

KERRY WINS THE DEBATE HANDS DOWN

Ceci Connolly: "It almost seemed as if the President ran out of material about two-thirds of the way through the debate." [Fox News, 9/30/04]

Mark Shields: "I thought the president tired clearly in the end." [CNN, 9/30/04]

William Kristol: "I don't think he did as much as he could have to really make the fundamental case for the Bush conduct on the war on terror." [Fox News, 9/30/04]

CBSNews.com: "Mr. Bush appeared perturbed when Kerry leveled some of his charges, scowling at times and looking away in apparent disgust at others." [CBSNews.com, 9/30/04]

Mark Whitaker: "I think Kerry won on style in this debate." [CNN, 9/30/04]

Jeff Greenfield: "John Kerry looked as presidential as the president." [CNN, 9/30/04]

Joe Scarborough: "As far as the debate goes, I don't see how anybody could look at this debate and not score this a very clear win on points for John Kerry." [MSNBC, 9/30/04]

Joe Scarborough: "It was John Kerry's best performance ever." [MSNBC, 9/30/04]

Kate O'Beirne: "I thought the President was repetitive and reactive." [NationalReview.com, 9/30/04]

Jonah Goldberg: "The Bush campaign miscalculated on having the first night be foreign policy night." [NationalReview.com, 9/30/04]

"Bush appeared perturbed when Kerry leveled some of his charges, scowling at times and looking away in apparent disgust at others." [Washington Post, 9/30/04]

John McCain: "I think that Kerry did a good job." [MSNBC, 9/30/04]

David Gergen: "There were times toward the end, especially in the last half, when he seemed tired. It almost seemed like...he didn't want to be there at times." [CNN, 9/30/04]

David Gergen: "John Kerry was the one who had the most to prove and I think he proved it. And that was that he's knowledgeable about international affairs and he can make his points in a concise, compelling way." [CNN, 9/30/04]

Jorge Ramos: "Talking about style and substance, I think we have a race right now." [CNN, 9/30/04]

Jorge Ramos: "When President Bush was looking at his notes and moving his papers, well those were very awkward moments, visually I think those moments might have a negative impact on President Bush." [CNN, 9/30/04]

Mark Shields: "I think credibility was there at the core, and the president could not admit that he had made mistakes or miscalculations." [CNN, 9/30/04]

Alan Colmes: "I think Sen. Kerry, tonight, did a very good job, clearly stating his position." [Fox News, 9/30/04]

Howard Fineman: "I think he had about 35 minutes of material for a 90 minute debate, and he kept having to do the same stuff over again." [MSNBC, 10/1/04]

Howard Fineman: "I happened to be right with the Bush spinners when they came into the room, Ed Gillespie from the RNC, Ken Mehlman; they all looked a little grim. And it wasn't just because they were facing what they knew was a hostile media, it's because they knew they had a tough sell. The Kerry people literally hopped, skipped, and jumped into the room." [MSNBC, 10/1/04]

Mort Kondracke: "This is the President's turf, this is the place that the President is supposed to dominate, terror and the war in Iraq. I don't think he really dominated tonight. I think Kerry looked like a commander-in-chief." [Fox News, 9/30/04]

Tim Russert: "George Bush is certain about the war in Iraq, certain about the war on terror, certain about his positions, John Kerry is now raising real questions about all of them and the American people I think are listening." [NBC, 9/30/04]

Joe Scarborough: "I think John Kerry looked presidential tonight." [MSNBC, 10/1/04]

Howard Fineman: "I think he looked every bit a president." [MSNBC, 10/1/04]

Howard Fineman: "Kerry won the event." [MSNBC, 10/1/04]

Mark Halperin: "I also thought the President was remarkably angry seeming, a lot of the time when you saw those cutaways of the President listening to Senator Kerry I thought he was unusually angry. It's not usually a very becoming posture for a candidate, even for an incumbent President." [ABC, 9/30/04]

William Kristol: Kerry "...was forceful and articulate." [Fox News, 9/30/04]

Tim Russert: "Tonight he seemed to find his voice for the Democratic view of the world." [NBC, 9/30/04]

Fred Barnes: "I think John Kerry was very good, very articulate." [Fox News, 9/30/04]

Fred Barnes: "'The President was sighing. The President was sighing a lot. He looked tired.'" [Fox News, 9/30/04]

Joe Scarborough: "John Kerry won the debate. Karl Rove, John Kerry won the debate." [MSNBC, 10/1/04]

Carl Cameron: "And tonight there is also flash polls. A number coming out from the network that indicate that the viewing audience tonight across the country believes that John Kerry won this debate over President Bush, in some cases by a 10 point margin." [Fox News, 9/30/04]

John Meacham: "Kerry has done a very deft job here of suddenly becoming Mr. Homeland Security." [MSNBC, 9/30/04]

