

I wrote the following response to an Inky piece called "Senate shields telecoms in spy bill" July 10

R1

There may very well have been a "fierce national debate over the balance between protecting the country from another terrorist strike and ensuring civil liberties," but I mostly saw that debate occurring in the blogs and the traditional media giving the whole issue a yawn and a pass. I don't remember the other side of the debate ever showing citizens who were in favor of preserving the Constitution that giving up our civil liberties was essential to protecting the country.

I had to utter a grim, mirthless laugh when I read: "Supporters maintained that the plan includes enough safeguards to protect Americans' civil liberties," because there simply are no meaningful protections included in the bill. The bill is a complete and utter blank check for the government to do as it darn well pleases without any meaningful limitations of any kind. No wonder President Bush was so pleased, the Democrats gave him everything he wanted.

I agree with Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI), the day the bill passed, eviscerating FISA and the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution, was a very sad day for the rule of law.

W1

Richard,

I must disagree with your comment in the Inquirer 6/25/08.

Congress did not cave they politicized a national defense issue. They did what was right and what they had to do. There was no question as to the outcome only the question of when. My friend you have been played and do not know it.

While in the US Army I worked for the NSA and I know they are respectful of your "fourth Amendment" rights. They also are respectful of your right to live in a free society. By the way a free society is not free. It is expensive and we all must pay in some way. I guess you think you are paying with your liberties.

Please explain why you object to monitoring someone in Pakistan talking to another in Germany but the call is routed through the US. Laws must be updated with technology. The purpose of the NSA is to keep a step ahead of those who would do us harm. They are a part of the US intelligence community. They actually work for you. Ironic?

Thankyou for your opinion, even if I strongly disagree.

Walt Steimel
Exton,Pa

R2

Greetings Walt,

I'm a veteran myself (Navy), so we can dispense with the "Thanks for your service" routine. To take your last point first, that the US should be able to spy on calls that are foreign-to-foreign, but which are merely routed through US switches, that's a completely non-controversial point that everyone from the furthest left radical to the furthest right-wing conservative agrees with. If that was the only point of contention that people were fighting over, we could settle that in an afternoon.

The whole point of American democracy is precisely that it's built on distrust. "Show me the books" is our national attitude. The whole point of "checks and balances" is precisely that no one is to be trusted

with an excessive amount of power. The Founding Fathers' vision of a properly-functioning government is one where the powers of each branch have all sorts of built-in restraints and everybody jealously holds onto their "turf." That's a system that has everything to do with human nature and nothing to do with technology.

I'm sure the folks you dealt with when you were in the service were fine, upstanding folks. Ditto for my own experience. I don't think, however, that any of them can be trusted with the power to spy on their fellow citizens without restraint. Why not? Because they're human beings. Lack of capacity to be trusted with unlimited power comes as part of the package.

No one is "playing" anyone. Yes, we live in a dangerous world, but yes, we have very good reason to be suspicious of our common employee, the government. There's nothing "ironic" about any of this. Sorry if I come across as snippy, but the Democrats were put into office precisely because the President was getting out of control and needed to be restrained. The Democrats have miserably failed in that task. Before, the motto of the netroots was "More Democrats." Now, it's "Better Democrats." We've got to clean house and pitch out the bad ones.

Rich

W2

Rich,

If I had known I would raise your blood pressure, I would not have been so direct. Take a breath to steal a phrase from Nancy (it used to be one of my favorite female names...that isn't sexist is it?)

It seems I had taken a narrower view with this subject than you.

No one is looking to give unrestrained authority to anyone in Washington. But sometimes it takes a cowboy to get things done when everyone else has their heads in the sand. My goodness there are certainly enough do nothings in Washington and also allot of critics who have never had an original thought. After 9/11 Bush acted and that is what the left is mad about. He acted and they could not figure out how to get the credit, because thats what its all about self gratification and getting re-elected. If he did it your way they would still be arguing about what to do and maybe asking OBL if it was ok with him. As for the acts of the Pres with the FISA Court and the actions of the NSA; I believe Congress was well informed as to what was going on. Specifically Representatives on the intelligence committees of both houses, particularly Nancy, Dianne and Rockefeller who never said a word until it politically advantageous.

The telcoms acted with patriotic verve when requested for info from the gov't. Good God man we were behind the 8 ball with our pants down and we had to know who and where the enemy was and actions were taken.

As for over-site, that is what we have now. Who did what to whom and how often. Let's fix it and get on with the business of government. Which reminds me, while your worried about the President usurping your rights and liberties, maybe you should be watching the supreme court. Sex, religion, property rights, rules of war, rights for enemy combatants and education are all coming down with a case of shorted liberty. There isn't any over site there, just a bunch of Liberal jurists making it up as they go. And what is going is your right to raise your children(it did not work in Germany or the USSR) Yes, George Orwell may have had it right but he never thought it would be coming from the court. (I know that 7 of the nine were appointed by Republican Presidents)

To unite for the betterment of the country it won't take better Dems but better patriots who put country above party, politics and themselves and as for the "blue dog dems" they are just in lockstep with the party elders. Case in point Patrick Murphy. He never says no to Nancy.

I try to avoid snippiness and particularly avoid pomposity.

Walt

R3

Walt,

>If I had known I would raise your blood pressure,

Nah, don't worry about it. The whole case had me steaming. Still does, matter of fact. Fortunately, the final vote has been put off until the 8th of next month.

>I would not have been so direct.

>Take a breath to steal a phrase from Nancy (it used to be one of my favorite

>female names...that isn't sexist is it?)

It shows contempt to use just a politician's first name.

>It seems I had taken a narrower view with this subject than you.

>No one is looking to give unrestrained authority to anyone in Washington.

Obviously, you're not familiar with the contents of the bill. If one looks at the bill carefully, it deletes all of the citizen protections that FISA had built into it and insists simply that telecoms get a permission slip from the President to spy on us. That's it. There are simply no other requirements that the telecoms need to fulfill.

>But sometimes it takes a cowboy to get things done

>when everyone else has their heads in the sand.

>My goodness there are certainly enough do nothings

>in Washington and also a lot of critics who have never

>had an original thought. After 9/11 Bush acted and that

>is what the left is mad about.

There are two persons who are responsible for 9/11 having happened. The first is Osama bin Laden as he planned it, organized it and launched it. But the second most responsible one was President Bush, as he demonstrated negligence, incompetence and dereliction of duty beforehand. There were PLENTY of warnings, all of which he ignored. We have compared 9/11 to the Reichstag Fire as opposed to Pearl Harbor because the Patriot Act bears a suspicious resemblance to the 1933 Enabling Act.

>He acted and they could not figure out how to get the credit,

>because that's what it's all about self gratification and getting

>re-elected.

>If he did it your way they would still be arguing about what to
>do and maybe asking OBL if it was ok with him.

You obviously get all of your information from Fox News.

>As for the acts of the Pres with the FISA Court and the actions
>of the NSA; I believe Congress was well informed as to what
>was going on.

I agree. We've named their problem the "New Republic Syndrome" (After the allegedly liberal magazine that supported the launching of the Iraq War), the need to appear "strong" by caving in to Republican demands that Democrats join them in stomping all over the Constitution with muddy, hobnailed boots.

>Specifically Representatives on the intelligence committees of
>both houses, particularly Nancy, Dianne and Rockefeller who
>never said a word until it politically advantageous.

If you're accusing them of political expediency, I agree. That's a plain-vanilla, regular old tendency of ALL politicians.

>The telcoms acted with patriotic verve when requested for info
>from the gov't.

