

Camp Followers

By [Patrick J. Buchanan](#)

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Perhaps the only institution in America whose approval rating is beneath that of Congress is the media.

Both have won their reputations the hard way. They earned them.

Consider the fawning indulgence shown insider Joe Biden with the dripping contempt visited on outsider Sarah Palin.

Twice last weekend, Biden grimly warned at closed-door meetings that a great crisis is coming early in the term of President Obama:

“Mark my words. It will not be six months before the world tests Barack Obama like they did John Kennedy. ... Remember I said it standing here if you don’t remember anything else I said ... we’re gonna have an international crisis, a generated crisis, to test the mettle of this guy.”

A “generated crisis”? By whom? Moscow? Beijing? Teheran?

This is an astonishing statement from a chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee who has access to the same intelligence as George Bush. Joe was warning of a crisis like the Berlin Wall of July 1961, where JFK called for a tripling of the draft and ordered a call-up of reserves, or the missile crisis where U.S. pilots like John McCain were minutes away from bombing nuclear missile sites in Cuba and killing the Russians manning them.

Is Russia about to move on the Crimea? Is Israel about to launch air strikes on Iran’s nuclear sites? What is Joe talking about?

If one assumes Joe is a serious man, we have a right to know.

Instead, what we got was Obama’s airy dismissal of Joe’s words as a “rhetorical flourish” and a media — rather than demanding that Joe hold a press conference — acting as Obama surrogates parroting the talking points that Joe was just saying that new presidents always face tests.

Had John McCain made that hair-raising statement, he would have been accused of fear mongering about a new 9/11. The media would have run with the story rather than have smothered it.

Contrasting McCain with his hero, Joe declared a few weeks back, “When the stock market

crashed, Franklin D. Roosevelt got on the television and ... said, 'Look, here's what happened.'"

Nice historical reference. Except when the market crashed in 1929, Hoover was president, and there was no television.

Can one imagine what the press would have done to Sarah Palin had she exhibited such ignorance of history. Or Dan Quayle?

Joe gets a pass because everybody likes Joe.

Fine. But Joe also has a record of 36 years in the Senate.

Has anyone ever asked Joe about his own and his party's role in cutting off aid to South Vietnam, leading to the greatest strategic defeat in U.S. history and the Cambodian holocaust? Has anyone ever asked Joe about the role he and his party played in working to block Reagan's deployment of Pershing missiles in Europe, and SDI, which Gorbachev concedes broke the Soviets and won the Cold War?

In the most crucial vote he ever cast — to give Bush a blank check for war in Iraq — Joe concedes he got it wrong.

Is Joe's record of having been wrong on Vietnam, wrong in the Cold War, wrong on the Iraq War, less important than whether Sarah Palin tried to get fired a rogue-cop brother-in-law who Tasered her 10-year old nephew to "teach him a lesson"?

"I've forgotten more about foreign policy than most of my colleagues know," says Joe humbly. Given his record, it is understandable Joe has forgotten so much of it.

Saturday, the New York Times did a takeout on Cindy McCain that delved back into her problem with prescription pills. Yet when Hillary's campaign manager, Mark Penn, brought up Obama's cocaine use on "Hardball," he was savaged by folks for whom the Times is the gold standard.

The people apparently had a "right to know" of Bush's old DUI arrest a week before the 2000 election, but no right to know about how and when Obama was engaged in the criminal use of cocaine.

The media cannot get enough of the "Saturday Night Live" impersonations of Palin as a bubblehead. News shows pick up the Tina Fey clips and run them and run them to the merriment of all.

Can one imagine "Saturday Night Live" doing weekly send-ups of Michelle Obama and her "I've never been proud" of my country, this "just downright mean" America, using a black comedienne to mimic and mock her voice and accent?

"Saturday Night Live" would be facing hate crime charges.

How do we know? When the New Yorker ran a cartoon of Michelle in an Angela-Davis afro

with an AK-47 slung over her shoulder, New Yorker editors had to go on national television to swear they were not mocking Michelle, but the conservatives who have so caricatured Michelle and The Messiah.

Is there a media double standard? You betcha.

Mr. Buchanan is a nationally syndicated columnist and author of Churchill, Hitler, and "The Unnecessary War": How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World, ["The Death of the West,"](#) ["The Great Betrayal,"](#) ["A Republic, Not an Empire"](#) and ["Where the Right Went Wrong."](#)

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