

# Bush press conference: the bigger the crisis, the bigger the lies

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The contrast between rhetoric and reality reached new heights at the press conference held by President Bush October 28. It was Bush's first news conference since July 30 and only the second since early March, two weeks prior to the invasion of Iraq.

The conditions under which the event was held were indicative of the crisis atmosphere surrounding the White House. According to the *New York Times*, Bush decided to hold the press conference Tuesday morning, and it was announced publicly only 90 minutes before it was scheduled to begin.

White House officials said a press conference had been under consideration for several weeks. It is likely that Bush's mentors had intended for him to meet the press in the aftermath of diplomatic successes—the UN resolution backing the American occupation of Iraq, the international donors' conference in Madrid—and a triumphant tour of Iraq by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz.

In the event, Wolfowitz's tour was something of a public relations disaster, ending with the Pentagon official fleeing a rocket attack on his heavily guarded hotel in downtown Baghdad—a bold guerrilla action that was followed the next day by four virtually simultaneous car bomb attacks on police stations in Baghdad and the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Evidently, the president's advisers felt obliged to put Bush before the microphones to counter the political fallout from the reversals on the ground in Iraq. One commentator called the move “a desperate effort by a White House that's trying to stem serious erosion in public support for its handling of Iraq.”

Bush proved his usual inane and banal self, unable to provide a coherent or substantive answer to a single question. Even the usually fawning *New York Times*

had to admit that Bush “stumbled over his lines at times, and his usual good-natured jousting with reporters occasionally turned snippy.”

In his opening remarks Bush presented a view of events ludicrously at odds with reality. Citing America's “continuing work in Afghanistan and Iraq,” the president declared: “The world is safer today because Saddam Hussein and the Taliban are gone.” This under conditions of a growing guerrilla war in Afghanistan and the single most bloody day of anti-US violence in Baghdad since the beginning of the American occupation.

The president was no less surreal when he turned to domestic affairs. He declared himself “optimistic about the future of the economy,” but said nothing about the impact of another \$87 billion to fund the occupation of Iraq on a federal budget deficit already at record levels, dozens of state governments on the brink of insolvency, trade and payments deficits reaching new heights every month, and a dollar already under mounting international pressure.

In response to a reporter's question about the spate of car bombings in Iraq, Bush offered the following profundity: “That's what terrorists do. They commit suicide acts against innocent people and then expect people to say, ‘Well, gosh, we better not try to fight you anymore.’”

Bush did not explain how it was that “terrorists” had “found recruits” willing to sacrifice their lives to drive out the US forces. According to Bush's inverted logic, American colonial rule is synonymous with peace and freedom, and resistance to this rule is, by definition, terrorism inspired by hatred of peace and freedom.

Another reporter asked Bush about his administration's refusal to hand over critical White House documents, including reports on presidential

daily briefings, to the commission investigating the September 11 attacks in New York City and Washington DC. Bush replied, “It is important for me to protect national security. ... It’s important for the writers of the presidential daily brief [sic] to feel comfortable that the documents will never be politicized and/or unnecessarily exposed for public purview.”

This is a truly remarkable argument. A commission whose mandate is to reveal the causes for the greatest failure of intelligence and internal security in US history is to be deprived of crucial documents on the grounds of—intelligence and national security!

Repeating the administration mantra that Iraq is “a new front in the war in terror”—a front created by Washington’s unprovoked invasion—Bush repeated another standard administration line, calling Iraq a “particular battle in the war on terror.” In other words, this is only one of many more wars to come.

When he was asked to “level” with the American people “about the difficulty and scope of the problem in Iraq,” Bush could only mutter: “Iraq’s a dangerous place. That’s leveling. It is a dangerous place.”

The president’s contempt for the soldiers, their families and the American people as a whole was captured in his response to a perfectly legitimate question: would Bush promise that “a year from now ... you will have reduced the number of troops in Iraq?” Bush’s response: “This is a trick question, so I won’t answer it.”

Bush’s ignorance and indifference to democratic principles emerged in response to a question about the possibility of adding more US troops to the forces already on the ground in Iraq. The president replied, “That’s a decision by John Abizaid [the overall commander of US forces in Iraq]. General Abizaid makes the decision as to whether or not he needs more troops.”

Really? Is the United States a military dictatorship? Who elected General Abizaid? (For that matter, who elected George W. Bush?) According to the US Constitution, there is civilian control of the armed forces.

No one in the press corps challenged this attack on fundamental constitutional principles.

One of the more bizarre, but revealing, moments in the press conference occurred when Bush turned his

attention to the 2004 elections. He suggested that the American people would be patient with the ongoing difficulties in Iraq “during an election year, because they tend to be able to differentiate between, you know, politics and reality.” He then expanded on his conception of politics: “a lot of noise and a lot of balloon drops and a lot of hot air. And I’ll probably be right in the mix of it, by the way.”

Two things are revealed by this remark—first, unabashed cynicism, and second, Bush’s disinterest in politics in any conventional sense. To Bush, politics is simply mass manipulation and deception. It is a diversion from the “real” role of the president, which is to pursue with the requisite ruthlessness the aims of the American financial oligarchy, both abroad and at home.

That such a cipher is able to pursue his program of war and social reaction is, above all, a testament to the lack of serious opposition from the Democratic Party. The absence of opposition from within the political and media establishment signifies that the program of the Bush administration embodies the policy of the US ruling elite.



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