

Biden's Key Role in the Crime of the Century: The 2003 U.S. Invasion of Iraq

Part II of our series on Joe Biden and the political skeletons in his closet

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Joe Biden presents himself as an empathetic guy who is willing to go the extra mile to help people overcome their personal tragedies.

However, Biden has throughout his career endorsed policies that caused countless personal tragedies for millions of people.

The best example is his support for the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq.

It led to the deaths and wounding of thousands of U.S. soldiers, killing of an estimated one million Iraqis, and destabilization of a wide swath of the Middle East.

In 2002, Biden was riding high, as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in his 30th year in the Senate.

Having supported Ronald Reagan's invasion of Grenada in 1983 and bombing of Libya in 1986, Biden went on to embrace George H.W. Bush's invasion of Panama in 1991, and Bill Clinton's bombing of Kosovo in 1999.^[1]

When Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein (1979-2003) invaded Kuwait in 1991, Biden did vote against invading Iraq, believing that Bush had not made the case for war and that Hussein could be contained through an international embargo.

However, once Bush went to war, Biden declared that he was giving Bush his total support, and praised Bush for displaying real "leadership," never mentioning the 110,000 civilians who died.^[2]

Following the 9/11 attacks, Biden supported the invasion of Afghanistan and tried to raise funds for a Marshall Plan-type program to fund the country's reconstruction.

Biden was so well connected to President George W. Bush in this period that he had a secure phone line to the White House set up in his home and met with Bush privately to plot out a public relations message for the Afghan War.^[3]

The *New Republic* termed Biden ["the Democratic Party's de facto spokesman on the war"](#)

[against terrorism.”](#)

In a [CSPAN talk before the Council on Foreign Relations in October 2001](#), Biden framed the War on Terror as an apocalyptic struggle between civilization and a trans-national terrorist entity who would bring violent disorder and chaos to the world.

Biden called for a strong U.S. commitment to the Middle East to defeat al-Qaeda and help empower “moderate Muslims,” while pushing for better efforts at public diplomacy.

When asked about Iraq, Biden said he was not in favor of immediate invasion, but rather for imposing a “smarter sanctions” policy and generating consensus for a multilateral coalition that would support the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Several months later, Biden told a crowd of 400 Delaware National Guard officers that, [“if Saddam Hussein is still there five years from now, we are in big trouble ... It would be unrealistic, if not downright foolish, to believe we can claim victory in the war on terrorism if Saddam is still in power.”](#)

“Take This Son of a Bitch Down”

Biden’s support for regime change in Iraq went back to the late 1990s.

After the first Persian Gulf War, Saddam had agreed to destroy Iraq’s chemical weapons stockpile and to allow weapons inspectors into the country.

Senator Biden supported President Clinton’s decision to remove the weapons inspectors in 1998 in order to launch a four-day bombing campaign, despite [being warned](#) that it would likely end Saddam’s cooperation. Subsequently, Biden [insisted](#) that “Saddam kicked the [inspectors] out.”



Biden presides over hearings where he advocated for regime change in Iraq in 1998. [Source: theintercept.com]

Scott Ritter, the chief UN weapons inspector, resigned in protest and accused the international community of not giving him and his colleagues the support they needed to carry out their job in Iraq.

Ritter was called to testify before the Senate in September 1998 where Biden, who was then the highest-ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, grilled him.

Biden told Ritter—whom he referred to condescendingly as “old Scotty Boy”—that no matter how thorough the inspections, [the only way to eliminate the threat was to remove Saddam Hussein](#).

“The primary policy is to keep sanctions in place to deny Saddam the billions of dollars that would allow him to really crank up his program, which neither you nor I believe he’s ever going to abandon as long as he’s in place,” Biden said, characterizing the then Clinton administration’s policy.

Biden continued:

You and I believe, and many of us believe here, as long as Saddam is at the helm, there is no reasonable prospect you or any other inspector is ever going to be able to guarantee that we have rooted out, root and branch, the entirety of Saddam’s program relative to weapons of mass destruction. You and I both know, and all of us here really know, and it’s a thing we have to face, that the only way, the only way we’re going to get rid of Saddam Hussein is we’re going to end up having to start it alone—start it alone—and it’s going to require guys like you in uniform to be back on foot in the desert taking this son of a bitch down. You know it and I know it.^[4]

Mobilizing Support for War

Biden followed up on these statements at the end of July 2002 by chairing [hearings in the Senate](#) that were designed to mobilize congressional support for Operation Iraqi Freedom, whose goal was the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Biden stated that the purpose of the hearings was to initiate a “national dialogue” on Iraq.

