

President Bush Enters the No Spin Zone

President Bush doesn't really like the press and with good reason. The media "gotcha game" has been elevated to almost hysterical levels, and any mistake or misstatement by a President is front page news. Would you want to walk a high wire everyday?

So the President rarely gives in-depth interviews, and his press conferences are held to a minimum. One on one, Mr. Bush is an engaging guy, but it's tough to be relaxed when every word you say is parsed and dissected. Unlike Bill Clinton, George W. Bush does not seek personal approval, at least not openly. Mr. Clinton loves adoration; Mr. Bush is much more private in his presentation.

Therefore, I approached my thirty minute interview with the President cautiously. I kept my presence low key, which is a tremendous departure for me. There are certain rules that have to be followed when talking with the most powerful man in the world, and I respected the guidelines.

For example, I am known for confrontational interviews, but you simply cannot tell a sitting President that you, the interviewer, know more than he does. That would make you look like a moron. So open confrontation goes right out the window.

Also, the tone of your questions must be respectful. Although I asked everything I wanted to ask and there were no restrictions in the interview, my queries were posed less aggressively than usual. I was direct, but subdued, another departure for me. By the way, I never show my questions to anyone in advance, and that rule applied to the President.

Security is massive for every presidential appearance. To even get to the interview room in a New York City hotel, I had to

go through hoops that make U.S. airport security look like the Mexican border. Back elevators were taken, I was perused by at least a dozen Secret Service Agents, and everything was bulletproof except my questions.

The President, himself, is a different man than the one I interviewed four years ago. Back then, as the Governor of Texas, he was more casual in his language, both body and verbal. He carried himself with authority in 2000, but now he seems to be aware that he is a life and death decision maker and that awesome responsibility has seeped into his persona. He's very aware of his position in life.

Mr. Bush was much more business-like this time around. He kept the chit-chat short and seemed anxious to answer the questions. I believe he likes the joust when he thinks the playing field is fair. I gave him a square deal last time around, and he remembered.

A TV interview is far different than a print one in the sense that facial expressions and posture play a key roll. My job is to break down the image and give viewers a glimpse at the real person sitting in front of me. I asked the President very short questions about very precise things: his National Guard service, the Swift Boat ads, Iraq and Iran, the Mexican border, Jacques Chirac, the fairness of the press and how his faith in God influences his decisions.

Most of the time, Mr. Bush was direct and to the point. A few times he evaded. He was, however, intensely focused, and so was I, except for one secret lapse. In the middle of my talk with the President, my mind flashed back for just a second to my childhood in Levittown, New York. The most powerful man on earth was answering my questions. Who woulda thunk it?

The Terrible Truth About Terror

What are we to make of the New York Times describing terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as a “Jordanian militant?” I mean, this guy is one of the most vicious al Qaeda thugs in the world; right now he’s behind much of the violence in Iraq and has been active in the worldwide terror network since at least 1990.

On June 17th of this year, a U.S. intelligence official provided my researcher Nate Fredman with the following information: In early 2000, Zarqawi traveled to Afghanistan to assume a leadership position in an al Qaeda training camp. There he and his associates trained other terrorists how to develop and distribute “toxins.”

Zarqawi stayed in the Al Qaeda area until war broke out after 9/11/01. He actively fought against U.S. forces and was wounded. After the collapse of the Taliban, he fled to Iran and then traveled to Iraq where his wounded leg was treated in a hospital run by Uday Hussein.

In the summer of 2002, Zarqawi went to Northern Iraq to train terrorists with the group Ansar al Islam, which is affiliated with al Qaeda. After the U.S. invaded Iraq, Zarqawi went underground to organize resistance. The CIA believes Zarqawi personally beheaded American hostage Nicholas Berg, and there is now a \$25 million bounty on his head.

U.S. intelligence officials say there is no question that Zarqawi is associated with al Qaeda, but to the New York Times, he is a “Jordanian militant.” That seems to be a rather benign description of a vicious terrorist killer, doesn’t it?

The reason the Times and some other liberal media operations continue to downplay Zarqawi and, indeed, the entire worldwide

terror threat is twofold: first, the liberal press does not want another pre-emptive strike against terrorists like the one the USA launched against Iraq. By denying Zargawi was an al Qaeda guy, the liberal media can falsely claim Saddam had nothing to do with al Qaeda.

And secondly, the anti-Bush press believes that terrorism is the president's strongest issue. So keeping the very real danger of coordinated terror down is good political strategy for those who want to see President John Kerry.

That's why the al Qaeda relationship with the brutal Chechen terrorists was muted. Both Russian and U.S. intelligence say al Qaeda is deeply involved with training and funding the Chechen killers. But you wouldn't know much about that by reading many American newspapers which described the Chechen child murderers as "insurgents" or, yes, "militants."

The truth is that terrorists do seek each other out and cooperate. The IRA, for example, used PLO training facilities in North Africa and the Middle East. And Zargawi himself traveled to Lebanon in the summer of 2002 to meet with leaders of Hezbollah, another lethal terror group. The terrorism fraternity is small but determined. These guys know and often help each other.

That's what's happening in Iraq right now. With foreign terrorists infiltrating into that country through Iran and Syria, Iraq has become the battle ground for worldwide terror and that's why the struggle is so important. And Zargawi is right in the middle of it.

So let's call worldwide terror what it is: a fanatical confederation bent on destroying a variety of targets, including the USA. Zargawi, the Chechen killers, and all the other fascist barbarians aren't militants or freedom fighters. They are all part of the terror club and the duty of an American President is to somehow render them defeated. And the

duty of the press is to tell it like it is.

