

# The Palin interviews: Ignorance in the service of the ultra-right

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ABC's broadcast over three nights of the interview between the network's anchorman Charles Gibson and Republican Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin served to expose the candidate's ignorance and ultra-right politics, while skirting around some of the most crucial questions underlying her improbable candidacy.

Equally revealing has been the reaction of the Obama campaign and the Democratic Party, which have given Palin a pass on everything said in the interview except her attempt to once again identify herself with the runner-up in the Democratic primaries, Senator Hillary Clinton. An angry reaction issued over the name of Florida Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz had more the character of a protest over brand name infringement than any substantive response to Palin's positions.

Ignored in the Democratic response was Palin's presentation of political views that are significantly to the right of the Bush administration, including foreign policy positions that pose the clear threat of a nuclear third world war.

In its tone, the interview was undoubtedly one of the most peculiar exchanges to be staged in recent American political history.

Gibson's approach often resembled that of an impatient and skeptical professor quizzing one of his failing students. For her part, Palin came off as semi-robotic, clearly feeding back talking points which Republican campaign operatives have crammed into her head in the little more than two weeks since her surprise selection as Senator John McCain's running mate.

There is little doubt that many of the nearly 10 million viewers who tuned in to the interviews did so at least in part out of morbid curiosity, watching to see if the untested and virtually unknown governor of Alaska would seriously disgrace herself on national television.

Palin fumbled some questions and had an evident "deer in the headlights" moment when asked about the "Bush Doctrine," something with which she was clearly unfamiliar, even after Gibson helpfully explained it to her.

Behind the packaged image, the qualities that Sarah Palin brings to American politics are religious-based bigotry and hostility to democratic rights, anti-intellectualism, phony right-wing populism and unwavering support for American militarism, in short, the stock and trade of the Republican right.

The dangers posed when this kind of ignorance, backwardness and reactionary outlook becomes fused with state power became

clear in the ABC interview.

After Palin declared her support for the admission of the former Soviet republics Ukraine and Georgia into the US-led NATO alliance, Gibson asked her whether this meant that the US would be obliged to go to war against Russia if Moscow again sent troops into the region.

"Perhaps so," replied Palin, in a matter-of-fact tone that suggested that war between two countries controlling stockpiles of nuclear weapons capable of incinerating the world was the most obvious, common-sense solution to a geopolitical crisis. "I mean, that is the agreement when you are a NATO ally, is if another country is attacked, you're going to be expected to be called upon and help," she continued.

She repeatedly described Russia's action in Georgia as "unprovoked," when even the Bush administration's State Department has claimed that it warned Georgia not to attempt an armed takeover of the autonomous, Russian-aligned regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Asked about what insight she had concerning the country against which she is so blithely prepared wage war, Palin claimed—erroneously—that one could see Russia from part of Alaska.

Similarly, Palin was asked what attitude Washington should take towards a decision by Israel to carry out airstrikes against Iran's fledgling nuclear program.

"Well, first, we are friends with Israel and I don't think that we should second guess the measures that Israel has to take to defend themselves and for their security," responded Palin.

While Gibson pressed her on this point, she clung doggedly to this position, twice repeating the phrase about not "second guessing" any action by Israel.

That Washington must routinely "second guess" such decisions—despite the undeniably inordinate influence exercised by Israel and the Zionist lobby over US foreign policy—apparently never occurred to Palin. Nor, apparently, that such an Israeli attack would almost certainly result in Iranian retaliation that could include attacks on US occupation troops in Iraq, including her own son, who deployed there on September 11.

Then there was the exchange on the "Bush Doctrine," about which much has been made in the media. Palin's initial fumbling was understandable. Gibson asked her "Do you agree with the Bush doctrine," and she replied by indicating she believed he was referring to "his world view."

When Gibson went on, however, to indicate that, no, he meant “the Bush doctrine, enunciated September 2002, before the Iraq war,” it became clear that Palin had not a clue that he was referring to the doctrine of “preventive war” by which Bush arrogated to US imperialism the right to militarily attack any country in the world that it saw as a potential threat to its interests.

Palin babbled on about her agreement with Bush’s effort to “rid this world of Islamic extremism, terrorists who are hell bent on destroying our nation” and affirmed that any “mistakes” or “blunders” in the process could be corrected with the election of new leadership.