However, the witnesses were skewed to represent alarmist views about Saddam and his alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and to support a preemptive strike. The three who testified on the subject of al-Qaeda, falsely claimed it received direct support from Iraq.

Former UN Assistant Secretary-General Hans Von Sponeck complained about the “deliberate distortions and misrepresentations” that “make it look to the average person in the U.S. as if Iraq is a threat to their security.”^[5]

Biden set the tone in his opening remarks when he emphasized that

we [cannot be complacent](#) about those who espouse hatred for us. We must confront clear danger with a new sense of urgency and resolve. Saddam Hussein’s pursuit of Weapons of Mass Destruction, in my view, is one of those clear dangers ... These weapons must be dislodged or Saddam Hussein must be dislodged from power.

These comments echoed a [New York Times op-ed](#) Biden published the first day of the

hearings with Richard Lugar (R-IN), which suggested that continued containment of Saddam raised the “risk that Mr. Hussein will play cat-and-mouse with inspectors while building more weapons” and that “if we wait for the danger to become clear and present, it may be too late.”

The first witness at the hearings was [Richard Butler, a diplomat-in-residence at the Council on Foreign Relations](#) and former executive chairman of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), an inspection regime designed to ensure Iraqi compliance with international protocols on WMD after the first Persian Gulf War.

Butler testified that Saddam’s claims that he had no WMDs was false. Rather, Iraq had the components that were needed to manufacture nuclear weapons and a [weaponized biological warfare program](#) with capability of loading anthrax onto missile warheads, and had terminated UNSCOM’s work in order to hide the truth.

In Butler’s view, Saddam was a war criminal who should be on trial at The Hague alongside Serb leader Slobodan Milošević.

The next witness, Khidir Hamza, was an Iraqi nuclear scientist who had defected from Saddam’s regime and told his story in the book, [Saddam’s Bombmaker: The Daring Escape of the Man Who Built Iraq’s Secret Weapon](#), written with Jeff Stein.

Claiming that Iraqis would welcome an American invasion “with open arms,” Hamza warned that Saddam Hussein had “turned Iraqi science and engineering enterprises into a “giant weapons making body.”

He said that Iraq possessed more than ten tons of [uranium](#), and one ton of slightly [enriched uranium](#), which he claimed was enough to allow them to build three nuclear weapons by 2005. Saddam was also well into chemical warfare production and developing biological warfare capabilities.

Image on the right: Khidir Hamza [Source: wikipedia.org]



According to Hamza, Saddam was a vicious tyrant who had hunted down defectors in exile like his brother-in law Hussein Kamel, who was killed in 1996.

Saddam was further linked to Islamic fundamentalism, training foreign jihadist fighters at an Iraqi intelligence camp twenty miles south of Baghdad, including in tactics of hijacking which was confirmed allegedly by satellite photos.

The Iraqi ambassador to Turkey, Farouk Hijazi, had traveled to Afghanistan and met with Osama bin Laden in 1998.

Most, if not all of Hamza's information on Iraq's nuclear weapons program was untrue, and UNSCOM inspectors insist that Hamza was never actually part of Iraq's nuclear program.

David Albright, who wrote a series of articles on Iraq's nuclear program, stated that [Hamza's unreliability](#) stemmed from his support for U.S. military action. [He told me he wanted to get a gun himself and go back and fight with his sons.](#)

UN weapons inspector [Scott Ritter heavily criticized the use of Hamza's testimony as a rationale for invading Iraq.](#) He said:

We seized the entire records of the Iraqi nuclear program, especially the administrative records. We got a name of everybody, where they worked, what they did, and the top of the list, Saddam's 'Bombmaker' was a man named [Jafar Dhia Jafar](#), not Khidir Hamza, and if you go down the list of the senior administrative personnel you will not find Hamza's name in there. In fact, we didn't find his name at all. Because in 1990, he didn't work for the Iraqi Nuclear Program. He had no knowledge of it because he worked as a kickback specialist for [Hussein Kamel](#) in the Presidential Palace. He goes into northern Iraq and meets up with [Ahmed Chalabi](#).

He walks in and says, "I'm Saddam's 'Bombmaker.'" So they call the CIA and they say, "we know who you are, you're not Saddam's 'Bombmaker,' go sell your story to someone else." And he was released, he was rejected by all intelligence services at the time, he's a fraud. And here we are, someone who the [CIA](#) knows is a fraud, the U.S. Government knows is a [fraud](#), is allowed to sit in front of the [United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations](#) and give testimony as an expert witness.

These comments provide a stinging rebuke of Biden and his deceit of the American people.

Witness after witness that followed Hamza advanced a similar underlying message to him.