But they acted in the knowledge that what they were doing was flat-out illegal.

>Good God man we were behind the 8 ball with our pants down
>and we had to know who and where the enemy was and actions
>were taken.

"We" were not "behind the 8 ball," President Bush and his crew were the ones caught napping, snoozing away with their feet up on the table.

>As for over-site, that is what we have now.

That's precisely what's been tossed out the window.

>Who did what to whom and how often.
>Let's fix it and get on with the business of government.

The "business of government" is, first and foremost, to obey the Constitution. It's NOT to just go ahead and make up one's own rules as one goes along. Bush failed to head off 9/11. What he and his whole crew needed to do was to retire back to Texas and to hand over the government to a group that was competent to handle it.

>Which reminds me, while your worried about the President
>usurping your rights and liberties, maybe you should be
>watching the supreme court. Sex, religion, property rights,
>rules of war, rights for enemy combatants and education are

>all coming down with a case of shorted liberty. There isn't
>any over site there, just a bunch of Liberal jurists making it
>up as they go. And what is going is your right to raise your
>children(it did not work in Germany or the USSR) Yes,
>George Orwell may have had it right but he never thought
>it would be coming from the court. (I know that 7 of the
>nine were appointed by Republican Presidents)

Typical. "Let's hand everything over to Dear Leader! We need a 'man on horseback' to 'discipline' the enemies of all us 'good Americans' !"

>To unite for the betterment of the country it won't take
>better Dems but better patriots who put country above
>party, politics and themselves

The very worst, most partisan politicians are ALWAYS the ones who claim to be acting "above politics."

>and as for the "blue dog dems" they are just in lockstep
>with the party elders.

They're in lockstep with the Republicans, i.e., the WRONG "party elders." We need Democrats who are in lockstep with (small 'd') democratic principles.

>Case in point Patrick Murphy. He never says no to Nancy.
>I try to avoid snippiness and particularly avoid pomposity.

I normally avoid snippiness and I'll watch the pomposity.

Rich

W3

Rich,

You were right about me not reading the whole 115 pages of the bill (still haven't) So I did a little investigating in the blogs to my left and other non-Fox sources. I did not see where all citizens protections were given up from the original FISA.(1) I did see how it had been updated to today's technology from previous manual wire tapping.(2) They now have 7 days to listen in before acquiring a court order and can use that info acquired prior to the ct order. One of the connections still must be overseas and a US citizen is not exempt from eavesdropping. And yes the telecoms will be exonerated of all wrong and suits against them will be dropped. The telecom issue is the worst. How could anyone prove that govt

was listening and besides the telecoms gave out the numbers of incoming and outgoing calls of the suspect. The suits were a sham anyway. They were just another attempt to expose the intelligence community through court approved discovery. (3)

But the most curious aspect of my journey was the official catch phrase of the opposition on the left. "Potential for Abuse". It is the basis for most arguments from the paranoid left (I'm not paranoid, people really are out to get me....old joke).

This is the major argument with the FISA Amendment. Not individual rights and all those self righteous concerns of those who know more than all the unwashed mass of humanity they give the impression of helping. (4) It is a poor argument that lends itself to sitting in a closet cowering. No we cannot sit in the closet because that may be just as dangerous a "Potential for Abuse" (5)

We should not have broken away from Britain, Potential for Abuse". Lets blame this whole NSA eavesdropping problem on Marconi and A.G. Bell because their inventions were fraught with "Potential for Abuse".

The second argument is "Turf". The original FISA enacted by Carter was to limit executive power and now this argument has morphed into the mess we have today. It was law for 1978 but it was insufficient for today's fast pace hi-tech world. Case in point "throw-away cell phones". (6)

Authorization for the Use of Military Force Against Terrorists (AUMF). This argument has been completely discounted by opponents. Did Congress think that the collection of intelligence was just for civilian use or limited to politically correct boundaries? (7) A successful military does not make a move without intel. Even the Navy knows that. (8)

The last argument is politics and it is the ugliest argument. And this it started with a hanging chad and a stolen election (four years later he stole the election in Ohio) It has festered way past the election into a hatred for Pres Bush. (9) This hatred is so vile that it has masked any reason of those opposed. "Get Bush-Get the White House". Did you ever wonder how the most stupid President in the history of the US, keeps outsmarting his super intelligent opponents? (10)

Were there mistakes made prior to 9/11? You are so right, but Bush was in power for only seven months and he is being judged for all the missteps of previous administrations concerning islamist terrorists (I am not PC literate). Let us include everybody. Bush's actions have to be correctly judged with the current events and passions of the time not with the security of viewing history then saying you would have done it differently. (11) Use the past to correct the future not to justify a lynching. (12) US foreign policy over the last 30 years is why we had 9/11. The terrorist only respects power and its unrestrained use. Our willingness to turn the other cheek or extend a hand of kindness was the problem. They thought we were a paper tiger.

Bush made mistakes, but he was pursuing a policy of reality, not some notion that we must all hold hands and dream of Eden. (13) Nice thought but not the time. The left has politicized the war on terror ever since 9/11 when they accused the Pres of sitting in front of those children and doing nothing for what 10 minutes. (14) That sir was disgusting, people were dying and some politician saw political opportunity? (15)

Look I am not that naive to think that everybody is true blue and always doing the right thing, But I am trusting enough to know that those doing *wrong* will be corrected by those that know better, eventually. Trust is what this country is based on. Positive trust. You blindly trust your fellow citizen to stay on his side of the yellow line to avoid hitting you head on. (16)

OTHER THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS;

What are democratic principles or is it democrat principles, I get confused. How are they different from republican principles and I don't mean the obvious issues. My big issue is less govt but you would not know there was any difference between the parties. (17)

That quote from Ben Franklin, about liberty, was politically expedient in its day to motivate the country and I think he would say it differently today. (18)

Oh and about the contempt thing. Not contempt just a healthy lack of respect for Nancy, Harry, and the other partisans looking to keep their jobs. Speaker should have gone to Rep. Harmon of Calif. (19)

I did not understand the comment regarding the supreme ct. Not a clue. And the reference to the Reichstag fire relating to the patriot act kind of threw me.

And finally, you got me with that Fox News shot. What is wrong with Fox News? Besides it is the only news outlet that understands us bitter, gun owners that cling to our religion while fearing change. (20)

Best regards,

Walt

R4

Walt,

(1) The essential difference is that the 1978 FISA requires the approval of a set of judges and the new bill requires only the Attorney General to approve a wiretapping warrant. The AG "serves at the pleasure of" and is under the direct authority of the President whereas the judges are appointed for life and are therefore independent.

(2) There have been numerous updates, most recently in 2002.

(3) We American citizens need to know what the government has been doing in our name as the government cannot be trusted not to abuse its power. The main point of the lawsuits is to determine just what has been done. To allow the telecoms to break the law, knowingly and repeatedly, and to not face any consequences for doing so, is to turn this from a society governed by law to a society governed by whoever happens to be in office at the moment. We fought a war over precisely that issue back in 1776.

(4) Keep in mind that the "unwashed mass" that the government seeks to exercise unrestrained surveillance over is about 70% of the country as opposed to those who trust the government, which is roughly 30%. That's why we call you guys the "Bush dead-enders."

(5) Actually, it's an argument that calls for an active, engaged and alert citizenry. Yes, the country as a whole has foreign enemies, but that doesn't mean the government should be seen as just innocently trying to protect us.

