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Where is the wolf?

In a world filled with terrorists, nuclear weapon toting dictators, and undercurrents of dissent, it is a miracle we aren't always on red alert. On February 27th, the state of orange alert was lowered coinciding with the conclusion of Hajj. This was the second time the state of orange alert was raised since post September 11th and the second time it has been lowered with no event. It seems like crying wolf has become a popular tactic with which to warn the American populous of eminent terrorist attacks. How much longer can Americans sit at the edge of their seats before they go numb?

According to a February 11th, 2003 article from wpxi.com, the five-color "Homeland Security Advisory System" was developed last year after the Bush administration faced heavy criticism for releasing vague terrorist warnings urging the country to be on "high alert" without providing any specifics. In reaction to the criticism and in order to improve coordination between the offices Bush signed Security Presidential Directive 3, enacted immediately on March 11th, 2002, which not only finalized the 5 tiered warning system, but a 45 day commentary period and 135 day limit in which the system could be modified. Since its inception, however, only 2 of the 5 tiers have ever been used, creating 2 types of Americans, those who mock the waste of the colors, and those who, for the past year, have been living in their bunkers anxiously preparing for the storm ahead.

For a system that was devised to help choreograph the security of our country it is amusing that according to a "National League of Cities" survey released last week, of

402 cities surveyed, 12 percent of the cities who complimented the system for its usefulness did not have any reaction to the latest orange elevation.

This might quite possibly have something to do with the lack of information issued in tandem with the raising and lowering of the warning levels. On which Ridge commented, “America understands and hopefully appreciates, when there is ‘that’ kind of information, we share it no matter how incomplete it may be.”

While the First Lady and the Attorney General encourage the public to go about living their daily lives, the former Pennsylvania governor states “it is now very important for American to remain on the highest possible alert.” Senator E. Schumer NY, comments that it seems to make people afraid without telling them what to do in any way.” All the while, the warning scale oscillates between its two colors of choice.

Perhaps the best analysis is given by Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle who stated “a nationwide alert is like having one weather report for the whole country.”

What is the American public supposed to do? It seems like the 135 day modification limit seems to have been prematurely set. Daschle goes on to suggest the government should consider targeting its terror warning to specific cities or regions. Then again, in an age of information and intelligence, what terrorist would try to strike us when we’re at guard? Eventually, our budget deficit will get the better of us, and the warnings will subdue. For the general public, which still heeds the warnings, the terrorist attacks come every day as

the colors fluctuate. For the remaining citizens, the colors are the only substantial change to come of the warnings. Stay alert, read the news, but let the government agencies for which the system was originally established do the responding.