[Charles Duelfer, the former executive chairman of UNSCOM, stated from the outset that he favored regime change in Iraq,](#) and highlighted, as a source of comparison, the 1919 Versailles Treaty's failure to prevent Hitler from rearming Germany despite an inspections regime that had been set up.

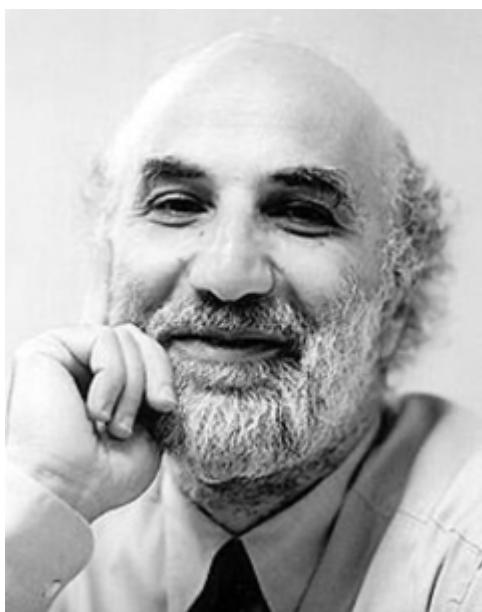
Duelfer asked subsequently "whether we were prepared to give back the Saddam regime control over the oil revenues." He stressed that "our highest priority should be convincing Iraqis in Iraq that they will be [better off when Saddam was gone, and that he will be gone.](#)"

Lieutenant General Thomas G. McInerney, the former Assistant Vice Chief of the Air Force, detailed before the committee how regime change could be accomplished through "blitz warfare"—a "24-hour, 7 day a week campaign," using "precision weapons," and "supported by fast mobbing ground forces and heavy, light, airborne amphibious, special covert operations working with [Iraqi] opposition forces."

One of the hearings' main academic experts, Fouad Ajami, director of Middle East Studies at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, emphasized an alleged

linkage between Iraq and 9/11 and said that Muslim hatred of America resulted from jealousy of American success and talent—among the untalented—and not historical factors or opposition to U.S. foreign policies.

Image below: Fouad Ajami, an Arab Uncle Tom. [Source: wikipedia.org]



Ajami went on to suggest that Americans would be greeted in Baghdad and Basra with “[kites and boom boxes](#)”—as they allegedly had been in Kabul.

Residents of these cities were “[eager for deliverance from the tyranny and the great big prison of Saddam Hussein.](#)”

Rend al-Rahim Francke, [a cousin and close associate of Ahmed Chalabi](#)—a con man who helped lobby for the Iraq War—echoed Ajami in claiming that American troops would be greeted as liberators and said that there would be no civil war after the U.S. invaded.

A member of the [Committee for the Liberation of Iraq](#), which was set up to lobby Congress to support an invasion of Iraq, she proposed a Bonn meeting for Iraq modeled on Afghanistan to help select the post-Saddam leadership.

The Bonn conference was highly unpopular among Afghans, however, because foreigners selected their leaders for them, and it went against the idea of democracy.

After Saddam was overthrown, Francke was appointed Iraqi ambassador to the U.S., and in 2004 was a [guest of Laura Bush](#) in the First Lady’s box at George W. Bush’s State of the Union address. Subsequently, she established the Iraqi-American Freedom Alliance, whose aim was to show the positive consequences of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The few skeptics who testified at the hearing mainly raised questions about tactics, economic cost and military feasibility of regime change and how long it might take to stabilize the country, but not about the potential cost for Iraqis or hidden underlying motives behind U.S. policy.^[6]

Dr. Phebe Marr, an Iraq expert and former professor at the National Defense University, was

characteristic in considering the goal of regime change to be [“ambitious.”](#)

She stated:

If the United States is going to take the responsibility for removing the current leadership, it should assume that it cannot get the results it wants ‘on the cheap.’ It must be prepared to put some troops on the ground, provide advisors to help create new institutions, and, above all, spend time and effort in the future to see the project through to a satisfactory end. If the United States is not willing to do so, it had best rethink the project.

In short, the United States should try to be good colonials and initiate a sustained long-term military and political commitment or none at all—hardly an anti-war position.

In the afternoon session of the last day, former [Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger](#) (1981-1987), branded Saddam Hussein as a “purveyor of evil” and “implacable” and “permanent foe of the United States,” and former National Security Adviser [Sandy Berger](#) (1993-1996), called Saddam a “menace to his own people and the stability of the region.”

Emphasizing Saddam’s link to terrorist groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Hamas, and al-Qaeda’s growing presence in Iraq, Weinberger was most strident in his support for preemptive war.

The United States, he said, had successfully “changed several regimes after World War II” and “in each case, the result was a “vast and major improvement.”