(6) See (2)

(7) http://digbysblog.blogspot.com/2006_01_01_digbysblog_archive.html#113641228933068600

Thus, we have one argument which claims that the 2001 Congressional Resolution authorizing military force in Afghanistan and against Al Qaeda (the "AUMF") -- a resolution which obviously never mentioned FISA, eavesdropping or surveillance, because it had nothing to do with any of those things -- should nonetheless be "construed" and "interpreted" to have "impliedly" amended FISA by giving Bush an "exemption" entitling him to eavesdrop in violation of that law. And this argument is made even though the Congress which supposedly gave Bush that exemption says that [it did no such thing](#), but to the contrary, [expressly refused](#) to provide that very authority.

(8) Entirely true, but the whole point of being "a society of laws and not men" is that there are rules and procedures governing such things. One simply can't run around improvising and making things up on the spot as one goes.

(9) If President Bush's illegal actions stopped there, we would have "gotten over it." Unfortunately, the Democratic Party has not performed the necessary balancing as they have too many triangulators and finger-to-the-wind calculators and the traditional press is utterly corrupt and pretty worthless for just about anything other than weather, traffic and entertainment reports. For a current example, see <http://mediamatters.org/items/200806270008> "**The Edwards standard and John McCain.**"

(10) Very few people on the left consider Bush to be stupid and as I point out in (9), Bush has taken advantage of a broken opposition party (That the netroots is trying to rebuild) and a broken press corps.

(11) When one Officer Of the Deck replaces another, the offgoing OOD does a "passdown" for the oncoming OOD. Did Clinton do this for Bush? Did the off-going National Security Advisor Richard Clarke do this for the oncoming NSA Condoleezza Rice? Yes, they did.

Clinton took a lot of heat for aggressively responding to a Fox News correspondent that he did what he could to battle Islamic extremists, but he was right. He did what he reasonably could have done. How much more can one ask?

If the Warsaw Pact had invaded West Germany in September 1981, Reagan could have pointed to the billions he had been pumping into the military and said "I did what I could," because Reagan WAS pumping billions into the military. Bush took a month-long vacation in August 2001 knowing full well that, as the PDB put it "bin Laden determined to attack in US."

(12) My point was to say that credit for Bush's actions after 9/11 have to be balanced against his inaction before 9/11. Lefties aren't trying to "steal his glory." There's no glory to steal.

(13) The term for this is "straw man argument." No one is or was arguing for any such thing. We're arguing that the US has to fight smarter, not harder. I've been looking into guerrilla wars for quite some time. They're fought best through regular politics, through seeing to the needs of the population and thereby separating the actual fighters from the regular folks. They're not fought best by just running around, shooting in all directions and killing folks willy nilly.

(14) I saw that film when it came onto the internet in June 2002 (Long before Michael Moore showed it in Fahrenheit 9/11). Bush's actions demonstrated criminal negligence and dereliction of duty. When "General Quarters" is sounded, all hands react by getting to their stations. What's the President's station? A command post. Any command post. The nearest ship or fort or if it's available (it was), Air Force One. The Captain is not relieved of doing this just because he's the "big guy." It was Bush's job to get there, not just so that he could give orders, but so that he could get a stream of constant real-time

updates.

(15) People were dying and Bush just sat there and contemplated the cracks in the wall.

(16) I respectfully disagree. I believe we have to keep a real-time up-to-date watch on our fellow citizens and government servants while also doing battle against foreign foes.

(17) My big issue is effective government. A too-small government results in things like the collapse of the I-87 West bridge in Minnesota. This is an inevitable consequence of worrying about the government being too big. How do we control a too-big government? See point (16).

(18) Again, I respectfully disagree. I think he's as relevant as ever.

(19) On Harmon, that's a legitimate difference of opinion. But I know you'd disapprove if I called him just "George" as opposed to "Bush" or "President Bush" and you'd be right. I don't like her much, but once my reader knows that I'm referring to the female half of the couple, I call her "Clinton" or "Senator Clinton."

(20) As long as people realize that Fox is a highly partisan outfit, nothing's wrong with it. If people think "I understand liberals because Fox tells me what they're like," then there's something wrong with it.

Rich

W4

Rich,

Thought for the day:

When seeking the truth one should not make the journey to prove their belief but be prepared to travel wherever the truth leads.

I researched Hr604 EH, IH and PCS in neither of these did it give the Atty Gen'l carte Blanche authority. This authority was restricted to overseas only, FISA Judges prevail in the US regarding US citizens. (1)

I did not mention Pres Clinton when I said foreign policy was at fault. I do hold him to some degree of fault just like I do Presidents Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton and Bush. The issues you bring up are total speculation and the references of CBS and mediamatters, really. Why didn't you just reference the DNC. You seem to have a very biased view. (2)

Did I understand you correctly that you really believe that Bush stole the elections in 00 & 04 or was it written incorrectly. I just went and reread your point and I think I understand it correctly. If your one of those conspiracy freaks please tell me so we can end. (3) I thought by corresponding in this way I could actually expand my knowledge of politics and govt. not get into a sci-fi battle with someone that thinks he saw the Pres planting bombs in the towers the night before, blowing up the levies in New Orleans (4) and collapsing that bridge in Minn. (5)

Your revelation about guerrilla warfare, or a correct term should be counter insurgency. General Petraeus has been conducting precisely that for the past year, and lets hope that his victory in this matter (6) will take less time than the counter insurgency in Germany after WWII that no one mentions. (7)

Walt

R5

Walt,

(1) According to the bill at <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h110-3773> the Attorney General and Director of National Intelligence are the only two individuals that will review the applications. Here's what judges are permitted to review after the fact:

***SEC. 702 (h)(4)(C) STANDARDS FOR REVIEW-** A judge considering a petition to modify or set aside a directive may grant such petition only if the judge finds that the directive does not meet the requirements of this section, or is otherwise unlawful.*

This isn't much of a review. The definition of "lawful" is quite broad, with a target merely suspected to be foreign, rather than proven to be foreign.

(2) I was responding to the points you made and I mentioned Clinton merely because he was the most recent president before Bush. Yes, we can trace US conflict with Islamic extremists going way back, but the point I was making was that the September 11 attack was one that Bush made no apparent attempt to prevent. Yes, there may have been things he did in secret to try and prevent the attack, but investigative reporters have had several years to provide any evidence of that. No, we can't conclude absolutely and positively that Bush just sat around and twiddled his thumbs on that issue from January to September.

The mediamatters reference was made simply to substantiate the point I was making about the media. No need to follow the link if you're willing to take my word for it.

(3) No, my point was that even if one begins with the presumption that Bush stole the election, it doesn't follow that that's the sum total of all legitimate lefty objections to the Bush Administration.

(4) Hadn't heard that first theory. I had heard the theory that the levees in New Orleans were blown up. I can't think of any way in which one would prove that. Even if we suppose bombs were used, the rushing water would quickly obliterate all traces of them. I put both of these theories in the "fringe" basket.

(5) My point about the bridge in Minnesota was that trying to run as small a government as possible leads inevitably to collapses just like that. If one is overly concerned with saving taxpayers money, one is tempted to skimp and save on safety inspections or to defer needed repairs. One cannot have a small and cheap government AND have safe transportation infrastructure. No one that I've heard of has suggested that anyone sabotaged that bridge.

(6) I don't see a victory on that front at all. The US may do better or worse in phases, but the following two paragraphs from the Iranian "Press TV" website has some interesting statements from Ahmed Chalabi, the guy who was the first choice of the Bush Administration to run Iraq after the US invasion:

"The INC's Chalabi retorted that granting immunity to US military personnel from prosecution under Iraqi law is baldly unacceptable. 'The vast majority of Iraqi people and authorities oppose the security treaty and regard it as contradictory to Iraq's sovereignty and security.'