Say It Ain't So, Ted Turner

So now we find out that CNN commentators James Carville and Paul Begala have signed on with the Kerry campaign as unpaid advisors. Traditionally, that would mean they would have to take a leave of absence from CNN or any news organization which employed them because journalistic ethics (oxymoron?) dictate that news organizations remain totally separate from political campaigns. But since we live in strange times, CNN says it will keep the guys on the air.

In the wake of the vicious attacks on Fox News for allegedly being "GOP TV," I expected the media to brutally dismember CNN and the new boys on John Kerry's bus. But instead it's been the silence of the lambs from the press. Can you say media bias?

A central thesis of the mainstream media is that Fox News caters to conservative Republicans. That thesis has been played out in newspaper articles, books and even in movies. Those right-wing bully boys from Fox, they're just awful aren't they? How many times have we heard that?

But when it comes to CNN, well, that's another story. That network apparently feels comfortable allowing daily commentary from two Kerry strategists. Shouldn't CNN now be compelled to give equal time to the Bush campaign? How about a new program called "What's Up, George," starring Mary Matalin?

The CNN decision should come as no surprise since CNN's founder and still-involved mogul Ted Turner despises President Bush. Last July, Mr. Turner opined on The Charlie Rose program

that “history will look back on this debacle in Iraq as one of the greatest mistakes that any major country has ever made.”

Turner went on to say that the USA has no right to the high moral ground in Iraq when “we’re terrorizing and sodomizing prisoners of war ...”

Keeping the press and political campaigns apart is what the founders had in mind when they granted us special first amendment privileges. Thomas Jefferson and the gang hoped the press would keep an eye on those seeking power—not try to help them obtain it. Editorial endorsements of candidates are fine and there’s nothing wrong with former political operatives being hired to analyze the news. However, there is plenty wrong with CNN’s present situation.

The fact that the media is allowing CNN to get away with this tells you all you need to know about how fair the American press is these days. I’ll submit to you that if Greta Van Susteren and I signed on with Bush/Cheney 2004, The New York Times would have passed out torches and the media mob would have stormed the Fox News castle. There’s a fox in the hen house all right—it’s called the left-wing press allowing their brothers to slide.

Personally, I don’t care if Carville and Begala want to help Kerry. And I don’t care what they say on CNN. Everybody knows those guys are Kool-Aid liberals; they’re not going to change many minds.

But I must say that CNN has some gall. It has consistently put itself up as the beacon of broadcast journalism and taken snarky shots at those it considers of lesser quality.

Well, the halcyon days at CNN have now come to an end. The network’s ratings have collapsed and so have its ethical standards.

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Night of the Living Dumb

No question that President Bush has regained some momentum in his quest to retain power. The Iraq war defense put forth by Rudy Giuliani and John McCain at the Republican convention actually silenced media critics for a few days, and the populist Arnold Schwarzenegger painted Mr. Bush as an effective, inclusive leader.

But world events have also helped the President. As terror rises all over the place, it becomes increasingly difficult for the Bush haters to diminish the President's own hatred for the "evil doers."

Iraqi terrorists slaughter a dozen waiters from Nepal. Chechen terrorists hold little children hostage and blow up two airliners. Even France was assaulted, as Islamic terrorists demanded that country rescind its ban on the wearing of headscarves in public schools. At this point, it is almost impossible to make a rational case against an aggressive war on Islamic fascism.

The people protesting the Republican Convention also helped Mr. Bush. With more than a thousand arrests, some cops badly injured, and innocent people harassed, the protestors are looked upon as fanatical and irrational by many Americans. And some of them are. A survey by The New York Sun newspaper found protestors favored a socialistic government more than any other. That kind of attitude is not a help to Senator Kerry.

Increasingly, the visible anti-Bush forces are defining themselves as way out there. A new Zogby poll found that

almost half of New York City residents believe some in the Bush administration knew the USA would be attacked on 9/11, and did nothing to stop it. Of course, there's not a shred of verifiable evidence backing up that insane belief. New York City is overwhelmingly anti-Bush, and the rest of country is noticing the caliber of criticism. If I were making a movie about the irrational Bush haters, I would entitle it "Night of Living Dumb."

The fundamental problem with the anti-Bush zealots is that they desperately want to believe the President is a bad man, and will reject all rational discussion that goes against their thesis. That kind of fanaticism frightens mainstream American voters and creates sympathy for the President. Irrational displays will never win an election. Ask Howard Dean.

A few months ago, I wrote in this space that John Kerry would not be seen in public with the likes of Michael Moore and the other far left bomb throwers, and that has proven to be true. Mr. Kerry knows he must convince centrist voters to support him if he wants to win, and radicals like Moore alienate the center.

If you still don't believe me, consider this: Fox News and your humble correspondent have come under horrific attack from the radical left. But every time a smear book or movie comes out defaming us, our ratings go up. My television program "The O'Reilly Factor" easily won its timeslot in the cable news wars during the Democratic Convention, and we beat the opposition three to one during the Republican gathering. The more the crazies tell Americans that I am unfair and unbalanced, the more people tune in. Where do I send the gift?

So there has been a momentum shift towards the Bush camp that should last until the debates, which begin at the end of September. Those displays will mean more than all the protests, all the mud slinging and all the spin. Not since

Kennedy-Nixon have Presidential debates been so crucial. I can't wait.