David Gergen: "I think he helped himself a lot tonight. If this Gallup poll, this quickie poll, is any indication of what's coming, I mean Gallup is the poll that's been accused of being, you know, tilted toward Republicans and if it comes in 53 - 37 Kerry winning the debate and if our other polls support that kind of finding, you can bet that's gonna put a lot of vigor into the Kerry campaign and really help to close this race for him." [CNN, 9/30/04]

Dean Reynolds: "Kerry showed being certain and wrong is being stubborn." [ABC, 9/30/04]

William Kristol: "Republicans had hoped that Bush could really knock out Kerry tonight, really, you know, expand the lead, really confirm the doubts about Kerry's ability basically to be the commander in chief in a post 9-11 world, and I don't think that happened. I think Kerry looked like a plausible commander in chief

tonight. We have to have a serious... the debate will continue on foreign policy and domestic policy, but it's a race. It's a race." [Fox News, 10/1/04]

Mike Barnicle: "I think John Kerry tonight made a tiny chip in that though because there's a difference between certainty and stubbornness and at times the President may have appeared to be a bit stubborn this evening in the repetition of his points. People I don't think want any bend, any yield in the president when it comes to fighting terror and terrorists around the world but the stubbornness of his position was such that I think Kerry made a little dent in that tonight and that was helpful to Kerry." [MSNBC, 10/1/04]

"...Kerry...portrayed Mr. Bush as a headstrong leader whose rush to war in Iraq had isolated the nation in the world community, enraged the Arab world and permitted Osama bin Laden to remain free." [New York Times, 10/1/04]

"...For much of the debate, television networks showed a split screen, displaying Mr. Bush often scowling and grimacing as Mr. Kerry challenged his management of war in Iraq. At one point, Mr. Kerry criticized Mr. Bush for failing to enlist the help of the United Nations and other allies before going into Iraq, saying that as a result the United States was enduring a disproportionate number of casualties and costs." [New York Times, 10/1/04]

"...Jim Lehrer...asked Mr. Bush if he agreed that the election of Mr. Kerry would increase the chances of a terrorist attack on American soil, an assertion that a number of Republicans - including Vice President Dick Cheney - has made. Mr. Bush did not directly respond to the question, and Mr. Lehrer did not return to it. But when Mr. Bush was asked whether Mr. Kerry had character issues that should prevent him from becoming president, Mr. Bush sighed loudly as he referred to that as 'a loaded question.'" [New York Times, 10/1/04]

Kerry "...hammered home his belief that Bush lacks credibility in Iraq and that only a "fresh start and new credibility" will bring success." [Washington Post, 10/1/04]

"If an incumbent has had to spend so much time tearing the other guy down, what, precisely, does that say about the incumbent's record?" [E.J. Dionne, Washington Post, 10/1/04]

Kerry "...was cool, respectful, rational in offering a detailed brief that Mr. Bush had embarked on a diversion from the war on Al Qaeda and global terror by invading Iraq, and his answers never exceeded the negotiated time limits. By the time the debate ended, Mr. Kerry appeared to have accomplished his primary goal for the evening: establishing himself as a plausible commander in chief." [New York Times, 10/1/04]

"At times, [Bush] seemed to lean into the television camera, pursing his lips, at some pains to disguise his apparent exasperation at Mr. Kerry's attacks, insisting, as he did at the outset, 'People know where I stand.'" [New York Times, 10/1/04]

Kerry "...may well have struck undecided voters as not much like the Republicans' worst caricatures. He spoke plainly, politely, but did not shrink from direct and pointed criticism of Mr. Bush's policies." [New York Times, 10/1/04]

"Mr. Bush was all topic sentence in the debate tonight - and it was often the same sentence." [New York Times, 10/1/04]

"When the networks (flouting the debate rules) cut to Mr. Bush while Senator John Kerry was speaking, the president had the hunched shoulders and the peevish, defensive look of an incumbent under heavy attack. The cameras demonstrated that Mr. Bush cannot hear criticism without frowning, blinking and squirming (he even sighed once)." [New York Times, 10/1/04]

"...If the question was whether Senator John Kerry would appear presidential, whether he could present his positions clearly and succinctly and keep President Bush on the defensive when it came to the critical issue of Iraq, Mr. Kerry delivered the goods." [Editorial, New York Times, 10/1/04]

" George W. Bush is famous for fierce discipline when it comes to sticking to a carefully honed, simple message. Last night he reiterated this campaign message once again - that "the world is safer without Saddam Hussein" and that things are, on the whole, going well in Iraq. But last night Mr. Bush sounded less convincing when he had to make his case in the face of Mr. Kerry's withering criticism, particularly his repeated insistence that the invasion had diverted attention from the true center of the war on terror in Afghanistan." [Editorial, New York Times, 10/1/04]

