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## Jon Stewart's Punching Bag, Fox News

By [BRIAN STELTER](#)

[George W. Bush](#) and [Dick Cheney](#) are long gone. Fox News Channel is [Jon Stewart](#)'s new enemy No. 1.

Last week that comedian did something that the hosts of "Fox & Friends," the morning show on Fox News, did not do: he had his staff members call the White House and ask a question.

It may have been in pursuit of farce, not fact, but it gave credence to the people who say "The Daily Show" is journalistic, not just satiric. "Fox & Friends" had repeatedly asked whether the crescent-shaped logo of the nuclear security summit was an "Islamic image," one selected by [President Obama](#) in his outreach to the Muslim world. The White House told "The Daily Show" that the logo was actually based on the Rutherford-Bohr model of the atom.

"This is how relentless Fox is" in savaging President Obama, Mr. Stewart said.

On the subject of Fox, Mr. Stewart is pretty relentless too. As demonstrated by that crescent segment and dozens of others since Mr. Obama took office, he may well be television's pre-eminent fact-checker of Fox News, the nation's highest-rated cable news channel.

It has been noticed by, among other people, the Fox host [Bill O'Reilly](#), who called Mr. Stewart a "devoted critic" of Fox News and said "his influence is growing."

Separately, this week Mr. Stewart's contract was renewed by Comedy Central into 2013. Combining the earnestness of a journalism professor and the sarcasm of a satirist, Mr. Stewart routinely charges that Fox's news anchors and commentators distort Mr. Obama's policies and advance a conservative agenda. He reminds some viewers of the left-wing group Media Matters but much funnier.

"Stewart does a great job of using comedy to expose the tragedy that is Fox News, and he also underscores the seriousness of it," said Eric Burns, the president of Media Matters.

The segments about Fox are often replayed hundreds of thousands of times on blogs and other Web sites, amplifying their significance. "Media criticism has become part of his brand," said Mark Jurkowitz, the associate director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, who noted that Mr. Stewart had also dissected CNN and CNBC in lengthy segments in the past.

It is true that the often-left-leaning "Daily Show" deals with a wide array of topics, but Fox is one that Mr. Stewart is overtly passionate about; he said on the show this week that he criticizes the network a lot because it is "truly a terrible, cynical, disingenuous news organization."

According to "The Daily Show" Web site, [thedailyshow.com](http://thedailyshow.com), Fox News has been a subject of 24 segments so far this year, including eight in the month of April. The lower-rated news channel CNN, by contrast, has been a subject of five segments this year.

In many of the segments, Mr. Stewart questions Fox's journalistic practices. He noted that Fox had hired former Gov. [Sarah Palin](#) of Alaska to be a political analyst in a January segment he called "News of the Weird." But he wasn't laughing

when he asserted that Fox is “functioning as her de-facto rapid response media arm, and they’re paying her for the privilege of doing it.”

In February he noted that Fox News had stopped showing President Obama’s widely praised meeting with Republican leaders while CNN and MSNBC had carried it start to finish. Mimicking a Fox anchor, Mr. Stewart said, “We’re gonna cut away because” — humorous pause — “this is against the narrative that we present.”

In March he ridiculed the news anchor Megyn Kelly for lining up guests who were opposed to the Democratic health care overhaul and citing polls that claimed the American people were opposed to it. Then he played a clip from October 2008, when Mr. Obama was leading in most polls, of Ms. Kelly’s saying “don’t trust the polls.”

In the past week and a half he found himself in a fight with Bernie Goldberg, the Fox News contributor, after suggesting that Mr. Goldberg and others were hypocritical for having bemoaned generalizations about the Tea Party while having demonized liberals.

As Fox’s ratings have surged, so too has the amount of criticism, particularly surrounding its combination of news programs and conservative opinion programs. Asked on Friday about Mr. Stewart’s criticism, a Fox spokeswoman, Loren Hynes, said the channel would pass on an opportunity to comment.

Mr. O’Reilly responded to Mr. Stewart on his Fox program on Wednesday, calling “The Daily Show” a “key component of left-wing television” and concluding: “Here, we have all kinds of views, all kinds of debates, and we’re not boring. That’s why Jon Stewart loves us, and, yes, needs us, especially Bernie Goldberg.”

Mr. Stewart and his executive producers usually let their segments speak for themselves, and they declined interview requests about Fox this week. Friends and colleagues of Mr. Stewart say privately that he cares deeply about media issues and happens to be in a position to talk about them.

His staff members regularly dismiss claims that “The Daily Show” is a form of journalism. “I have not moved out of the comedian’s box into the news box,” Mr. Stewart said on the show on Tuesday, adding, “The news box is moving toward me.”

But there he was, checking in with the White House when Fox didn’t. The inspiration for the “Fox & Friends” segment about the “Islamic image” came from The New York Post, which, like Fox News, is owned by the News Corporation. Mr. Stewart cut up the clips of the co-hosts Brian Kilmeade and Gretchen Carlson reckoning that the flags of Muslim nations look a lot like the summit logo — followed by Ms. Carlson’s saying “you be the judge” — before letting rip.

“Yeah, you be the judge,” Mr. Stewart said, hurling an expletive and continuing, “We’re just curious citizens, wondering if we put that logo up with four Muslim flags, whether you’ll have a visceral reaction that our president is perhaps Muslim.”

He concluded: “Anyway, what do you think? We’re just doing the math and then giving you the answer, and then asking you to check our work.”

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