"Chalabi stated the treaty is counterproductive for Iraq in the long term and what the US is seeking is a binding bilateral agreement for the ongoing presence of its forces in Iraq whose UN mandate expires on December 31."

I see Iraqi nationalism as ultimately trumping the US presence in that country.

(7) Oh yeah, the "werewolves" idea? Yeah, I heard that was a complete invention.

Rich

R6

Walt,

I answered your question about judges and their involvement with FISA under the new bill, but as lefty commenters have pretty much ignored the issue (for the very good reason that, as I suggested and as the author points out in the article I reference, judges don't actually get to play much of a role under the new bill), I did a quick once-over analysis. Elliot Cohen does a much better and more thorough job at <http://www.buzzflash.com/articles/node/5539/print>

I presume that you stopped writing because I took the theory, that the New Orleans levees were blown, seriously enough to consider it in detail. This is a habit of mine. When someone suggested on a comment thread to a video that Code Pink had given \$60,000 to Iraqi insurgents, I asked for the link. It turned out to come from Free Republic (We call them "Freepers"), a notoriously unreliable source for news.

Rather than dismissing what the Freepers said outright, I took a look at the piece. Sure enough, it appeared that Code Pink did indeed send \$60,000 to a destination in Iraq and sure enough, the headline claimed they sent it to insurgents. But a careful look at what the article actually quoted Code Pink's

leader as saying showed that the purpose of the funds was for medical supplies for Iraqi civilians. I took a look at the date of the piece. It was October 2004 and the Second Battle of Fallujah had begun more than a month earlier, meaning there were no organized groups of insurgents to send the money to in any event.

I reported my findings to the comment thread and without anybody feeling that I had insulted them, the person who posted the information quickly dropped the subject and didn't mention it again.

I don't take the theory, that the levees of New Orleans were blown, seriously, but my preference is to show people why a theory is implausible rather than to say flat out that it's ridiculous.

Rich

BTW, I found a Reuters piece at

<http://tinyurl.com/6gfm7w>

that estimates that the US needs to spend about \$1 trillion to bring our transportation infrastructure back up to standards. This is not the result of any deliberate plan on anybody's part. This is the natural and unavoidable consequence of trying to limit government expenditures under the theory that we need a minimalist government. Some programs end up getting the short end of the stick and spending on bridge inspections is like spending on your car's transmission. It's a lot of money, but you can't wear it or eat it, you can simply do what you were doing before. Like bridge inspections, it can always be put off for a little while.

W5

Rich,

Today is the first day I have been able to sit at my desk. Bad back but getting better. Thanks to the greatest health system in the world. And some really great products of the pharmaceutical industry.

No I am not bothered by your comment on the levee. I thought that was an attempt at humor.

Rich your views are left first last and often and I am trying to figure out just how far left and maybe get an intervention going. My views are determined by a myriad of factors. But I do not investigate to only support my position, but to also see if I may be wrong and I am often wrong. I voted for Nixon, wore a leisure suit and root for the Eagles. The one trait that I have discovered about dyed in the wool liberals is that they seem to avoid anything that may interfere with their conclusion and definitely avoid listening to or supporting a different point of view. And they seem to go wherever it is necessary to prove their point

Do you read Trudy Rubin in the Inquirer? Her opinion of July 6, 08 titled "On talks, Iranians shift tone and tactics" was from the heart gushing of how the Iranians seem to have seen the light and want to play nice with everybody. Well, in the same issue on page A12 there was an item titled "Iran: No Change in Nuclear Policy" I'm not pointing out a mistake, but rather a reporter telling others what she

wants to happen because that is the conclusion she already came to that the Iranians are just misunderstood. Even though she leans left I read her because she is knowledgeable and spends a lot of time in the middle east. But you have to be able to distinguish between static and information.

Other cases where the far left will either squelch opposition or avoid facts in evidence are Sen Lieberman, Pres Reagan, economics, history, man made global warming er global warming er climate change (sorry I have difficulty keeping up the current PC phrase). Oh and then there is the "We will not raise taxes on the middle class but will let the Bush tax cuts expire on the dreaded rich" (no pun intended). This is a lot like "read my lips".

When news is biased in its presentation is it correct or only half the story. Rich, I do not mind viewing other points of view but I try to view points of view other than mine. Maybe just once in a while you should look to your right just to avoid a stiff neck.

I read the ref blog you sent, Buzzflash. A man on a mission to prove his conclusion.

I mean this man takes paranoia to a new level. Bush may use this authority to spy on the democrat candidate Sen. Obama? Could this be another example of conspiracy theory.

Defending the ethics of code pink is admirable, but code pink is as irrelevant as the aged hippies that make it up. Would you defend, the John Birch Society (another irrelevant group) with the same fervor.

Back is starting to hurt and the Phillies are starting to finally hit.

Walt

R7

Walt,

Whuuh? You mean yer a reg'lar human being with ordinary human frailties? Never woulda thunk it! I'll read through what you've written and respond further on.

Hope y'all get better!

Rich

R8

Walt,

1. I was a history major back in college and during the late 80s I had a boring secretarial job where I had plenty of time to read. I did readings on the Vietnam War, going through conservative, middle of the road and liberal books. I ended up with liberal conclusions because they answered various questions better than the other approaches did.

I did research on the abortion question and found that the feminist reading room provided better answers than the big city library did.

I look at the facts and evidence first. There are times when my liberal buddies and the lefty blogs are wrong, but they generally (Not always) take the same approach I do. They go where the evidence leads them. If we have assumptions that drive our research, we're usually (Again, not always) upfront about them. I don't avoid conservative materials, I just usually find that the liberals provide better answers.

2. Trudy Rubin's okay, but she ain't no Molly Ivins (Judith "Miss Manners" Martin is similarly marvelous, but she tackles manners, not politics). Nah, Abbie Hoffman was a hero of mine, but I'm generally not starry-eyed about anybody. I saw that Vladimir Putin was against the Iraq War just as a lot of us were, but I also noticed that Russia had considerable financial and oil interests in Iraq that would be (And have been) lost if the US invaded. The Iranians may have a point at times, but they're Iranians and we're Americans.

3. The Elder Bush (As opposed to the younger one in office now) was the one who said "Read my lips." He regretted that because higher taxes were necessary. The Younger Bush's tax cuts have hurt the economy. See one of CEPR's earliest studies comparing the two-decade period of the 1960s & the 1970s with the period of the 1980s & the 1990s at <http://tinyurl.com/5pb7q8>

Conservative economics have been ruinous for America. We desperately need to switch to a sound economic footing and yes, that means higher taxes.

4. I do. I check on what folks over there are thinking and saying.

5. I have absolutely zero faith in the good intentions of any political leader. Didn't trust Clinton, don't trust Bush and don't trust Obama either, though I support him for President. Of necessity, everything about what the warrantless wiretapping program is doing is a guess because it's all hidden away from public view. No, that fellow's conclusions can't be proven at this time because we simply don't have access to the evidence.

Folks may think our government is doing good, patriotic things behind those closed doors. They're certainly welcome to think so, but I respectfully refuse to share that view because, as I said, the whole point of democracy is that "we want to see the books."

6. I was using Code Pink as an example to make a point about evidence. If I had a similar example that involved the John Birch Society, I would unhesitatingly use them. I once read that the Christian Coalition made a very sensible use of their computer resources, so I've cited that example a number of times.

7. Enjoy! My 11-year-old niece knows how I feel about sports. My sister asked me if I wanted a hang out and watch football with them. I said "Yeah, I might do that." My niece said "Oh, I know why you want to watch, Uncle Rich, you just want to watch the cheerleaders." I was like "Well...er...um..."