Bush's "...body and facial language sometimes seemed downright petulant...." [Editorial, New York Times, 10/1/04]

"President Bush has thrown Sen. John F. Kerry's words back on him during nearly every speech of the campaign, but he rocked back in irritation during the first presidential debate Thursday night when the Massachusetts senator did the same thing to him. Bush's apparent annoyance at the idea of Kerry as the commander in chief was perhaps the debate's clearest emotion." [Washington Post, 10/1/04]

"If Republicans had hoped Bush could put Kerry away with a strong performance on terrain that has been his strongest suit, they are likely to be disappointed, as the Democrat constantly challenged the president to answer for his policies." [Washington Post, 10/1/04]

"Bush...hailed the coming presidential election in Afghanistan, saying that the fact that 10 million people had registered to vote was a 'phenomenal statistic.' But Human Rights Watch this week said that figure was inaccurate because of the multiple registrations of many voters. In a lengthy report, the respected organization also documented how human rights abuses are fueling a pervasive atmosphere of repression and fear in many parts of the country, with voters in those areas having little faith in the secrecy of the balloting and often facing threats and bribes from militia factions." [Washington Post, 10/1/04]

"On North Korea, Bush charged that Kerry's proposal to have direct talks with that country would end the six-nation diplomacy that the administration has pursued over Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. But each of the other four countries in the talks has held direct talks with North Korea during the six-party process -- and China has repeatedly asked the Bush administration to talk directly with North Korea. Moreover, the Bush administration has talked directly with North Korean diplomats on the sidelines of the six-party talks, and Powell met with his North Korean counterpart over the summer." [Washington Post, 10/1/04]

" Bush said he has increased spending on curbing nuclear proliferation by 'about 35 percent' since he took office. But in his first budget, he proposed a 13 percent cut -- about \$116 million -- and much of the increases since then have been added by Congress." [Washington Post, 10/1/04]

"Bush said 'Saddam Hussein had no intention of disarming.' Yet Iraq asserted in its filing with the United Nations in December 2002 that it had no such weapons, and none has been found." [Washington Post, 10/1/04]

"Bush twice suggested al-Qaida is a vastly diminished force at the top, saying at one point that '75 percent of known al-Qaida leaders have been brought to justice,' and at another, Osama bin Laden is 'isolated - 75 percent of his people have been brought to justice.' But al-Qaida is still considered a mortal danger in part because it refills its ranks and leadership. The president was actually referring to deaths or arrests of operatives who powered al-Qaida when it mounted the Sept. 11 attacks, not those behind the organization today." [Associated Press, 10/1/04]

" John Kerry summed up President Bush's plan for Iraq in four words - 'More of the same' - and thus neatly laid out the choice facing voters Nov. 2: Stick with the incumbent or take a leap of faith with a newcomer." [Associated Press, 10/1/04]

"Kerry won the debate, according to three polls. Gallup said a phone survey called Kerry the winner by 53 percent to 37 percent for Bush. A CBS News instant poll said 44 percent called Kerry the winner and 26 percent picked Bush. In an ABC News instant poll, 45 percent said Kerry won; 36 percent picked Bush. Both political parties said they had encouraged supporters to participate in instant surveys." [Bloomberg News, 9/30/04]

Myles Martel, debate adviser to Ronald Reagan in 1980 and author of Political Campaign Debates: Images, Strategies and Tactics: "...From a substance standpoint, Kerry had the burden of proving he could do a better job as president, and he did not uphold that burden. He leveled many incisive, well-honed attacks." [USA Today, 10/1/04]

Roger Wilkins, George Mason University history professor: "'Kerry did what he had to the whole way through. He was crisp. He didn't meander as he's done. He was clear and in command of facts and he was focused. The president was repetitive. You had the sense the phrase 'mixed messages' had been focus-grouped to death. He looked from time to time uncertain.'" [USA Today, 10/1/04]

Jane Elmes-Crahall, WilkesUniversity communications professor: "'Kerry succeeded in framing the main arguments in this debate and turning the tables on the president. The president appeared defensive throughout the entire debate - pursed lips, stumbles, hesitations.'" [USA Today, 10/1/04]

Richard Greene, speech consultant and author of Words That Shook the World: 100 Years of Unforgettable Speeches and Events: "...I've never seen Mr. Bush as much on the offensive as he was tonight.'" [USA Today, 10/1/04]

Robert Schmuhl, University of Notre Dame American Studies professor and author of Statecraft and Stagecraft: American Political Life in the Age of Personality: John Kerry was... "direct in his responses and specific in arguing his case." [USA Today, 10/1/04]

"...By nearly 2-to-1 viewers said in the USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll afterward that [Kerry] expressed himself more clearly than Bush." [USA Today, 10/1/04]

