA refused to share crucial information like this. Scenes like these really challenge the prevailing liberal media and Hollywood mindset by showing that the Patriot Act's information-sharing and surveillance provisions are crucial to the safety of this country, and that political correctness and bureaucratic inefficiency are Islamic terrorism's greatest friend.

The acting is also excellent in "The Path to 9/11." Harvey Keitel is strong, sympathetic, and quirky as FBI agent John O'Neil, and Donnie Wahlberg is also sympathetic and believable as CIA agent "Kirk." The standouts though are the wonderful South Asian and Middle Eastern actors who play both the heroes who help the U.S., and the terrorists out to destroy it. The actor playing Ishtiak, the Pakistani informant who helps the CIA capture Ramzi Youssef, is terrific. Played by newcomer Prassana Puwanarajah, Ishtiak is a shy, unassuming figure who makes a very unexpected -- but very sympathetic -- hero. The Ishtiak character tells the CIA that he's helping them because he is a scholar, and morally and philosophically he does not believe in the destruction of innocent life. Ishtiak risks his life, and the life of his young wife and baby, to help the U.S. capture Ramzi Youssef and thwart his terrorist plans. The Ishtiak sequence is one of the most moving segments of the miniseries. The producers told me that the actor playing Ishtiak is actually a doctor living in London, who does theater on the side.

The actor playing Ahmed Shah Massoud (the heroic leader of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, and one of America's strongest allies in that area) is also an inspired piece of casting. Actor Mido Hamada looks remarkably like Massoud, and is highly effective at playing the noble and charismatic leader. The producers informed me that Hamada, who is quite handsome, has been the particular favorite of ladies at the advance screenings. The Al Qaeda terrorists and Taliban are also very well cast. The actors playing Ramzi Youssef (Nabil Elouhab of "Eastenders"), Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (Michael Benyaer of "24"), and Mohammed Atta (Martin Brody) do a fine job portraying characters who are three dimensional and non-stereotypical in their villainy.

"The Path to 9/11" starts with the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, and covers the international terrorist conspiracy that unfolded over the next eight years and led to 9/11. The miniseries is shocking for taking a pro-American, anti-terrorist approach that is all too lacking in Hollywood's depictions of the War on Terror ("Syriana," "Fahrenheit 9/11," and "V for Vendetta" anyone?). At a time when the resolve of this country in fighting the War on Terror seems to be flagging, "The Path to 9/11" - much more than Oliver Stone's "World Trade Center" - will remind the nation why we're in this war. "The Path to 9/11" provides the context and the history that "World Trade Center" misses. FrontPage Magazine ran an excellent interview recently with writer/producer Cyrus Nowrasteh (who spoke at the 2005 Liberty Film Festival). This quote from Cyrus will make clear why I'm so excited about this miniseries:

"Nowrasteh: This miniseries is not just about the tragedy and events of 9/11, it dramatizes "how we got there" going back 8 years to the first attack on the WTC and dealing with the Al Qaeda strikes against U.S. embassies and forces in the 90s, the political lead-up, the hatching of the terrorist plots, etc. We see the heroes on the ground, like FBI agent John O'Neill and others, who after the 1993 attack felt sure that the terrorists would strike the WTC again. It also dramatizes the frequent opportunities the Administration had in the 90s to stop Bin Laden in his tracks < but lacked the will to do so. We also reveal the day-by-day lead-up of clues and opportunities in 2001 right up to the day of the 9/11 attacks. This is a terror thriller as well as a history lesson. I think people will be engaged

and enlightened.

FP: When you refer to the failed effort to stop Bin Laden in the 1990s, this was obviously the time of Bill Clinton. How much do you think his administration made us vulnerable to 9/11?

Nowrasteh: The 9/11 report details the Clinton's administration's response < or lack of response < to Al Qaeda and how this emboldened Bin Laden to keep attacking American interests. The worst example is the response to the October, 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen where 17 American sailors were killed. There simply was no response. Nothing."