Rich

W6

Rich,

You seem rather level headed with a strong tilt to the left. What do you say we find a political subject we can agree on and improve it. You know just two guys solving the problems of the world, instead of the long continuous diatribes of partisan politics.

You have the first serve if you choose to play.

Last minute thoughts that are totally biased;

yes, the Iggle's cheerleaders are interesting but they never show them enough.

Imbalance of trade and the declining dollar are a result of oil dependency which no economy can overcome.

Will the last home owner in Philadelphia be paying the total city debt in real estate taxes after everyone else has moved to suburbs.

Will Phila become a city of winners with its sports teams and if we do, how do we act?

If we continue exalting second place in our children will those who excell be considered the underachievers or will they just not get a trophy

Will the Democrat move to the suburbs improve the suburbs as the party improved the city.

Upscale restuarants when trying to improve the cheesesteak result in something that needs an ID card.

Should Photo-ID cards be issued to dead people to make it fair?

Walt

R9

Walt,
I'll give your proposal come thought, nothing comes to mind immediately.
Rich

R10

Walt,
I suppose if there's an immediate practical problem we're concerned with, it's how do we influence a presidential candidate after we've made it clear we're going to support his candidacy anyway? There's really no alternative to Obama as a presidential candidate at this point. (And no, as we derisively call him, "Saint" Ralph Nader is most definitely not an option), so short of threatening to somehow allow a McCain victory, how do we "steer" his campaign/administration, either now or after he occupies the Oval Office?
Back in the 60s, people developed the idea of "participatory democracy," but after writing a book on how it worked in practice, the author summarized how everybody defined the term and well...there were about as many definitions as there were practitioners.
What we clearly need is some intermediate method of guiding politicians, some way to push them here or there in between elections.
Rich

W7

Rich,

I thought you would have come up with something hard. I'll give it some thought, but my first thought would be Godfather II, Michael seemed to have influence with the Nevada senator. However, today that might be a vote getter.

Walt

R11

Walt,

Heh. Gotta say, I appreciated Tony Soprano after having watched the Godfather films. I'm like "Now, here's a 'hands-on' guy who gets down and supervises the job on a close, personal basis!" None a' this delegating the job so that he's sitting in an office far away from the action.

Rich

W8

Rich,

On a serious note, influencing a politician once he has your support is like locking the door after the robbery. The way we elect the Pres with the electoral collegemakes it impossible for the masses to have any influence at all, unless you controlled the delegates. But you were probably thinking smaller than Pres. Such as a congressman. The internet could be used as a block voter that could be big enough to have more influence than even the unions or the party bosses. And a congressman gets elected every two years and what is his chief concern? Getting re-elected. Take Ms Pelosi, she can't cave on the drilling issue. Her far left voters in her district will throw her out of office. Pelosi is totally controlled by a block of voters that she and the party carved out to ensure her re-elections.

The internet has been used to raise money (Obama did a great job). Now the real problem would be the voters lack of interest.

Washington & Oregon have mail in votes and are thinking of electronic voting through the internet. That is scary because I am sure the voters will far exceed the registration.

Phila and Chicago have had great influence over their elected officials, the party bosses rule with an iron fist.

Money and guaranteed votes are the only thing that gets the attention of politicians.

Back to the Pres. They all want a second term and they want a stacked congress. If your internet block threatened to give the house majority to the opposition, I suppose that would be a factor along with guarantying not to re-elect. Obama is being controlled by the far left as can be seen with his policy switching on Iraq. He gives a speech which they do not like then he retracts and goes back to the get out now mantra. It is clear that he has changed his position on Iraq and is leaning to the right. In a

couple of weeks he and McCain will be almost simpatico. His speech today was scary. Where will he get the money to double foriegn aid and why would he want to. Obama's economic policy needs work, he sounds like a High Schooler running for class pres and promising no homework if elected.

A long term solution would be a third party. This would reduce the math needed for election and give more influence hopefully to the people. England and Israel have a no confidence vote for a sitting head of state.

Short of something illegal I am at a loss.

Power corrupts and hopefully absolute power never is issued.

Tony Soprano's family was out of control, but he did control the politicians.

R12

Walt,

Yes, I was speaking of the President and yes, you've confirmed my suspicion that there is no easy, obvious answer.

I'm quite puzzled by your assertion that Obama is controlled by the left. If he was controlled why did he punk us on FISA? The commentary on the liberal blogs is that we understand why politicians "tack to the center" once their nomination is assured, but that Obama has moved in an alarmingly quick manner. He threatens to confirm everything that Bush said in 2004 about our politicians being "finger-to-the-wind" pols that cynically change their positions at a moment's notice.

But with all that, I'm very unclear as to how he's changed his position on Iraq. Seems to me he's adopted some very gradual changes in position, but I don't see any "about-faces" there. He thought invading was a bad idea to begin with.

Where to get the money for social spending? That's easy, we're spending vastly too much on useless items like the Star Wars/Missile Defense/SDI/etc program. Cancelling that won't provide enough, but the US can't spend on useless crap like that and then complain there's no money available.

Rich

W9

Rich,

Your right (oops I mean correct) that he has moved right and his position is 180 from the position of the troops will begin to come home the day I take office. What do you mean gradually, those in his camp have the bends. I believe he is learning and that he is one that had never experienced the US without his liberal influences and that crack about us ens in Pa. is something he believed but does not believe now. The learning process.

I wasn't talking about social programs (Democrat base assurance) he is to double foreign aid. For who for what (famous quote from as important intellectual). It does not work now so does he want to double its ineffectiveness. Foreign aid to me is a US Navy warship at its ready to protect and defend any nation that needs it, that's foreign aid.

Obama's prewar position on Iraq is irrelevant because his opinion was just that an opinion of the uninformed. His view was part of his liberal bias and had nothing to do with his "Commander in Chief" ability. He opposed the "Surge" also. Its like playing roulette, if you keep betting black you win about half the time. Please try to be somewhat objective.

Walt

R12

Walt,

So you're saying Obama is "suffering from liberal bias" (Sure, fine, okay, I'll go with that wording), but on the other hand you're saying he's changed his position.

There's a copy of his latest speech at

<http://www.boomantribune.com/story/2008/7/15/12324/8622>

I'm not aware that his position has fundamentally changed. He's promising to get the troops out in 16 months. That's not a new position. He's said that before. It would be bias on my part to advocate a new position. It's not bias to say that his position hasn't changed (It may count as lack of research on my part or willful blindness, but not bias).

I believe foreign aid takes up about 1% of our total budget and that the bulk of it goes to Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel & Egypt. Yeah, I'm not too impressed with the results of giving money to foreign countries. It's always appeared to me that making policy changes is more beneficial than just throwing money around.

Rich

W10

Rich,

I did not say he is suffering, I said that his opinion on prewar Iraq was not based on any fact, but was his belief, which happened to be the liberal mantra, "Peace not War". You do not get points for that, which you tried to grant.

His position has changed to the position of get out based on facts on the ground, he believes that the surge has reduced violence from out in 16 months (16 came after a debate in which Biden said it was impossible to get them out in a shorter time, which Obama and Clinton were trying to say within a much much shorter time.) no matter what, and he had stated that the surge was not working then is said it was working because of Democrat dissention here at home. And "facts on the ground" was a Bush position prior to the surge which was strongly criticized by the Dems.

Don't get me wrong, I see nothing wrong here as he is getting closer to my position. It just would be better if he came out and said that due to information not had previously, my position has changed, instead of trying to make believe he has been consistent. But if you did not notice, I guess the rest of his voters don't either.