Nonetheless, even from her standpoint of ignorance, Palin’s responses made it clear that she embraces the essence of the “Bush Doctrine”—unrestrained American militarism.

Asked about whether the US had the right to carry out cross-border attacks against Pakistan, without the permission of that country’s government—something that is already taking place on the orders of the Bush White House—Palin responded: “In order to stop Islamic extremists, those terrorists who would seek to destroy America and our allies, we must do whatever it takes and we must not blink, Charlie, in making those tough decisions of where we go and even who we target.”

So emerges the Palin corollary to the Bush doctrine: go anywhere and target anyone, just don’t blink.

On domestic issues, the combination of ignorance and duplicity continued to characterize Palin’s responses. Asked about her recorded differences with McCain on global warming, she denied the existence of any such disagreements and asserted her belief that “man’s activities certainly can be contributing to the issue of global warming, climate change.”

Just last year, however, she faithfully echoed the line of the extreme right and the oil lobby, telling an Alaska newspaper, “I’m not an Al Gore, doom-and-gloom environmentalist blaming the changes in our climate on human activity.”

Palin reiterated her well-known opposition to abortion rights, calling for the overturning of the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision and stating her belief that abortion should be banned even in cases of rape and incest. While Palin described this view as her “personal opinion,” Gibson made no attempt to press her on the fact that she favors merely a state-by-state approach to abortion, but advocates making it illegal everywhere, regardless of the sentiments of the pro-choice women she claimed to “respect.”

Gibson asked her about the well-established fact that as the newly elected mayor of Wasilla she had pressured the town librarian about banning of books deemed unacceptable by the Christian right. Her denial—calling it “an old wives’ tale”—was left unchallenged.

Significantly, what went entirely unexplored in the Gibson interview were Palin’s extensive ties to the extreme right and Christian fundamentalism. There was no question about her relationship with the Alaskan Independence Party, which her husband joined and whose conferences she herself attended and addressed. The party, which calls for Alaska to secede from the United States, is an affiliate of the Constitution Party, an ultra-right electoral party whose program incorporates the outlook of a Bible-based fascism.

No question was asked about Palin’s attitude towards dominionism, the doctrine of the Christian fundamentalist right that the US is a “Christian nation” and that all of its laws and institutions should be run according to Biblical law.

The only reference to Palin’s religious-political views came in Gibson’s question about remarks made to her church to the effect that the US troops fighting the dirty colonial-style war in Iraq are “on a task that is from God.” Gibson asked her if she believed that the US is “fighting a holy war.”

The candidate’s improbable response was that she was merely echoing a statement made by Lincoln. While the Republicans regularly drag Lincoln’s name through the mud, this is rather extreme, given his oft-stated contempt for organized religion.

Neither the media nor the Democrats have any interest in exposing this dirty secret of American politics, that the most significant popular “base” of the Republican Party—the most consistent defender of the corporations and finance capital—is composed of extreme right-wing and fascistic elements, including the most reactionary tendencies within Christian fundamentalism.

Under normal circumstances, Palin’s ignorance of international relations and limited political understanding would have disqualified her for the vice-presidential nomination of one of the two main big business parties. The sole reason for McCain’s choosing her as his running mate was the desire to “energize” this ultra-right base.

The Democrats have chosen to ignore this issue entirely. Nor have they issued any response to Palin’s statements regarding war on Russia and Iran. Having embraced the “surge” in Iraq, Obama is running not as an antiwar candidate in any sense, but as the advocate of a more strategically thought-out and even more robust form of American militarism. As such, he has issued his own bellicose statements against Russia, Iran and Pakistan.

That Palin could even be considered as the Republican Party’s vice presidential candidate is testimony not only to the extreme right-wing trajectory of this party itself, but also to the spinelessness of the Democrats and their inability and unwillingness to wage any serious attack on either the Republican Party or the ultra-right.

There are clearly some misgivings within the American ruling elite over this strategy and the pitfalls of having an individual like Palin a “heartbeat away” from a presidency occupied by a 72-year-old man with significant health problems. The *Washington Post* published an editorial on the interviews describing them as “unsettling.” Her performance, the paper stated, was “not disqualifying, but it was also far from comforting.”



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