"Bush said that '75% of known al-Qaeda leaders have been brought to justice,' which seems to suggest that the terrorist group is mostly eradicated. But U.S. and international intelligence agencies say that most killed or captured leaders have since been replaced. The group's two top leaders, bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, remain at large." [USA Today, 10/1/04]

"Bush said Kerry has opposed missile defense, the concept for a defense shield of interceptor missiles that would deflect or destroy ballistic missiles fired at the United States. Kerry voted for the 1999 National Missile Defense Act, which called for deploying missile defense as soon as technologically possible. Testing thus far has not proved that interceptor missiles can divert or destroy incoming missiles under real-world conditions." [USA Today, 10/1/04]

"John Kerry has a reputation, invoked so often that it invites parody, of being a strong closer in his political campaigns. But in Thursday night's first presidential faceoff, Kerry also came across as a strong opener." [Walter Shapiro, USA Today, 10/1/04]

"...Given Kerry's strong performance, the immediate impulse is to predict that this race for the White House is far from over." [Walter Shapiro, USA Today, 10/1/04]

"I thought Kerry did very, very well; and I thought Bush did poorly – much worse than he is capable of doing. If I were just a normal, fairly conservative, war-supporting guy: I would vote for Kerry. On the basis of that debate." [Jay Nordlinger, National Review Online, 10/1/04]

"The senator seemed to rattle the president, about 15 minutes in – and he stayed rattled. Also, the president was on the defensive almost all the time. Rarely did he put Kerry on the defensive." [Jay Nordlinger, National Review Online, 10/1/04]

"Bush said, 'We're makin' progress' a hundred times – that seemed a little desperate. He also said 'mixed messages' a hundred times – I was wishing that he would mix his message. He said, 'It's hard work,' or, 'It's tough,' a hundred times. In fact, Bush reminded me of Dan Quayle in the 1988 debate."

"...It was clear to us the president was beaten decisively by his challenger in this 90-minute contest. The president's pinched face and shifting eyes only seemed to accent Kerry's charge that Bush had "made a colossal error of judgment" by invading Iraq. Kerry in contrast remained calm and confident. The president tried to fend off his challenger's cool dissection of his Iraq record, by charging Kerry with vacillation and indecision on the issue. But it was Kerry this night who appeared resolute and Bush who seemed to wobble, if not in rhetoric, in bearing." [Editorial, Arizona Republic, 10/1/04]

"...For most of the first hour, during which Iraq was the prime focus, Bush's repetition seemed insistent rather than firm, and his body language -- sighing, clenching his teeth, rolling his eyes -- suggested a man on the defensive. Kerry, as had been expected, was more fluid and facile in scoring conventional debating points -- answering Bush's arguments with fresh rebuttals. But his easy manner projected an unexpected confidence that has been missing for most of the general-election campaign...." [Peter Canellos, Boston Globe, 10/1/04]

Kerry "...gave national exposure to some of the criticisms of Bush's policies that critics said were not effectively aired at the determinedly upbeat Democratic convention in Boston." [Peter Canellos, Boston Globe, 10/1/04]

Kerry "...scored a lot of points and perhaps forced voters to look at him with fresh eyes. If they do, the debate last night will have transformed the 2004 presidential race." [Peter Canellos, Boston Globe, 10/1/04]

"After waffling all summer, Kerry's position on Iraq is now clear." [Editorial, Boston Globe, 10/1/04]

"In the middle of a disjointed, subpar performance on an evening when he could have locked away a second term, President Bush made an unusually silly attempt to link the terrorists who attacked the United States on 9/11 with the dictator who used to rule Iraq. It was the president who sought the chance to shine in his favorite subject area and then proceeded to blow the opportunity sky-high." [Tom Oliphant, Boston Globe, 10/1/04]

"Kerry even managed to turn around the president's presumed best asset: his determination and spine. 'You can be certain but you can also be wrong,' Kerry said succinctly. Meanwhile, the president's much vaunted ability to stay on message seemed more like a life raft he was grabbing as tough questioning in the 90-minute debate bore in on him and the essential thinness of his message was revealed." [Editorial, Boston Globe, 10/1/04]

"...The president sometimes seemed exasperated and even angry as Kerry pressed his case against him; at one point, Bush even apparently sighed in frustration, a distant echo of the behavior that hurt Vice President Al Gore in his first debate against Bush in 2000." [Ron Brownstein, Los Angeles Times, 10/1/04]

Kerry "...showed his prosecutor's experience by relentlessly driving his case that Bush had bungled the management of the war by failing to provide enough time for diplomacy before invading, failing to provide troops with all the equipment they needed, and failing to plan adequately for the aftermath." [Ron Brownstein, Los Angeles Times, 10/1/04]

