

Main points from

CORAL GABLES: Main points from the presidential debate here late on Thursday between US President George W Bush and Democratic candidate Senator John Kerry:

IRAQ

Bush: 'In Iraq, we saw a threat, and we realized that after September the 11th, we must take threats seriously, before they fully materialize. Saddam Hussein now sits in a prison cell. America and the world are safer for it.'

'In Iraq, no doubt about it, it's tough. It's hard work. It's incredibly hard. You know why? Because an enemy realizes the stakes. The enemy understands a free Iraq will be a major defeat in their ideology of hatred. That's why they're fighting so vociferously.'

'The biggest disaster that could happen is that we not succeed in Iraq. We will succeed. We've got a plan to do so. And the main reason we'll succeed is because the Iraqis want to be free. I don't see how you can lead this country to succeed in Iraq if you say wrong war, wrong time, wrong place. What message does that send our troops? What message does that send to our allies? What message does that send the Iraqis?'

Kerry: 'This president has made, I regret to say, a colossal error of judgment (in Iraq). And judgment is what we look for in the president of the United States of America. I know I can do a better job in Iraq. I have a plan to have a summit with all of the allies, something this president has not yet achieved, not yet been able to do to bring people to the table. We can do a better job of training the Iraqi forces to defend themselves, and I know that we can do a better job of preparing for elections.'

'The president just talked about Iraq as a centre of the war on terror. Iraq was not even close to the centre of the war on terror before the president invaded it.'

'And he launched the war in Iraq without a plan to win the peace. Now, that is not the judgment that a president of the

United States ought to make. You don't take America to war unless you have the plan to win the peace.'

'This president just — I don't know if he sees what's really happened on there. But it's getting worse by the day. More soldiers killed in June than before. More in July than June. More in August than July. More in September than in August..'

NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

Bush: 'I agree with my opponent that the biggest threat facing this country is weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a terrorist network. And that's why proliferation is one of the centrepieces of a multi-prong strategy to make the country safer.'

'And we've been effective. We busted the A.Q. Khan network. This was a proliferator out of Pakistan that was selling secrets to places like North Korea and Libya. We convinced Libya to disarm. It's a central part of dealing with weapons of mass destruction and proliferation.'

'I'll tell you another way to help protect America in the long run is to continue with missile defences. We'll be implementing a missile-defence system relatively quickly.'

Kerry: 'Nuclear proliferation (is the most serious threat to US security). There's some 600-plus tons of unsecured material still in the former Soviet Union and Russia. Now, there are terrorists trying to get their hands on that stuff today. And this president, I regret to say, has secured less nuclear material in the last two years since 9/11 than we did in the two years preceding 9/11.'

NORTH KOREA

Bush: 'I can't tell you how big a mistake I think that is, to have bilateral talks with North Korea. It's precisely what (North Korean leader) Kim Jong Il wants. It will cause the six-party talks to evaporate. It will mean that China no longer is involved in convincing, along with us,

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for Kim Jong Il to get rid of his weapons. It's a big mistake to do that. 'Now there are five voices speaking to (North Korean leader) Kim Jong Il, not just one. And so if Kim Jong Il decides again to not honor an agreement, he's not only doing injustice to America, he'd be doing injustice to China, as well.'

'It's not going to work if we open up a dialogue with Kim Jong Il. He wants to unravel the six-party talks, or the five-nation coalition that's sending him a clear message.'

Kerry: 'I want bilateral talks (with North Korea) which put all of the issues, from the armistice of 1952, the economic issues, the human rights issues, the artillery disposal issues, the DMZ issues and the nuclear issues on the table.'

IRAN

Bush: 'On Iran, I hope we can ... continue to work with the world to convince the Iranian mullahs to abandon their nuclear ambitions. 'We worked very closely with the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Great Britain, who have been the folks delivering the message to the mullahs that if you expect to be part of the world of nations, get rid of your nuclear programs.'

'The IAEA is involved. There's a special protocol recently been passed that allows for inspections. I hope we can do it. And we've got a good strategy.'

Kerry: 'With respect to Iran, the British, French, and Germans were the ones who initiated an effort without the United States, regrettably, to begin to try to move to curb the nuclear possibilities in Iran. I believe we could have done better. 'I think the United States should have offered the opportunity to provide the nuclear fuel, test them, see whether or not they were actually looking for it for peaceful purposes. If they weren't willing to work a deal, then we could have put

sanctions together. The president did nothing.'

DARFUR

Bush: 'In terms of Darfur, I agree it's genocide. And Colin Powell so stated. We have committed 200 million dollars worth of aid. We're the leading donor in the world to help the suffering people there. We will commit more over time to help. 'I agree with my opponent that we shouldn't be committing troops. We ought to be working with the African Union to do so — precisely what we did in Liberia. We helped stabilize the situation with some troops, and when the African Union came, we moved them out.'

Kerry: 'With respect to Darfur, yes, it is a genocide. And months ago, many of us were pressing for action. I think the reason that we're not saying send American troops in at this point is severalfold.

'Number one, we can do this through the African Union, providing we give them the logistical support. Right now all the president is providing is humanitarian support. We need to do more than that. They've got to have the logistical capacity to go in and stop the killing. And that's going to require more than is on the table today.

'But I'll tell you this, as president, if it took American forces to some degree to coalesce the African Union, I'd be prepared to do it because we could never allow another Rwanda. It's the moral responsibility for us and the world.'

CHARACTER AND LEADERSHIP

Bush: 'My concerns about the senator is that, in the course of this campaign, I've been listening very carefully to what he says, and he changes positions on the war in Iraq. He changes positions on something as fundamental as what you believe in your core, in your heart of hearts, is right in Iraq. 'You cannot lead if you send mixed messages. Mixed

messages send the wrong signals to our troops. Mixed messages send the wrong signals to our allies. Mixed messages send the wrong signals to the Iraqi citizens.

Kerry: 'Let me talk about something that the president just sort of finished up with. Maybe someone would call it a character trait, maybe somebody wouldn't. But this issue of certainty. It's one thing to be certain, but you can be certain and be wrong.

'It's another to be certain and be right, or to be certain and be moving in the right direction, or be certain about a principle and then learn new facts and take those new facts and put them to use in order to change and get your policy right.'

RUSSIA

Bush: 'I think that there needs to be checks and balances in a democracy, and made that very clear that by consolidating power in the central government, (Russian President Vladimir Putin) is sending a signal to the Western world and United States that perhaps he doesn't believe in checks and balances, and I told him that.'

'Russia is a country in transition. Vladimir is going to have to make some hard choices. And I think it's very important for the American president, as well as other Western leaders, to remind him of the great benefits of democracy, that democracy will best help the people realize their hopes and aspirations and dreams.'

Kerry: 'I regret what's happened in these past months. And I think it goes beyond just the response to terror. Mr Putin now controls all the television stations. His political opposition is being put in jail. 'And I think it's very important to the United States, obviously, to have a working relationship that is good. This is a very important country to us. We want a partnership. But we always have to stand up for democracy.' **AFP**