

THE THAW THAT STARTED FIVE MONTHS AGO

The press is agog that Hillary Clinton sat down with—and wooed—her long time personal vast right-wing conspiracy funder, Richard Mellon Scaife.

NYT:

But in a striking about-face, Mr. Scaife now says he has changed his mind – at least about one half of the duo.

Fox:

Scaife, who unnerves some conservatives with countervailing positions on abortion and the war in Iraq, said he still wants to hear from Barack Obama before his newspaper endorses a candidate in Pennsylvania's April 22 primary.

ABC:

Richard Mellon Scaife, a major funder of the 90s-era Vast Right Wing Conspiracy – specifically, The American Spectator and its "Arkansas Project" – today reconsiders his former nemesis in an op-ed in his newspaper, the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

JMM:

This alone has to amount to some sort cosmic encounter like something out of a Wagner opera. Remember, this is the guy who spent millions of dollars puffing up wingnut fantasies about Hillary's having Vince Foster whacked and lots of other curdled and ugly nonsense.

Aside from the fact that it is quite common for the poobahs of newspapers to meet with political candidates leading up to an election in their community (and Scaife suggests he'll meet with Obama, too), I think the meeting ought to be put in context with Bill Clinton's earlier meeting with Scaife, back in November (a meeting only ABC's Tapper notes in his coverage), one carefully stage-managed by Scaife's vast right wing conspirators of the 1990s, Christopher Ruddy and Michael Isikoff. Scaife's revisionary history of his involvement in the Clintons' woes started when, in November, Ruddy called Bubba "part Merlin and part Midas."

Bill Clinton now finds himself the unlikeliest of Scaife heroes. Last month Ruddy posted a softball interview with Clinton on the Newsmax site (sample question: "What is the best thing about being an ex-president?"). A worshipful cover story followed in the current edition of the magazine. Clinton, it gushed, is "a political and cultural powerhouse" who is "part Merlin and part Midas—a politician with a magical touch."

The earlier Clinton-Scaife thaw was brokered, according to Ruddy, by Ed Koch. And as happened on Friday with Hillary, Bubba reportedly wowed Scaife. In other words, Hillary's schmoozing of Scaife comes after he already developed a crush on her husband.

I assume the Clintons have reached out to Scaife for no other reason than they would love his support—and barring that, they would love for him and his wingnut bloodhounds to stay out of their underwear drawers. But what is Scaife looking for?

I think Fox may offer the key: foreign policy. Scaife has soured on Bush's little war. As he says, in his own op-ed on Clinton:

Particularly regarding foreign policy,

she identified what we consider to be the most important challenges and dangers that the next president must confront and resolve in order to guarantee our nation's security. Those include an increasingly hostile Russia, an increasingly powerful China and increasing instability in Pakistan and South America.

Like me, she believes we must pull our troops out of Iraq, because it is time for Iraqis to handle their own destiny – and, more important, because it is past time to end the toll on our soldiers there, to begin rebuilding our military, and to refocus our attention on other threats, starting with Afghanistan. [my emphasis]

It's a sentiment expressed, too, about the meeting with Bubba.

What is going on here? Scaife declined to comment, but Ruddy tells NEWSWEEK he and Scaife believe Clinton's life since leaving office has been "very laudable," and that **he is doing "very important work representing the country when the U.S. is widely resented in the world."** [my emphasis]

Which suggests that, as early as November (when only Ron Paul and, to a lesser degree, Mitt, advocated for a pull-out on the Republican side), Scaife may have realized he cannot blindly support the Republican brand this year. And currently, faced with a 100-year war McCain presidency, Scaife is stuck siding with Democrats, at least on foreign policy.

There's probably more—which we'll see after his interview with Obama (not least since, on all these issues, Obama is actually stronger than Hillary). But for the moment, it's worth noting that even the godfather of vast right-wing

conspiracy cannot abide by the damage
Republicans are doing to America's place in the
world. Perhaps, in the face of the Iraq
catastrophe and the abdication of America's
moral authority, panty-sniffing no longer seems
so important.