"...Words continually fail Bush. Mostly because he doesn't try very many. With the TV cameras trained on the stripped-down debate stage, his bare-bones communication style sometimes played as monotonous rather than resolute. He repeatedly said the situation in Iraq was "hard work." He said it 10 times, until it no longer seemed like anything so much as a network time-killer." [Paul Brownfield, Los Angeles Times, 10/1/04]

"When Kerry spoke, Bush appeared tight-mouthed and frustrated that he was being contradicted. Kerry looked in control, taking notes, nodding and listening. For 90 minutes, at least, it seemed Kerry had found a small-screen context in which he can get the better of Bush." [Paul Brownfield, Los Angeles Times, 10/1/04]

"Sen. John F. Kerry won Thursday night's debate on foreign policy by a comfortable margin...." [Editorial, Los Angeles Times, 10/1/04]

"...The body language may have been more revealing than the verbal language. President Bush ranged from disgusted to folksy, from calm to nearly hyper. Sen. John Kerry -- often accused of being wordy and wooden -- came through as forceful, direct and able to keep his sentences short and punchy." [Miami Herald, 10/1/04]

"Kerry stayed on the offensive throughout the showdown, labeling Bush as a careless leader who let terrorist Osama bin Laden escape in Afghanistan, led the United States precipitously into war in Iraq without proper planning, and ignored vital security needs at home, such as securing ports." [Knight Ridder Newspapers, 10/1/04]

"...Kerry did provide a clear message in the debate, claiming Bush has led America into a ruinous war that diverted resources from fight against al-Qaeda." [Dick Polman, Philadelphia Inquirer, 10/1/04]

"Kerry, while repeatedly arguing that Bush has conducted an ineffective war, cited the perilous security problems in Iraq, and pointed out that the U.S. has done a poor job training Iraqi security forces. Bush twice replied by saying 100,000 fully trained security forces are in the field today. Kerry didn't have an opportunity to rebut that, but it is wrong. According to a recent Pentagon briefing, that figure includes about 36,000 police officers who have not completed the two-part 24-week training program." [Dick Polman, Philadelphia Inquirer, 10/1/04]

"The President suggested that the war in Iraq was connected to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, saying, 'The enemy attacked us.' The federal 9/11 commission, however, said that so far, it found no evidence 'indicating that Iraq cooperated with al-Qaeda in developing or carrying out any attacks against the United States.'" [Philadelphia Inquirer, 10/1/04]

"Bush's main line of attack all evening was his charge that Kerry keeps changing positions on Iraq. In fact, while Kerry admitted last night that he hasn't always expressed himself clearly, he has never backed away from his vote authorizing the war and he has always said that Bush should have sought more international help." [Philadelphia Inquirer, 10/1/04]

"...Bush side-stepped a question from moderator Jim Lehrer on whether the election of Kerry would increase the risk of a 9/11-type attack." [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 10/1/04]

"You could tell who won this debate with the sound off. Every time John Kerry spoke, the split-screen showed President Bush looking like he took a swig of milk three

weeks past the expiration date. Kerry beat the president Thursday night on the one issue that defines this election: the war on terrorism." [Tommy Tomlinson, Charlotte Observer, 10/1/04]

"Bush, the steady president, didn't look steady. Bush, tough under pressure, stumbled under pressure. Bush, who wants to make this campaign about the issues, couldn't find an issue -- except to say that Kerry gives off mixed messages. They weren't mixed this time." [Tommy Tomlinson, Charlotte Observer, 10/1/04]

"...Bush has four years in the world's spotlight, and Thursday night he looked uncomfortable there. In Charlotte a couple of weeks ago, he was calm and charming in a room of supporters. Thursday night, with Kerry pinning him back, he looked exasperated." [Tommy Tomlinson, Charlotte Observer, 10/1/04]

"Think about if you had watched without knowing a thing about either candidate. Which one would you have picked as presidential?" [Tommy Tomlinson, Charlotte Observer, 10/1/04]

"President Bush needed to explain to Americans a foreign policy that has led the nation to war and alienated many other nations. Sen. John Kerry needed to convince Americans that he was capable of doing a better job. Bush failed and Kerry succeeded." [Editorial, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 10/1/04]

"Bush's familiar and now drastically truncated justifications for the invasion of Iraq fell flat against Kerry's insistence that the war was not necessary to contain the threat presented by Saddam Hussein and that the invasion was a dangerous diversion from the larger war on terrorism. Kerry also did a remarkable job of enunciating the objections many people have to the war in Iraq." [Editorial, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 10/1/04]

"Kerry was cogent and focused, something he needed to do to look presidential. He went on the attack early and kept Bush on the defensive through much of the event. Bush sometimes look peeved and fidgety and his twitching mouth and blinking eyes indicated a nervousness." [David Yepsen, Des Moines Register, 10/1/04]