Fortunately, Nowrasteh and the producers of this miniseries have gone out on a limb to honestly and fairly depict how Clinton-era inaction, political correctness, and bureaucratic inefficiency allowed the 9/11 conspiracy to metastasize. Let me say here though that "The Path to 9/11" is not a partisan miniseries or a "conservative" miniseries. It simply presents the facts in an honest and straightforward manner (the producers have backed up every detail of the miniseries with copious amounts of research and documentation), and the facts are that for seven years, from 1993 to 2000, the Clinton administration bungled the handling of the world-wide terrorist threat. The miniseries is equally honest in depicting the Bush administration. It shows a few points where administration officials, following in the tradition of the Clinton years, do not follow certain clues about the terrorist plot as zealously as they should have. Nonetheless, "The Path to 9/11," by honestly depicting the unfolding of events over eight years, makes it clear that most of the conspiracy leading up to 9/11 was hatched during the seven years of the Clinton administration, and that since Bush was in power for only eight months when 9/11 occurred, he can hardly be blamed for the entire disaster.

"The Path to 9/11" does a tremendous job in bringing to life the complex web of international characters and organizations that lay behind the events of that tragic day. ABC has created a miniseries that is truly epic in scope - a richly textured tapestry that weaves together a fascinating array of people, places, organizations and events both here in America and around the world. I was impressed by how vivid every character was, however briefly he or she may have been on the screen - and how quickly, clearly, and economically Nowrasteh and Cunningham depicted complex events. I absolutely loved the on-location work they did, and the great character actors of every nationality that they brought together. Cyrus Nowrasteh's background as an Iranian-American seems in particular to have given him a special insight into both the Middle-Eastern and American aspects of the story. Director David Cunningham, the son of a missionary, also brings an obvious love of foreign cultures and locales to his direction. The result is an engrossing, atmospheric tale of foreign intrigue. It was fascinating to see the crowded urban slums of Pakistan where the CIA captured Ramzi Youssef, the desert fortresses of the Taliban and Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, the Manila nightclubs where the 9/11 hijackers planned their attacks, the Tanzanian locales where the embassies were blown up, the meetings of the terrorists in Spain, and the various locations across America where the conspiracy comes together.

Let me wrap up by saying that what I truly loved about "The Path to 9/11" was the following: the honesty with which it told the story behind 9/11 with all its political ramifications; the epic scope and sweep of the story; the vivid and interesting characters of all nationalities; the great use of international locations; the terrific use of ethnic source music in tying the segments together and giving the miniseries a musical,

propulsive pace (often reminding me of the musical quality of such 1940s Warner Brothers classics as "Casablanca" and "The Sea Hawk"); and the outstanding cinematography and editing (the miniseries has a great documentary-realist style that comes from director David Cunningham's background as a documentarian). Cyrus Nowrasteh tells me that they had five cameras shooting at all times, which accounts for the great natural moments they caught between the actors, and the swift pace of the storytelling.

Overall, I thought "The Path to 9/11" was infinitely better than Oliver Stone's "World Trade Center" (granted, Stone decided to tell a narrower story), and if this is properly marketed, ABC should have a huge hit on its hands. The problem is that I don't see ABC marketing it at all, and I'm concerned that they're dropping the ball on getting the word out about this show. They've reportedly spent more than \$40 million producing "The Path to 9/11," and yet I see little advertising or promotion anywhere. Conservatives need to really step in here and spread the word via talk radio and the internet. Every American, and everyone alarmed by Islamic terrorism around the world should see this miniseries. "The Path to 9/11" should get every Emmy award and Golden Globe award out there - if Hollywood is willing to be fair and open-minded.

I'm highly encouraged by the ad that 84 Hollywood filmmakers and celebrities took out on August 17 in the Los Angeles Times denouncing Hamas and Hezbollah, and I'm thrilled by this ABC miniseries. I hope this heralds a new, saner approach on the part of Hollywood toward the world-wide problem of Islamo-fascism -- one that recognizes Islamic terrorism for what it is, and is willing to denounce it so that better things, such as democracy, civil rights, women's rights, and free speech -- can take its place. These are issues that all conservatives and liberals can get behind, and I'm glad to see that the entertainment industry is finally, at least in these two instances, uniting for the greater good of this country and for the noble cause of democracy around the world.

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