I did not accuse you of bias, I asked you to be objective in your giving Obama credit for him prewar stance.

I am a subscriber on Obama's website and get all the speeches.

Walt

R13

Walt,

So you're saying Obama once had a much shorter time period in which to withdraw troops and now advocates 16 months. I was just trying to figure out what you talking about when you stated that he had a "complete reversal of position." That sounded to me like he was in favor of McCain's position that was (perhaps unfairly) characterized as "100 years."

Sorry, but when you use vague language, that causes confusion in your reader/listener. Yes, it DID sound like you were saying that I didn't understand due to my being liberal.

Rich

W11

Rich

One point at a time. You said that Obama was against the war from the beginning and thus credit him with having good judgment.

My point is that Obama's philosophy is liberal and has been influenced by the "peace not war" crowd at Harvard. His opinion was not based on any prewar facts such as the Pres and Congress had available to them. Thus the gambling analogy.

I cannot give him any points for his prewar position.

R14

Walt,

Very well, one point at a time it is.

What exactly were these oh-so-critical pre-war "facts" you speak of? There was a lot of crap that was gleaned through torture, where the victim said whatever he thought his tormentors wanted to hear.

Sure, there was information about Niger selling yellowcake uranium to Iraq, but that was based on a set of badly-forged documents.

There was the guy named "Curveball," who made up all KINDS of fairy stories.

President Bush tried to tell gruesome horror stories about human-rights violations, but quickly stopped doing that when Human Rights Watch said "Ya know, these are really interesting stories, but what's your source for them?"

Judy Miller of the NY Times of course told us all sorts of interesting tales too, but none of that turned out to be true, either.

So I'd like to know what you mean by "crucial facts that Obama was unaware of."

Rich

[Lengthy period of time here]

W12

Rich,

Sorry for the delay in getting back but I was so disappointed with your liberal (tell me what I want to hear to prove my point) bias, that I had to take a small vacation.

Where do I start. Lets go to 1998 one year b/4 Rafid Ahmed Alwan defected and I quote

"If Saddam rejects peace and we have to use force our purpose is clear. We want to seriously diminish the threat posed by Iraq's WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION PROGRAM"

Bill Clinton 2/17/98

Rafid escaped Iraq and went to Germany and insisted that he not meet with US agents, all info received by US about Rafid was obtained through German communications.

He was only one source, more or less a grain of sand on the beach. Do you really think that this source is the reason for going to war? 60 minutes did and created an entire show around this one source. Another oddity is his code name "curveball", which is a common street term for a tall tale or a lie. Don't you have to question this or at least ask who gave him the name? If it was the CIA, then that would indicate that they did not deem him credible, just by his code name.

To me the "Slam Dunk" comment made by the head of CIA, after all intel was reviewed and the Pres asked for cia's comment, this was the nail in Saddam's coffin.

British intel came to the same conclusions about the wmd. that Germany, France and the US did without using any intel gleaned from Iraqi exiles. British intel focused on high level agents.

Are you for real, gruesome tales? Are you immune to the atrocities done by Saddam. Have you refused to acknowledge the mass graves? The gruesome tales told by Pres Bush paled in the reality of facts born out since the invasion. Saddam was hanged for crimes against humanity.

The Niger thing was generated by British intel and Bush used it in a state of the union speech. That was more or less a mistake, although a minor one that the left has jumped on. It was blown up by the left for the left, again a piece of info. Don't get into the Wilsons. They are not what they seem unless you think they are money grubbing attention seekers looking for love in all the wrong places.

Your torture rhetoric is a bumper sticker and I am disappointed that you would quote a bumper sticker or a dem talking point.

Clinton was quoted in various speeches and in state of the union as saying "Saddam a threat to the world", advocates a new Iraqi govt and best of all "and mark my words, he will develop weapons of mass destruction, he will deploy them and he will use them."

In my opinion, if Clinton was elected to a third term he would have been forced to take out Saddam with or without 9/11. Also there are quotes galore from Pelosi, Daschle, Albright and others that are extremely hawkish regarding WMD, Saddam and the use of force.

Lets not forget that the war was approved by all, then vilified by the left when things turned bad. Obama was quoted on Aug 3, 2004 (before the convention) as saying, there is not much difference between Bush and Kerry on Iraq and my position and George Bush, the difference is who's executing policy. A perfectly correct political comment. And it was made two years after his political anti-war speech made to who? an anti-war group.

Now in conclusion I leave you with one question concerning Bush's war (another bumper sticker)
---Why did every ones belief become one man's lie after no wmd was found?

Let me answer. It was politically expedient. How can the left continually say two and two is five one day and six another without being challenged?

Walt

PS 1. As for Judy Miller, I don't believe everything I read in the paper.

2. They were maketing the war. A fact, yet the left is appalled that anyone would market anything in Washington.

R15

Walt,

Okay, I saw this sentence and immediately slapped myself on the wrist as I realized that I hadn't made my point clearly enough.

Another oddity is his code name "curveball", which is a common street term for a tall tale or a lie. Don't you have to question this or at least ask who gave him the name? If it was the CIA, then that would indicate that they did not deem him credible, just by his code name.

So your point is that Rafid Ahmed "Curveball" Alwan was not a credible source?

Well...yeah. That's what I thought was clear. 60 Minutes did a whole hour's show on this guy because, while he clearly wasn't the exclusive covert source of information, he was obviously a major source for the Bush Administration and for the NY Times' Judy Miller. The fact that you yourself didn't put too much stock in her reporting is kinda beside the point as many people did.

The point about Plame/Wilson/Niger is related. Again, the Bush Administration put a great deal of stock into the allegation that Iraq tried to purchase some yellowcake. How would Niger have gotten those multiple tons of uranium past the international consortium that controlled the uranium mines? How could they have gotten perhaps a hundred heavy trucks over the desert without anyone noticing? Just as with "Curveball," the Bush people were relying on extremely poor intel.

Your point about "Slam Dunk" is accurate, but remember, Tenet made that statement AFTER Bush made his big, dramatic speech to the UN saying Iraq was a grave and growing danger. Tenet's only alternative was to say "Yup, you sure got yourself in a bind. You're bumming, dude!"

"Torture rhetoric" - I was thinking specifically of the destroyed videotapes of the Abu Zubayda interrogation. Zubayda was apparently a source of a great deal of information, but when Congress learned that the videotapes of his interrogation were destroyed, the suspicion was, quite rightly, that all of the information allegedly obtained from him was worthless because it was obtained under great duress. Only on "24" and similar fictional representations does torture produce the truth.

As to the "Everybody knew Iraq had WMD" argument, I did a search on that phrase and found:

So then, what of the notion that the French, the Germans, the UK, the UN, Democrats, and so on all "knew" Saddam had weapons of mass destruction? "Everybody" did not "know" Saddam had WMD ready to use. The WMD America helped Saddam to acquire had long-since been destroyed, as the Hussein Kamel debriefing showed eight years earlier (and as was known to the CIA). Most of the rest of the intelligence had collapsed or was collapsing by early 2003, and all of these countries and the UN knew *that* and warned US officials about it.

<http://deepblade.net/journal/2005/11/everyone-thought-saddam-had-wmd.html>

The point is, you said Obama's "opinion was not based on any prewar facts such as the Pres and Congress had available to them. Thus the gambling analogy." But if those people were relying on crap information, then what good does it do to have all of these wonderful, marvelous, glitzy secret, covert sources? You may feel that all of their wrong information was merely the result of errors, but I see it as a situation where President Bush really, really WANTED to launch that war. When he and his people ran into inconvenient facts that said there wasn't such a problem there, they brushed that information aside.