"Kerry also seemed smart and articulate, while Bush appeared halting at times. Occasionally, Bush looked confused as he flipped through his pages of notes." [David Yepsen, Des Moines Register, 10/1/04]

"...Kerry was able to make a compelling case that he has been consistent on the war in Iraq - voting for the resolution authorizing the president to wage war because he believed the president would do so only as a last resort. The president didn't do that, Kerry credibly claimed." [Editorial, Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, 10/1/04]

"Mr. Kerry's performance was steady, though unlike Mr. Bush, he frequently addressed his remarks to Mr. Lehrer, the moderator, rather than the TV audience at home. Mr. Bush at times appeared defensive and angry, and slouched at the podium, but firmly reiterated his commitment to success in Iraq that would make the U.S. safer." [Wall Street Journal, 10/1/04]

"Mr. Kerry was direct in his charges and wielded a wide array of facts in accusing the president of failing to secure America at home and endangering it by pursuing the war in Iraq." [Washington Times, 10/1/04]

"Instant polls for several networks showed that viewers thought Mr. Kerry "won" the debate, which actually resembled more of a joint press conference. The Gallup-CNN poll gave him a 53 percent to 37 percent advantage over Mr. Bush, and the ABC poll gave him a 45 percent to 36 percent advantage." [Washington times. 10/1/04]

"The strategists said the outcome probably will give a minor boost to Mr. Kerry" [Washington Times, 10/1/04]

"I think that on points, on the issues, Senator Kerry won," said Mr. Tuman, who teaches classes on presidential rhetoric and debates [at San Francisco State University]" [Washington Times, 10/1/04]

"[Elaine Kamarck, a Democratic consultant who has worked closely with the Kerry campaign, said] 'Whoever on the Bush debate team agreed to the that format should be fired,' she said. 'George Bush can't talk that long. His strength is in sound bites. Given that amount of time -- which on television is an eternity -- it was evident that he had no good answers for a pathetic record.' Ms. Kamarck said she thought Mr. Kerry "exceeded expectations by being smart and clear," and predicted a slight bump in the polls..." [Washington Times, 10/1/04]

"Kerry was clearly more prepared than Bush on issues about many countries in the very foreign policy debate that Bush wanted first. Stay-the-course Bush ran out of material halfway through the 90 minutes. He often looked away from Kerry with an air of how dare he have to share the podium with this mosquito. Seven times, Bush tried to swat Kerry away with a variant of 'They're not going to follow somebody who says this is the wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time.'" [Derrick Z. Jackson, Op-Ed, Boston Globe, 10/1/04]

"Bush will need more than a fly swatter." [Derrick Z. Jackson, Op-Ed, Boston Globe, 10/1/04]

"At one other key point point, Kerry gave an informed historical reason why the United States needs to earn trust "that passes the global test" before launching a preemptive war. Bush appeared befuddled, saying, "I'm not exactly sure what you mean, 'passes the global test.'" Of course Bush wouldn't know, since he bypassed the globe in going to war." [Derrick Z. Jackson, Op-Ed, Boston Globe, 10/1/04]

"After spending much of the last two months on the political defensive, Democrat John Kerry went on the offense Thursday night, attacking President Bush's record and leadership so persistently that Bush asked moderator Jim Lehrer four or five times for another chance to respond." [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 10/1/04]

"Kerry spent less time Thursday having to defend himself against charges of inconsistency, and more time hammering away at Bush's handling of Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and North Korea, calling Iraq 'this incredible mess' and saying 'the president has had four years to try to do something about' North Korea's nuclear programs and failed." [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 10/1/04]

"the president was also forced by Kerry to spend a lot of time defending his own record, on numerous occasions describing Iraq as 'hard work.'" [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 10/1/04]

"But in terms of presentation, Kerry seemed to have more success Thursday night projecting the "clarity" he and his campaign have been seeking to convey." [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 10/1/04]

"Of the two charges, Kerry's had more resonance in the debate on Thursday - a day that saw more bloody violence in Iraq and the beginning of what appears to be a major push against insurgents in the Iraqi city of Samarra" [Editorial, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 10/1/04]

"The president repeatedly - and tediously - came back to variations of the Kerry-as-flip-flopper theme. 'The only consistent thing about my opponent's position has been his inconsistency,' Bush said. But Kerry was able to make a compelling case that he has been consistent on the war in Iraq - voting for the resolution authorizing the president to wage war because he believed the president would do so only as a last resort. The president didn't do that, Kerry credibly claimed. If the president had another theme, it was that the country would be weaker and less secure under a Kerry

administration. He repeatedly accused Kerry of undercutting U.S. soldiers with his claim that Iraq is the wrong war at the wrong time and in the wrong place. But Kerry coolly responded that it is 'vital not to confuse the war with the warriors.' Kerry came back again to his combat experience." [Editorial, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 10/1/04]

