

AP CALLS BUSHCO ON ITS SPIN

Tell me. When you saw this headline in the WaPo today, who did you think wrote the story?

*Bush
Put
Spin
Summit* *Aides
Upbeat
on*

Dan Froomkin, perhaps?

Nope. It was an AP story, tracing, in detail, the Administration's efforts to get the press to back off its conclusion that Bush's summit with Vladimir Putin was a disaster.

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE – White House officials waged an extraordinary campaign during an 11-hour Air Force One flight to put a positive spin on the outcome of Sunday's summit talks between President Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Four times on the long flight back to Washington from Sochi, Russia, Bush aides trooped back to the press cabin to make the case that the summit had turned out well, particularly on missile defenses.

It was the heaviest lobbying campaign veteran reporters could recall ever occurring on the president's plane. Press accounts of the summit had been sent to Bush's plane and administration officials thought they were too negative. Clearly, Bush's aides were disappointed.

Some of the officials' statements were on the record. Some of them were off-

the-record _ not to be used _ or on "deep background" _ not to be attributed to anyone in the administration. Some were on "background" _ to be attributed to a senior administration official. It was hard keeping track of the conditions.

[snip]

There had been an anticipation in the White House press corps that Bush would invite reporters up to his conference room on the plane to reflect on the trip, as he has done on occasion. Four additional reporters were allowed to fly back with Bush, heightening those expectations. But it did not happen and White House officials did not dispute that Bush was steamed with the coverage.

AP reporter Terence Hunt goes on to explain the Administration's desperate efforts to get Putin to agree to say Bush Administration efforts at assuaging his concerns about the missile defense plans for Europe have, indeed, assuaged his concerns. He describes Stephen Hadley going to absurd lengths to redefine the definition of what success looks like.

Wow. Imagine such reporting on the machinations aboard Air Force One if it had come from the week of July 7, 2003 (though, to be fair, Matt Cooper tried to write just such an article, though without the necessary cooperation of John Dickerson).

My only complaint about this article (an admittedly churlish one) is that it doesn't, then, explore why Bush went to such lengths to try to spin the press. The America news public, after all, ought to think about what it means that Bush is insisting Russia has agreed to the construction of a missile defense system in Europe when—Putin has made crystal clear—Russia has only agreed to Bush's pathetic fig leaf intended to cover up just how deep Russia's

disapproval for the missile defense system really is.

The story is—as Hunt has shown well—that the Administration wants to pretend the summit was something it wasn't. But it's also why the Administration is so desperate to pretend it scored a victory when it hasn't—and what the implications are for long-term stability in Eastern Europe.