President Clinton said there was a serious problem back in 1998. Check out the statement by the UN weapons inspector ElBaradei:

"... during the past four years, at the majority of Iraqi sites, industrial capacity has deteriorated substantially, due to the departure of the foreign support that was often present in the late 1980s, the departure of large numbers of skilled Iraqi personnel in the past decade, and the lack of consistent maintenance by Iraq of sophisticated equipment. At only a few inspected sites involved in industrial

research, development and manufacturing have the facilities been improved and new personnel been taken on. This overall deterioration in industrial capacity is naturally of direct relevance to Iraq's capability for resuming a nuclear weapons programme."
<http://www.un.org/News/dh/iraq/elbaradei-7mar03.pdf>

So yes, there WAS a problem back in 1998. By 2003, not so much. ElBaradei doesn't rule out the possibility of there being weapons entirely, that's why we did a thorough inspection that ended around January 2004, but the probability was vanishingly small and we simply don't have the resources to go charging after every possible threat in the world.

Are you immune to the atrocities done by Saddam. Have you refused to acknowledge the mass graves?

Nope, that's why we called the guy an evil dictator. Our position was never that Hussein was a nice fellow who was simply misunderstood. The point was that there was no need to launch a war that's cost hundreds of thousands of lives and has displaced millions. Whatever he did, the evil suffered by the Iraqi people as a direct result of the invasion has been far worse.

Lets not forget that the war was approved by all, then vilified by the left when things turned bad.

Nah. Democrats went along with the war because they thought that was the way the wind was blowing. Citizens from "The Left" never approved of the war and criticized it from day one.

Rich

W13

Rich,

Please read what you wrote, because if you believe it, totally and without question, there is no point in continuing the discussion.

Better to torture 1000 terrorist suspects than have harm come to 1 innocent. You would be the first to throw the rope over the tree if you found out the info was attainable before the disaster. People do not give it up just by saying please. Of course I am not the total expert that you claim to be.

Please tell me who or what is the "We" you are always referring to?

Walt

R16

Walt,

In the third to last paragraph, I stated that "we called Saddam Hussein an evil dictator," is that the "we" you're speaking of? "We" means the American public in general, but I was specifically referring to the people that are to the left of the Democratic party. No one that I'm aware of ever romanticized Hussein, no one said "Aw, he's a great guy, he's just misunderstood."

Now, I'm fully aware that conservatives constantly, neverendingly, continually accused us of being "Objectively pro-Saddam" and the like. That was always more true in their minds than anywhere out here in the real world.

Someone challenged me on the "torture 1000 guilty but include one innocent," "risk all to save a few," etc. I thought about it and decided I was obliged to come down upon the side of "better to let guilty people go free than to imprison innocents." For us to have a society that's allegedly safe from all danger, but where the authorities are free to run roughshod over our rights and liberties is simply not a life that's worth living. Back during the 1930s, the Soviet Union allowed their police to torture people for information. Torturing people very quickly became a substitute for doing any sort of real investigating. This happened because they were human beings, it will very quickly happen here because, you guessed it, we're human beings.

Like I said about the Ben Franklin phrase, I take him quite seriously.

Am I always right? Well, I've always been in the habit of saying things in a very forthright manner. If you have evidence to the contrary, step on up! Let's hear it! If ya think I'm wrong, make your case for your side of it. I'm always willing to hear people out.

Rich

W14

Rich,

While your willing to listen, you will never be swayed from your rigid position because you and the "we" are correct and everyone else is wrong and should be reprogrammed to think with the collective's mind. That is why "the we" shouts down thoughts that are anti "we".

The "we" looks forward to a world of one thought. But it is the Eden to the far left that can never work because there will always be free thought that will stand in the way. The power of good. The "we" always underestimates it.

To be left of the democrat party is to be off the edge. Just how much government will make you happy? And is too much govt enough?

Why do you persist in believing in the evil of man instead of the good. If you truly believe that man will only do evil with any kind of power, isn't it also true that the opposite could occur and really bum you out.

As far as Saddam goes, the powers to be, do not really care what you or the "we" think, they did what they thought had to be done. They did it without remorse and without the daily finger to the wind. You see that a democracy is growing in Iraq and your mad that the damn thing might be a success, because you know that the only group that lives in the past is the "we". The rest of us move on our stupid way and continue to confound the "we". But you, R Feingold, Pelosi, Boxer, Schumer, Hagel (the latest convert) and the rest of the "we" that are the true believers in the Eden that could be, will continue to believe in the evil of man and your secular right to know what is best for the unwashed. How magnificent.

McCain as President will hurt the "we", because he unbalances the court with five or six strict constructionists and that scares the hell out of your cause. The "we" has worked so hard and so long that they can almost taste the sweet victory. But a conservative court would really give the cause a setback. The "we" is rather like a terrorist group who does its work with intellectual cunning. First infiltrate the unions then the school system. Fill the young with the message then let them go forth into govt service and do the bidding of the "we". But all the work has been spoiled by a dumb Texan and could be crushed by a 70 year old who will stack the court. Sounds like a B movie.

Your on the wrong side Rich.

Walt

R17

Walt,

I'll read over the rest of this and respond, but let me just say that citing cliches is a way to get absolutely nowhere when one is arguing with me. It may make you happy to cite a whole bunch of chestnuts, but the way to convince me of anything is to show me in detail why my positions are wrong. People refer to that as "getting into the weeds," but that's the only kind of argument that convinces me of anything.

Rich

W15

Rich,

Some of those cliches I just made up. There were no facts contained in my note to be discussed or intended to be discussed. There were no debating techniques or argumentative twists. It was just opinion.

And to be truthful I do not want to get into the weeds. I feel sorry for you in the fact that you cannot be happy with the USA as it stands. Of course we all can make it better but I am happy with what I have while making it better. Obama had it wrong, your the one who is bitter you and all the others who are left of the Democrat party.

Don't you get tired of looking for shadows believing in conspiracies? Rich, they really did walk on the moon and 9/11 was not a Bush created conspiracy to go to war.

Walt

R18

Walt,

Went out to see the latest "Batman." Kewl stuff! Too bad about Heath Ledger. The world lost a real talent.

The "hive mind" - As I said, tossing a bunch of unsubstantiated comments at me without proving what you say leaves me at the end going "Well, that was interesting, but I didn't learn anything." It's not a matter of making a special effort, it's a matter of writing in a certain manner. My father did 20 years in an engineering firm after doing 20 years in the Navy. He once told me that "When you get a group of people around a table without a clear agenda, they sit around talking (*ugh*) philosophy! Then they sit there at the end of the time they had allotted for the meeting with nothing down on paper, with nothing having been accomplished." I feel the same way about reading a string of unproven statements. One of the better and more popular lefty bloggers goes by the name of "Digby" and while she has a few other bloggers contributing pieces on her site, she does most of the writing. Digby begins each piece by making a clear statement as to what it is that she's setting out to prove and then by producing evidence that proves what she's asserting. Her pieces are characterized by lots and lots of indented quotes and links and the occasional diagram.

Right-wing blogs, on the other hand, tend to say "Well, I think.." rather than to cite any real source or they just cite each other rather than by getting information from outside sources. I find that they'll cite "Our Glorious Leader" i.e. President Bush or some other authority figure when they really feel the need for proof.

No, a world of "one thought" has no appeal for us. Heck, I thought dealing with lefties was described as "herding cats." What was the ol' Will Rogers quote? A lady asked him if he "belonged to an organized political party," he responded "Oh, heck no Ma'am, I'm a Democrat!"

