

At Least One of Us Has Gone Mad

We knew Matthew Parris when he was still fairly sane...

Better than sane. His extraordinary political perceptiveness, his personal and intellectual integrity, his kindness and his humane, libertarian instincts made him first a Conservative MP whom one could unashamedly support, and then arguably one of the greatest columnists ever. About a decade ago, we were on the same side, or so it seemed.

Not any more. Not for a long time.

At some point he seemed to start losing it. To be fair, he has written excellent articles on some subjects quite **recently**, but war is not one of them. He opposed NATO's military intervention in Kosovo, and the liberation of Afghanistan from the Taliban and Al Qaeda. In a December, 2001 **article** which still seems germane and true, Henry Porter wrote:

A little under two months ago the Times columnist Matthew Parris put the hawks on notice. In the **Spectator** he declared his deep misgivings about the war, and wrote that he hoped that, if the Afghan adventure ended, like Vietnam, in palpable humiliation, those who had argued for the war against terrorism would be man enough to admit they were wrong.

Well, it hasn't ended like Vietnam; in fact the result has been a complete vindication of the plans devised by the Pentagon, of the Bush administration's resolve and of Tony Blair's support. Mr Parris has yet to concede that he and other prominent doves were wrong but while we wait, it's worth recalling another sentence in his column which captures much of the venom that existed between the two camps during the jittery weeks of autumn: " But they (the hawks) will know who they are, and we can guess who they are: the people who went the extra mile, and urged the troops the extra mile, towards the battle-front, and who did so not because they had to but as a matter of personal judgment and moral choice."

That is exactly right. Every journalist, academic and expert called upon in September to write about or debate what should happen had to make a difficult personal

judgment. But it was not just the hawks who made a choice. The doves did too, and although at the time it seemed a safe bet that to opt for peaceful means in Afghanistan was to claim a kind of de facto high ground, it turned out to be the less courageous choice and now demonstrably the wrong one.

To say that Matthew is firmly against the coalition action in Iraq would be an egregious understatement. In his March 29th, 2003 article in **The Times**, he writes:

I am not afraid that this war will fail. I am afraid that it will succeed.

The title of the article is: "Are we witnessing the madness of Tony Blair?" But who is the madman here? Oh! The irony of it all! To quote Matthew's opening paragraph:

Most of us have experienced the discomfort of watching a friend go off the rails. At first his oddities are dismissed as eccentricities. An absurd assertion, a lunatic conviction, a sudden enthusiasm or unreasonable fear, are explained as perhaps due to tiredness, or stress, or natural volatility. We do not want to face the truth that our friend has cracked up. Finally we can deny it no longer and then it seems so obvious: the explanation, in retrospect, of so much we struggled to reconcile.

UPDATE: No surprise here.

Sun, 04/06/2003 - 04:35 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Insanity

Interesting how war has a habit of polarizing opinion into the good guys and the bad guys.... Tony Blair's come along great, IMO.

Bill Henderson

by a reader on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 12:30 | [reply](#)

Matthew Parris

Interesting.

I recall reading Matthew Parris years ago in the "Spectator" and liking him.

Now he's become a typically European envious little raging impotent.

by a reader on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 22:34 | [reply](#)

Insult

That last comment is an insult to impotent men.

Or do I mean Europeans?

by **Rob Klein** on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 21:00 | [reply](#)

Out of context

The Matthew Parris quote ("I am not afraid that this war will fail. I am afraid it will succeed.") is taken out of context.

He didn't want the Iraq war and its aftermath to go too smoothly for the Americans lest they be tempted to continue their policy of trying to export freedom and democracy by force of arms.

Of course, if we temporarily ignore the world outside of Iraq, then Parris, just like the rest of us, prefers the Americans to win as quickly and painlessly as possible.

I should point out, furthermore, that it's ignorant and even a little bit insulting to call someone insane when all you really mean is that you think some of their opinions on current affairs are rationally indefensible. (Never mind that they and many other people think the same of you.)

by Neil Fitzgerald on Sat, 11/27/2004 - 03:50 | [reply](#)

Times change....

Since it is a while since you wrote this article, perhaps it would be fair to all concerned if you spent a few moments considering, in the light of events, if your opinions have changed?

by Roger S on Mon, 09/18/2006 - 12:15 | [reply](#)

Events

Which events do you think might change our opinion, in what way?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/blog/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 09/18/2006 - 13:52 | [reply](#)

Benefit of retrospect

I do hope Matthew someday has the pleasure of reading this silly drivel. Only the second paragraph reflects reality: he's a very nice man and probably one of the best columnist ever. Maybe the writer of this article should check his bearings, especially with the benefit of retrospect from 2007 when almost everyone agrees that the war was a mistake. The writer should also hesitate before making condemnations and consider whether he really understood Matthew's articles.

by K Johansen on Sun, 09/23/2007 - 07:36 | [reply](#)