"Both candidates correctly labeled nuclear proliferation as the biggest threat to the nation. But again, Kerry made the more effective comments, pointing to the looming threats of such weapons in North Korea and Iran. He also questioned the president's approach and whether the war in Iraq had diverted attention from these and from finding bin Laden." [Editorial, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 10/1/04]

"Kerry clearly overcame his perceived biggest handicap, his seeming inability to loosen up and just plain connect. If the test of success for Kerry was whether he could be less wooden, he obviously succeeded. If the test for the president, not known for his oratory, was that he simply meet that particular expectation, he didn't disappoint." [Editorial, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 10/1/04]

"I think that clearly, Kerry made a better performance than Bush," [an undecided voter] said of Thursday's debate" [Rocky Mountain News, 10/1/04]

"I'm a little tired of Bush's thinking that the American people are so eager for money that we would do anything to have our taxes lowered,' [an undecided voter] said. 'If we need nursing homes for our elderly and schools for our children, we need to pay for them. If that means a little higher taxes, so be it.' So she applauded Kerry's comment that Bush 'didn't need that tax cut. America needs to be safe.'" [Rocky Mountain News, 10/1/04]

"Don't harp on that, George,' [an undecided voter] muttered when the president, for about the fifth or sixth time, took Kerry to task for his 'wrong war, wrong place, wrong time' message. A few minutes later, Bush said it again. 'He's losing it,' [the voter] said. [The voter] also took issue with the president's twitches and grimaces during Kerry's answers. 'He should not do that,' said [the voter]. 'It limits him. And I'm a Republican!'" [Rocky Mountain News, 10/1/04]

"Even though this was the debate - on Iraq and foreign policy - that the Bush campaign wanted first, this turned out to be a debate that seemed tailored for Kerry. And by the night's end, the buzz was that Kerry had taken advantage of the moment. Of course, you trust the buzz at your own risk. But if you watched, you saw the lines drawn starkly. These were not stump speeches. This was Kerry directly challenging Bush and Bush having to answer as millions of viewers looked on." [Mike Littwin, Column, Rocky Mountain News, 10/1/04]

"After some questions, you could see [Bush] visibly brighten when the light came on, signaling that it was time for him to end." [Mike Littwin, Column, Rocky Mountain News, 10/1/04]

"What was clear was that Bush spent more time on the defensive. Given the situation on the ground in Iraq, it could hardly be any other way. Kerry kept pressing, and Bush kept frowning" [Mike Littwin, Column, Rocky Mountain News, 10/1/04]

"...it was hard to find anyone nonpartisan who thought you could frame Kerry's performance with the flip-flop question." [Mike Littwin, Column, Rocky Mountain News, 10/1/04]

"As Bush and Kerry got ready to start, former Denver Mayor Wellington Webb advised against further booing. And for the most part, the responses were limited to applause for Kerry and loud groans for Bush. There were guffaws when Bush talked about spreading freedom in the Middle East and laughter when he misused the word 'vociferous' when referring to warfare. When Kerry spoke, the gathering took on the spirit of a religious revival with 'amen' and 'yes, oh yes,' echoing in the hall.

'Lay it on him,' said Paul Bray of Denver when Kerry spoke of soldiers going to war without adequate body armor and weapons. The crowd roared when Kerry spoke about the only building U.S. troops guarded in Iraq was the oil ministry. But with Kerry's comments about Bush outsourcing the job of finding Osama bin Laden to Afghan warlords, the stomping and roaring in support drowned out the rest of his comments." [Rocky Mountain News, 10/1/04]

"As the lights faded, the reviews came in. 'It looked like Bush was falling apart and people caught that,' said Owen Perkins, of Denver. 'He didn't have much to say compared to Kerry.' 'Bush was bad,' said John Fitzgerald, of Golden. 'Bush couldn't respond. It looked like he couldn't think,' said Dee Billings, of Denver. And no one disagreed with Biden's assessment. 'John Kerry will get better every day. He is a strong finisher,' said Biden. 'We're going to win.'" [Rocky Mountain News, 10/1/04]

"Bush seemed less relaxed, sometimes frowning or wincing at Kerry's remarks... At Fox News, anchor Brit Hume noted the seeming anger Bush displayed, a point picked up by Mark Halperin, ABC News political director, who said Kerry cleared the bar in his first presidential debate. 'He clearly performed at a level that was more than confident,' Halperin said of Kerry. 'I thought the president was remarkably angry-seeming at times.'" [Atlanta Journal Constitution, 10/1/04]

"Although [voter] Diane Jones said she'd "probably" vote for President Bush, she insisted her mind could be changed by the debates. After this first one, she said: 'That's the best I ever heard Kerry speak.'...[the family] all agreed that Kerry was the better debater. And all agreed that picking the right man to be president is crucial, especially with their son in Iraq." [Atlanta Journal Constitution, 10/1/04]

"[Iraqi American] Aburkaibeh gave the first round to Democratic candidate Sen. John Kerry, because he felt that Kerry was more focused and consistent than President Bush, and had detailed answers. Plus, he said, Kerry's body language was more convincing." [Atlanta Journal Constitution, 10/1/04]

CATEGORIES: Knowledge of issues

GRADES: Kerry: A-; Bush: B+

COMMENT

McCann on Bush: Bush was readily knowledgeable of the names and titles of foreign leaders and covered some excellent territory from a broad-based perspective.