Now, A government that was more concerned about what society needed as opposed to being run as cheaply as possible, now that's an idea that people on my side of the aisle can get behind. As I said, the collapse of the I-87 bridge over the Mississippi was precisely what one can expect when people sit around bellyaching about how much government costs as opposed to saying "What do we NEED to have our government do?" I and my buddies have zero problems having Republicans speaking up from the minority as we don't want to be spending any more than we really need to be spending. Certainly, somebody should be watching the collective wallet.

"People behaving better than expected" - Pessimists are the most jolly and cheerful people around. We are delighted when people display ordinary competence precisely because we don't expect it. No, if people perform as angels, that's a wonderful thing. It's simply not good public policy to EXPECT people to act as angels. Someone had a good description of detective work: "Something happens and we go around to everyone we think did it. We get their denials. Then the real work of being detectives begins as we check out their denials."

"...they did what they thought had to be done" - That's a matter of interpretation. Again, it's what I call an unsubstantiated statement and obviously I disagree with your take on it. I looked at the whole string of the reasons they gave and decided there were far too many loose ends that come with the theory that they were making an honest, good-faith effort to do anything that was honorable, decent or reasonable. In Iraq, we see a place that's a bit quieter than last year, but that's partly because the vigorous "ethnic cleansing" campaigns that the Shiites were carrying out in cities like Baghdad (There's no reason to believe Americans consciously or deliberately enabled it) is now largely complete. Baghdad used to be 50%-50% Sunni-Shiite, now it's 15%-85%. We see zero evidence that "a democracy is growing." If one does, wonderful! If it doesn't, it's because the chess-playing rug merchants of the Arab world snookered the short-term-thinking, checkers-playing Americans once again.

"strict constructionists" - Oh please! You believe in that "Originalist" propaganda? I'm not going to even bother getting into that garbage.

And no, we don't believe Bush is dumb. A few years back, someone was putting together a joke book on how Bush mangled the English language and noticed something very interesting. Whenever Bush spoke of positive things, health, education, peace, etc., he absolutely trashed the mother tongue. When he spoke of death, destruction, bloodshed and killing, his language became very clear and precise. No, Bush isn't dumb.

Rich

W16

Rich,

I'll have to leave you alone with your paranoia for a couple of weeks. I am going to Fla.

Keep the faith while I am gone. Oops sorry you have no faith, well anyway do the best that you

can.

Walt

R19

Aye, have a good time in FL.
Rich

Some thoughts:

In W14, Walt says: *Why do you persist in believing in the evil of man instead of the good. If you truly believe that man will only do evil with any kind of power, isn't it also true that the opposite could occur and really bum you out.*

The people that I'm in agreement with are actually America's Founding Fathers. If one looks carefully at how US law works and how the Constitution is constructed, our Founding Fathers very much believed that people who are not restrained by competing power centers will do terrible things. The fact that the Bush Administration is evil was entirely predictable from the vantage point of 200+ years ago and in fact, was predicted and our laws were written to anticipate and to try and head off precisely this clusterf*** of a presidency. The two major problems are that the Democratic Party is besotted with DLC theories of "Triangulation" and easy money from wealthy interests and that our press corps is a corrupt and decadent institution.

In W14: *Your torture rhetoric is a bumper sticker and I am disappointed that you would quote a bumper sticker or a dem talking point.*

So, let's examine this. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia [spoke of torture](#):

In response to a question about the "ticking bomb" scenario, Justice Scalia says that the 8th Amendment ban on "cruel and unusual punishment" does not necessarily apply to torture because torture for information is not "punishment." He then goes on to say that he thinks it would be crazy not to use at least some force to stop an attack on an American city (he picks Los Angeles). The level of force that Justice Scalia thinks pretty clearly permissible is a "slap in the face" and also, when asked by the interviewer, Alan Dershowitz's proposed sterile needle under the fingernail. Justice Scalia goes on to say that hard questions are posed by substantially greater force under conditions of lesser certainty.

The "ticking bomb" scenario and "an attack on an American city" are very clearly take from the *fictional* TV show "24" as opposed to any genuine, documented facts about real cases.

Bush himself cited the Zubayda case and failed to refer to a single point learned that US interrogators weren't already aware of. [Andrew Sullivan](#) goes over this and notes that:

I've learned, alas, that this president is not credible in testifying to the details of his own war

crimes. Recall the massive discrepancies between what the Bush administration first conceded went on at Abu Ghraib and what the photographs subsequently revealed.

I cited real, actual, documented facts. Yet, according to Walt, my “*torture rhetoric is a bumper sticker.*”

W3 has an interesting view of the Bush Administration that permeates Walt's view of how they go about viewing reality, how they go about discerning the facts: *Bush made mistakes, but he was pursuing a policy of reality, not some notion that we must all hold hands and dream of Eden.*

How realistic is this view? [Jane Mayer](#), discussing her new book *The Battle for a Country's Soul*, remarks:

When warned that these policies [on torture] were unlawful and counterproductive, they ignored the experts and made decisions outside of ordinary bureaucratic channels, and often outside of the public's view. Rather than risking the possibility of congressional opposition, they classified vital interpretations of law as top secret. No one knows to this day how many more secret opinions the Bush Justice Department has produced. Far from tempering these policies over time, they marginalized and penalized those who challenged their *idées fixes*. Because the subject matter was shrouded in claims of national security, however, much of the internal dissent remained hidden.

In other words, the Bush people made decisions in a manner that in no way, shape or form resembled the cold, dispassionate, sober analysis that Walt sees them as performing and indeed, it would have been nice had they been doing things in the way that Walt sees them as doing.

And, oooh!!! W11 got me **really** annoyed: *[Obama's] opinion was not based on any prewar facts such as the Pres and Congress had available to them. Thus the gambling analogy.*

Obviously, my own opinion had far more in common with Obama's than it had with Bush's or with any of the Congresspeople who had access to classified info. As such, I took this comment very personally. I was very interested to see that Walt was completely unable to answer my objections to the statement. Clearly, if I were a Congressperson who was relying on the President and his people to inform me accurately, I would have been very disappointed. Keep in mind, especially, the passage I quoted in R15:

... during the past four years, at the majority of Iraqi sites, industrial capacity has deteriorated substantially, due to the departure of the foreign support that was often present in the late 1980s, the departure of large numbers of skilled Iraqi personnel in the past decade, and the lack of consistent maintenance by Iraq of sophisticated equipment. At only a few inspected sites involved in industrial research, development and manufacturing have the facilities been improved and new personnel been taken on. This overall deterioration in industrial capacity is naturally of direct relevance to Iraq's capability for resuming a nuclear weapons programme.

Notice that ALL of ElBaradei's information here is public knowledge. Nothing here is secret and it's very, very relevant to the question at hand. How important is it to have secret information? How much should we take secret information into account when making real-world decisions? Clearly, we want our government people to have the best information possible, but it's a bad idea to rely on secret information too heavily. Judith Miller of the NY Times relied on the source called “Curveball” and look where it got her.

Is it worth it to carry on long conversations with the opposition? I think I cleared up some of Walt's misconceptions. I was pretty amazed to see how besotted with Fox News/Republican rhetoric he was. Did I really learn anything? Not really. I was expecting him to provide evidence so as to correct misconceptions and misunderstandings on my part. Instead, I was treated to more and more rhetoric and misconceptions on his part. I guess these conversations can work if both persons are on the same track and have pretty similar ideas as to what they're trying to accomplish.