

# President Obama would be bad for Britain

If this country's voters could vote in America, John McCain could take the summer off. So thorough would be his

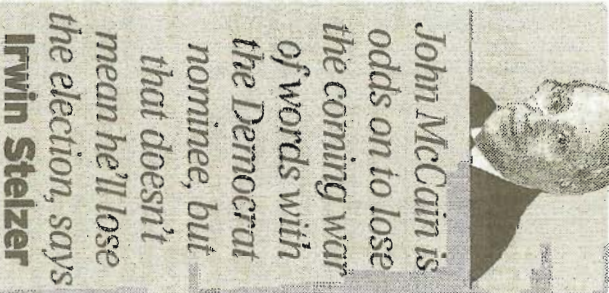
As British and most other foreign observers see it, Barack Obama is the second coming. Perhaps not of you-know-who, although in his victory speech Obama did describe his triumph in the primaries as "the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal". Moses made the waters recede, but he had help. So Obama must be the second coming of JFK. Never mind that Kennedy sent troops to Vietnam, backed an abortive invasion of Cuba, and conveyed such a sense of inexperience and weakness at his summit with Khrushchev that we almost stumbled into a nuclear war when the Russian leader decided he could get away with putting some missiles in Cuba.

Like Kennedy, Obama is handsome, thin, stylish. Better still, he's black, and so eloquent that he persuaded "racist" America, or at least its Democrats, to have him lead the party in its quest to recapture the most powerful office in the world. Many Brits can't wait for his first visit, and the French are agog at the prospect of Michelle (sounds French, doesn't it?) Obama strolling arm in arm with their very own Carla, both clad in the latest French frocks.

Small problem. Obama is a dyed-in-the-silk protectionist, who would never allow his wife to be seen in anything not made in the good-old-US-of-A. He wants to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta), and if Canada and Mexico refuse the terms he will offer, threatens to cancel the entire trade-opening deal. He has pledged to turn down new trade deals, on the general theory that free trade has cost America jobs, and, more important, antagonised his trade union patrons.

There's worse. Obama is eager to shed America's role as keeper of world order. Troops are to be brought back from Iraq regardless of what generals tell him, a position far more extreme than Gordon Brown's. The PM courageously decided to slow troop withdrawals when his generals advised they are still needed in Basra. However much British and European public opinion opposed the American intervention in Iraq, Foreign Secretary David Miliband has made it clear that it would be a tragedy if America retreated from its global responsibilities, and shifted that burden to a UN incapable of effective action when the world's hot spots boil over.

Nor can Europeans be happy with Obama's promise to meet with the world's bad guys, no pre-conditions required. He is apparently unaware that his willingness to meet the leaders of North Korea and Iran (Castro the younger is also on his list, but fear of a backlash among Florida's Cuban expatriate community has muted this plan) undermines the multilateral efforts of the groups



that are dealing with those regimes. Foreigners eager to see Obama in the White House seem content to trade George W. Bush's multilateralist diplomacy for Obama's face-to-face talks. My guess is that British voters would really prefer a dual presidency, with Obama handling domestic policy and McCain in charge of foreign policy. Obama could make America more like Britain with universal, government-managed health care; higher taxes on the "rich" and on capital gains; expanded social services; trade unions made more powerful; continued preferences for blacks seeking university

places and government jobs; gay marriage or some variant thereof; abortion on demand. Meanwhile, McCain could be trusted with foreign policy. He would continue to fight for free trade, which he sees as a cornerstone of US foreign policy. He says America cannot tell Canada that it is pulling out of Nafta in one breath, and then ask it to increase the deployment of its troops in the most dangerous sector of Afghanistan in another. He has told voters in Ohio and Indiana, two states peopled by workers who have lost their high-paying manufacturing jobs to "1-per-day" Asian and Latin American labour: that those jobs are never coming back.

Protectionism, he tells grumbling audiences, would only add to their woes by closing markets to US exports, and depriving them of the low-cost imports that continue to drive Wal-Mart sales. Better to retreat than sulkily wish for a return of good old days that are gone forever. That tough love is not for the more touchy-feely Obama, who prefers to sympathise with the displaced workers, and hint that he will somehow tax US companies to induce them to bring those stolen jobs back to America.

McCain would also give America's allies the peace of mind that comes from knowing that the president is willing to use military force when necessary, but has seen the horrors of war and knows that war must always be a last resort. Unless you favour a

large increase in Europe's military budgets you inevitably have to wish that McCain, rather than Obama, will be in charge of US foreign policy during the coming confrontation with Iran, North Korea and a resurgent Russia. Unfortunately for our European friends, the American ballot does not allow the selection of one president for domestic policy, and one for foreign. So you will have to be content with our choice. My guess is that those who follow the US elections on the BBC will watch an articulate Obama battering the sincere but bumbling McCain. Every attack on Obama will be dismissed as racist, every stumble by McCain attributed to his age and every Obama flirtation with protectionism dismissed as "he doesn't really mean it". Any McCain comments on Iran's nuclear ambitions will be reported as a threat to "take out" those facilities.

Should Americans decide that foreign policy concerns trump economic policy concerns, age and experience trump youth and untested promise, and should Cindy McCain rather than Michelle Obama get to choose the new curtains in the White House, those who depend on the BBC for their news will be as surprised as they were in January 2001 when George W. Bush was sworn in. And throughout Europe charges of racism will re-emerge. You can count on it.

Comment on Irwin Stelzer's view at [telegraph.co.uk/personalview](http://telegraph.co.uk/personalview)