Panetta on Kerry: Exhibited sophisticated understanding of nuclear proliferation and U.S.-Russia relations. Persuasiveness

CATEGORIES: Persuasiveness

GRADES: Kerry: B+; Bush: B

COMMENT

Hester on Bush: Repetition of two claims --- Kerry sends "mixed messages" and "says things that a commander in chief shouldn't say" --- is a useful argument tool.

Eaves on Kerry: Excellent communicator with greater public speaking skills than his opponent.

CATEGORIES: Personal connection

GRADES: Kerry: B; Bush: B-" [Atlanta Journal Constitution, 10/1/04]

"for the first time Thursday night, those undecided voters ... got to see a Democratic candidate they may not have recognized. If that doesn't change the hearts and minds of the electorate, nothing will." [Jim Spencer, Column, Denver Post, 10/1/04]

"Kerry, needing to shrug off his deficit in the polls, immediately scored points. He attacked the president's decision to go into Iraq with minimal international support and claimed Bush's preoccupation with Iraq detracted from the hunt for Osama bin Laden and mobilized other terrorists. Bush seemed almost surprised by Kerry's focused jabs, as if he had expected the Democrat to flip-flop before his very eyes. He was back on his heels more than once," [Editorial, Denver Post, 10/1/04]

"Arguing like the former prosecutor he is, John Kerry came out swinging Thursday - though it's not as if he had much choice. Pounding President Bush for "colossal" mistakes in Iraq and misplaced values at home, Mr. Kerry saw the first debate as his best chance to change the dynamics of a race that has tilted toward Mr. Bush since the Republican convention a month ago. He may well have done that. A spate of instant polls declared Mr. Kerry the winner. A variety of analysts said the Democratic challenger repeatedly put the president on the defensive during the 90-minute session" [Dallas Morning News, 10/1/04]

"Mr. Kerry regularly deployed thin smiles, head nods and a busy note-taking pen while Mr. Bush spoke. It obviously didn't indicate his agreement with the president, but rather that he seemed to be eager and ready to rebut. Mr. Bush retained a serious countenance but went for his water glass at least four times on camera while Mr. Kerry laid off any liquid refreshment. Did anyone get the impression that the president was overheating during responses to questions from moderator Jim Lehrer or statements by Mr. Kerry? MSNBC analyst Andrea Mitchell said the reaction shots were 'very damaging to Bush' at times. Fox News Channel anchor Brit Hume noted that in side-by-side shots, 'You had more lectern and less Bush. He [Mr. Bush] looked smaller, and Kerry looked taller.' In fact, Mr. Kerry is 4 inches taller than the president, but the cameras were supposed to show parity. 'I think Kerry survived and did pretty well tonight,' said Fox News Channel analyst Bill Kristol, who openly supports Mr. Bush's re-election. ABC News had the only instant post-debate poll, which it said was a random 'scientific' sampling. It showed that 45 percent thought Mr. Kerry had won, 36 percent sided with the president and 17 percent deemed it a tie" [Ed Bark, Column, Dallas Morning News, 10/1/04]

"Mr. Bush often spoke more haltingly while initially composing his answers and rebuttals, frequently resorting to 'um.' He also tended to lean into the lectern while Mr. Kerry generally stood straighter and spoke without hesitation. 'My sense is that Kerry made some inroads,' Meet the Press moderator Tim Russert said on MSNBC." [Ed Bark, Column, Dallas Morning News, 10/1/04]

"Those who expected the Massachusetts senator to be the droning, long-winded patrician he has been so far this campaign had to have been startled by the sharp, focused fighter Mr. Kerry was last night. He finally connected with audiences, speaking with uncharacteristic passion and directness about what he sees as the Bush administration's failures. If we had seen this John Kerry three months ago, the race might look very different today. On substance, too, Mr. Kerry landed some serious blows to the president. He struck hard on Mr. Bush's lack of planning for the Iraq occupation, and questioned the quality of his judgment. The Democrat's most memorable line turned the president's greatest virtue - his decisiveness - into a vice: 'It's one thing to be certain. But you can be certain and be wrong.'" [Editorial, Dallas Morning News, 10/1/04]