

# Trading Places

How to rekindle conversation between Left and Right

By John Zmirak

I REMEMBER WHEN liberals and conservatives used to be able to talk to each other. Sure, liberals had an important advantage, since they controlled most of the prestigious media. On the other hand, we conservatives had logic, tradition, and most of the facts on our side—which pretty much leveled the playing field. I was perfectly comfortable as a teenager taking up petitions for Ronald Reagan and ringing doorbells for the Right-to-Life Party candidate for NYC mayor. While it wasn't easy being the loudest (and almost the only public) conservative at Yale in the 1980s, I felt I had the Truth on my side—and was constantly subjected to criticism from the Left, which honed my ideas and arguments.

Things are different now. Those who call themselves conservatives have entire TV networks and chains of talk-radio stations on their side. They are able to preach to the choir—much as Pacifica Radio, National Public Radio, or campus newspapers in the Ivy League always have on the Left. Today's self-styled conservatives can go for months without encountering an opposing opinion—and if they happen to hit one, there are hundreds of blogs ready to dismiss the information or arguments they encountered as toxic byproducts of the "Mainstream Media" or "MSM." Likewise, the Left has plenty of comfy sandboxes where it can play, untroubled by alien ideas.

Indeed, there is little overlap between the increasingly polarized extremes of American discourse. The Left and Right

are barely on speaking terms. You might be pardoned for believing they live on different planets. For the sake of keeping the peace, and establishing inter-planetary harmony, I'd like to propose the following thought experiment. Let's play "Pretend." (This is gonna be fun, kids!)

Progressives, let's pretend that every single one of those fetuses aborted in America was an Iraqi civilian, killed by George W. Bush's failed policies.

Conservatives, let's imagine that each of those Iraqi civilians killed by George W. Bush's failed policies was a tiny, innocent fetus.

I told you this would be fun! Let's try again:

Progressives, every time you complain about the "Christian Right," just

tion to protect us against white terrorists like Timothy McVeigh. Would you call reporters "traitors" for covering it?

Progressives, imagine if instead of fossil fuels poisoning the atmosphere that your children will have to breathe, that it was porn.

Conservatives, imagine if the cause of global warming weren't the use of big old American-made Humvees and SUVs but acts of sodomy. Would you be out there trying to do something about it?

Progressives, pretend that every time Madonna stages a mock crucifixion on stage to sell tickets to her shows, instead she's appearing in blackface.

Conservatives, imagine that every innocent person who gets executed in America is a cute little blonde girl murdered by Muslims.

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once plug in the "Jewish Left." Sounds kind of offensive, doesn't it?

Conservatives, imagine that it had been Arabs, instead of Americans, who killed 200,000 civilians in Hiroshima to save the lives of their soldiers. Then it would have been an act of terrorism.

Progressives, imagine if George W. Bush were using force trying to spread feminism instead of capitalism. Would you still protest his wars?

Conservatives, imagine if it were Bill Clinton trying to suspend the Constitu-

Progressives, pretend that every illegal immigrant who crosses the border is a scab crossing a picket line.

Conservatives, imagine if every scab crossing a picket line were an illegal immigrant crossing the Rio Grande.

Progressives, imagine if Islamic extremists promoting theocracy around the world were Baptist or Catholic instead, trying to impose Christianity.

Conservatives, imagine if the Arab Lobby dominated our Mideast policy—thanks to the support of preachers like

Pat Robertson—and was able to destroy any politician in America who dared to criticize it.

Progressives, imagine if the Hollywood Ten, and all those blacklisted screenwriters, had been shilling for Hitler instead of Stalin. Would you still admire them for sticking to their principles?

Conservatives, let's pretend that every time the U.S. government uses force to topple a foreign regime and impose our system on the country, that it's an act of Big Government engaging in social engineering—like busing schoolkids for the sake of integration.

Progressives, imagine if in every instance in history where Christians were murdered by revolutionaries (from the French Revolution up through the Spanish Civil War), it were Jews or Tutsis or Bosnians instead. Would you still wear that funky little red star cap or that Che Guevara t-shirt?

Conservatives, let's pretend that the U.S. just outright stole Hawaii and Puerto Rico, the way Saddam Hussein stole Kuwait.

Progressives, imagine that stem-cell research was a plot by wealthy pharmaceutical companies to get the government to fund their labs in the hope that some day Third World women would sell their eggs or embryos, so that rich white people could live an extra ten years or so.

Conservatives, imagine if all those Christians driven out of Iraq and made homeless by the war in Lebanon were parishioners at your local church.

Both progressives and conservatives: imagine you were to apply the same standards to your own partisans and pet causes that you apply to the other side. Imagine how confusing life would get. ■

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### **The White House has overcome resistance from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and has ordered plans to attack Iran after the November congressional elections.**

President Bush has made it clear, both publicly and privately, that Iran will not be allowed to develop a nuclear-weapons capability and that he intends to take direct action, whatever the consequences would be. It is well understood at the White House that if a naval and air assault is required in lieu of effective international sanctions that modify Iranian behavior there will be severe damage from Iranian retaliation. The U.S. Navy has been tasked with developing contingency plans to keep the Straits of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf open while Air Force planners have been tasked to destroy presumed nuclear sites and to cripple Tehran's offensive capabilities.



### **Someone is also orchestrating a press campaign using fabricated news items to heighten concerns about Iran's nuclear program.**

Manucher Ghorbanifar, an Iranian arms dealer involved in Iran/Contra and a close friend of leading neoconservative Michael Ledeen, was apparently one source of false information published in the Aug. 6 article in the *Sunday Times* of London. The article stated that Iran was clandestinely seeking to obtain uranium from the Congo. While it was true that a shipment of illicitly mined uranium ore had been intercepted last year, the Iranian connection was a complete fabrication and a clumsy one at that since Iran has its own uranium mines. The information was apparently provided by Ghorbanifar to the Pentagon's Iranian Directorate and from there it was somehow obtained by the *Times*. Another article in the *Sunday Times* of Sept. 3 describes how the Ukrainian security services provided Iran with intermediate-range missiles that are capable of carrying nuclear weapons. The transfer reportedly took place in 2004 and was facilitated by a local mafia boss. As Iran already has such missiles, developed with the help of North Korea, and lacks the warheads, the report has no credibility. The article cites no corroborative details and no names of individuals involved, which has raised the suspicion that it too is a fabricated effort to buttress criticism of Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program. It is possibly part of a disinformation operation by Israel's Mossad or by the Pentagon. Perhaps not coincidentally, the *Sunday Times* is owned by Rupert Murdoch, who also owns the neoconservative house organ *The Weekly Standard*.



### **President Bush's Sept. 7 speech on secret CIA prisons cited a number of dubious cases where torture had allegedly produced information that "saved lives."**

Per Bush, one Abu Zubaydah, "who had received training on how to resist interrogation," was on the receiving end of CIA "alternative procedures" that forced him to reveal information that "identified" fellow terrorist Ramzi bin Shibh. The only problem in what is otherwise a rousing tale is that bin Shibh was well known both to the intelligence community and the media long before Zubaydah was captured. Zubaydah also reportedly has the mental capacity of a retarded child, making one wonder exactly what sort of interrogator working for what kind of government would be willing to subject him to torture.

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