

**THE BLOG****Status Quo Auntie**

By Marty Kaplan

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After about the bazillionth time that Condoleezza Rice said *status quo ante* on *Meet the Press*, I wanted to personally perform some dental work on her, *sans* anesthetic, *Marathon Man*-style.

But luckily, blogging is a more constructive form of anger management.

Condi doesn't want to go back to the *status quo ante* - diplo-speak for *The Way We Were*. No, she's a Stay the Course kind of gal; today's *status quo*, she informs us, is a way better deal. To justify her neoconnish claim that the Israel-Lebanon war we're witnessing is part of the "birth pangs" of a new Middle East, and that Sunni-Shiia carnage is just a passing phase in our Strategy for Victory in Iraq, she exhumed the hoary chestnut that the Chinese word for "crisis" means both "danger" and "opportunity."

Actually, it doesn't. This canard gained currency when Richard Nixon used it to explain the title of his 1962 memoir, *Six Crises*. It was bogus then, and it's bogus now. (Don't take my word for it; read what Victor H. Mair, Professor of Chinese Language and Literature in the University of Pennsylvania's Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, says here.)

A more apt proverb for Auntie Status Quo to have invoked would have been the one used by Stalin apologist (and loathsome *New York Times* pre-WWII reporter) Walter Duranty, who justified Uncle Joe's depravities with the maxim, "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs." (It's a sunny variant of Colin Powell's Pottery Barn Rule. Iraq: You Break It, You Own It.)

Watching Condi do her Sabbath thing in front of a power-blue drape, and beneath an elegant "Western White House - Crawford, Texas" oval whose insouciant self-parody beggars the imagination, it suddenly struck me that it was exactly five years ago that Bush, in Crawford, read the PDB headlined, "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US"... and reacted presidentially by going out and clearing brush. This was the PDB that Condi later told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was a "historical" document. "Historical." You know: that's English for *status quo ante*.

With the fifth anniversary of 9/11 approaching, perhaps we can begin to make out the emergent Rovian framing of that day. 9/11 Crisis: Danger + Opportunity. The opportunity, of course, turned out to be "Remember the Maine!" redux, an

excuse for America to get its imperial groove back. And the danger turns out to be a constitutional crisis. From today's perspective, the *status quo ante Bush v. Gore* sure looks more appealing than the opportunities killing us now.

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