

Why you Brits will never 'get' Sarah Palin

The American election campaign has made life better for those of us living here and identified as non-enemies of President Bush or, even worse, one of the "neo-cons" David Cameron went all the way to Islamabad to denounce. It is not that our British friends have fallen in love with George Bush, or adopted a more tolerant attitude towards those of us who think the world might be a more dangerous place if America were to retreat into reliance on the United Nations to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

No, it is that Brits with any interest in America, which means most of you, are so distracted by the campaign that they don't have time to share with us their latest reason for Bush bashing, or to tell us at dinner parties that 9/11 wouldn't have happened if the Jews hadn't been so ghastly to the Arabs, or to accuse us of overheating the globe.

Now, there is only time for, "Tell us about the elections? Is it really possible that Obama won't win?" That's the easiest question. Yes, it is possible that Barack Obama's rhetoric will not succeed in fooling enough of the people enough of the time to gain him the keys to the White House. He claims to be a bipartisan healer, but has never voted against his Democratic leadership in

the Senate. He claims to love America, but spent 20 years as a disciple of a pastor who urged his congregation to "God damn America", rather than call on God to bless it. He is a man whose list of ways young people might serve their country definitely does not include enlistment in the military.

No matter. In Britain, as in the rest of Europe, Barack Obama is seen as the second coming, at least of John F Kennedy, if not of that other fellow. Tall, articulate, handsome, with a stylish wife and engaging children (paraded on stage at the Democratic convention before 80,000 fans and tens of millions of television viewers, but, says the candidate, "off limits" to reporters). Better still, he is black but, as Charles Moore reminded us last week, borrowing from Colin Powell, "not that black". There is, we have found, no use laying out such facts before Brits who want to see Obama in the White House.

It is, however, productive to discuss Sarah Palin, John McCain's choice for vice-president. The first question goes something like this: "My God, does she really believe in God, just like those jihadists we are supposed to be fighting?" Well, yes and no: yes, she is deeply religious, but no, she is not about to engage in a holy war against



Irwin Stelzer is amused, and relieved, that the British obsession with the gun-toting governor is diverting attention from bashing the President

Islam, or even against Europe's secularists. Nor is she about to denude the nation's libraries of books with which she disagrees, or bar the teaching of Darwinism in schools, even though she thinks there should be a place to advise students that there is another point of view as to the origin of man. Should she want to do just that, our founding fathers had the sense to reserve

power over education to local communities and the states.

Next question: "She shoots moose and wolves, poses with the sort of weapons favoured by Vladimir Putin and drug lords, and seems to have no objections to the proliferation of arsenals in the homes of Americans. Doesn't that worry you?"

Not very much. The second amendment to our constitution guarantees Americans the right to bear arms, a right affirmed only recently by the Supreme Court in a decision Obama says he supports. Also, we have long known, as Britain is now learning, that laws do not keep guns out of the hands of the bad guys; they only disarm law-abiding citizens and reduce their ability to defend themselves. Surveys in prisons show that burglars fear two things: trained guard dogs and armed potential victims. Many Americans find it encouraging that the McCain-Palin ticket includes a man willing to defend his country and a woman willing to defend her home.

Then there is abortion: "Won't she deny women the right to choose?" Well, no. Sarah Palin is opposed to abortion - witness her "hillbilly fecundity", as Mark Steyn describes liberals' reaction to her five children, her willingness to bear a Down's syndrome baby, and support for

her unwed daughter's decision to carry her baby to term. But Governor Palin has shown no inclination to impose her view on others.

In the end, the Supreme Court will remain the arbiter of the battle between "pro-life" and "pro-choice" Americans. Which perhaps is unfortunate: were the electorates in several states given an opportunity to pronounce on the issue, the minority might be more willing to accept the verdict than it is when eight men and one woman in black robes opine.

What many foreigners might be missing is that Palin's supporters don't much care what she thinks about babies, guns and Jesus. They seem to care only that she is what one British friend described as "a real person". Fortunately for the American electorate, there is nothing much that the British commentator can do to prevent its worst nightmare from becoming a reality: Sarah Palin sworn in as President of the United States, dining with the Queen at a state banquet.

So sit back and enjoy the show. It is far more entertaining, and certainly more democratic, than waiting for the defenestration of a prime minister by a cabal of his colleagues.

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