



Media Reality ✓ Check **QUICK TAKE**

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AS LIBERALS CAN'T GAIN ELECTION TRACTION, THE MEDIA STEP IN **WASHINGTON POST'S OCTOBER SURPRISE?** **REPORTER PAINTS BUSH AS CLINTON CLONE**

When there's no lunatic sniper taking potshots at innocent people, the *Washington Post* can usually make a big splash by putting a really, really slanted news item on its front page for lazy and liberal TV reporters to simplify and quote for days on end. That seems to have been the game the *Post* and its White House correspondent, Dana Milbank, were playing this morning when the paper disguised an op-ed by Milbank as a piece of front-page news. "For Bush, Facts Are Malleable," the *Post* headlined. "Presidential Tradition of Embroidering Key Assertions Continues," insisted the subhead.

Milbank revealed nothing that substantiated the *Post's* derogatory headlines. Instead, he wasted readers' time by focusing on three relatively small and unimportant details — and he even had to spin those to make them controversial. For instance, he repeated the petty concern of ABC's Martha Raddatz, who took issue with Bush's October 7 claim that Iraq had unmanned planes which could spread chemical or biological poisons on American targets. "Charlie, they are not capable of flying that great a distance," Raddatz condescendingly told *World News Tonight* substitute anchor Charles Gibson on October 8.

Of course, such planes could be launched from somewhere besides Iraq, or directed to American targets in the Middle East. For "gotcha journalism," it's pretty lame.

Now, a full two weeks later, the *Post* has revived Raddatz's stale theory as shocking proof that Bush's "rhetoric has taken some flights of fancy in recent weeks." Milbank dismissed the threat from unmanned Iraqi planes: "A CIA report this month suggested that the fleet was more of an 'experiment' and 'attempt' and labeled it a 'serious threat to Iraq's neighbors and to international military forces in the region' — but said nothing about it having sufficient range to threaten the United States."

Milbank also scolded the President for a comment made six weeks ago that an International Atomic Energy Agency report found Saddam had been "six months away from developing a weapon" before Iraq's 1991 defeat. "The report said Iraq had been six to 24 months away from nuclear capability," Milbank wrote. What a stinging rejoinder!

Eight years ago — on August 21, 1994, to be exact — *Post* White House correspondent Ruth Marcus wrote an article detailing Bill Clinton's problems with truth-telling. She limited herself to matters of fact, not interpretation, and her language was far more neutral than Milbank's snotty tone ("flights of fancy"). Still, the *Post* consigned to the editorial pages her rebuke of a liberal Democratic President — and that's exactly where Milbank's opinionated story belonged.