Exclusion of Voices for Peace

While Senator Russell Feingold (D-WI) praised Biden for [“producing a very fine moment in the history of the \[Senate Foreign Relations\] Committee,”](#) anti-war Senators Lincoln Chafee (R-RI) and Paul Wellstone (D-MN) raised concern about the lack of balance.

Chafee told Biden that the panel he had set up “gave the perspective that the threat [from Saddam and his alleged WMDs] was very real, very immediate” but that it would have been [“good to have a different perspective \[offered\].”](#)

Wellstone was able to get inserted into the record three principled anti-war statements.

The first was written by Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS). She provided a warning from Nelson Mandela that “attacking Iraq would be a disaster,” and predicted that it would “kill thousands of civilians,” risk the lives of U.S. military personnel, lead to a “long and bloody occupation” and “cost billions of dollars urgently needed at home.”]

Bennis noted that there were absolutely no verifiable reports regarding Iraq’s WMD program or evidence of Iraqi involvement in the 9/11 terrorist attacks—Iraq was in fact antagonistic to bin Laden and vice versa—and she said that preemptive strikes were illegal under international law.

The second anti-war statement came from [J. Daryl Byler of the Mennonite Central Committee’s Washington Office](#), who advocated for a regional approach to Iraq’s disarmament and establishment of an international tribunal as a right way to investigate

allegations of crimes against humanity by Saddam Hussein.

Byler noted that, for more than 20 years, ordinary Iraqis had suffered from the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars and impact of UN sanctions intended to contain and control the Iraqi government, and that a U.S. invasion would make a bad situation worse and result in the deaths of thousands of children and civilians.

Byler predicted that the war would further destabilize the Middle East and provide “yet another example that the world’s superpower is unilaterally able to impose its will and wish on less powerful countries.” An Iraqi evangelical church leader told his delegation that “we hope that someday your country will stop doing everything with force.”

The third anti-war statement was written by Dr. Peter Pellet, emeritus professor of nutrition at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Dr. Colin Rowat, a professor of economics at the University of Manchester.

They emphasized the humanitarian crisis resulting from the U.S. bombing of the electrical grid during the first Persian Gulf War and imposition of economic sanctions and believed that the civilian costs of new military action would be greater than in 1990.

The three principled anti-war statements contrasted markedly with the rest of the hearings and were prescient in their analysis and warnings.

They did not command the same attention, however, as the regular panelists since they were not issued in-person.^[7]

Their inclusion was a masterful trick designed to sustain the illusion that all sides were represented in the “national dialogue.” Really, however, it was a staged political event designed to lay the groundwork for war.

Afterwards, President Bush thanked Biden for holding the hearings, and Biden went on all the major television networks to argue for war, citing the lopsided testimony he had arranged. “We have no choice but to eliminate the threat,” he told *Meet the Press*.^[8]

Twisting the Truth

Image on the right: Scott Ritter giving a lecture at the Harvard Kennedy school pointing to the lack of evidence for WMDs. He was a key figure excluded from the hearing. [Source: news.harvard.edu]



In his memoir, *Promises to Keep*—published in 2007 when he was running to be the Democratic Party’s presidential nominee—Biden claimed that the two days of expert testimony at the Senate hearings were “a good start to educating the country about the monumental difficulties of opening up another military front.”

Biden wrote that “not wanting the president to get locked into going to war,” his intention was to “make public the disincentives to going to war in Iraq.”^[9]

Prior to the hearings, Biden wrote that President Bush personally assured him that “there was no plan to take down Iraq” and that he was confident at the time that “Secretary of State Colin Powell was trying to dissuade the president from an invasion.”

Ten days later, however, Biden read in the *Washington Post* that Bush had signed an intelligence order directing the CIA to undertake a comprehensive covert program to topple Saddam Hussein, including lethal authority to capture the Iraqi president.” Biden wrote that he didn’t ask the administration to send any witnesses as such because “I didn’t want to force their hand.”^[10]

Biden leaves the impression that he was opposed to the war and trying to stop it and did not want to give the Bush administration a voice, stating that the consensus of the experts was that Saddam “was five to ten years away from developing a nuclear weapon” and “not an imminent threat.”

However, in his introductory remarks and accompanying *New York Times* op-ed, Biden had stated that Saddam was a major threat who had to be confronted, and the experts at the hearings testified that Saddam was a grave threat, had WMD, was linked to al-Qaeda, and would have a nuclear weapon within three years; not five to ten.

Biden directly contradicted what he wrote in in his memoir when he told Meet the Press host Tim Russert in April 2007 that [“everyone in the world thought he \[Saddam\] had them \[WMDs\]. The weapons inspectors said he had them.”](#)

In an attempt to show the hearings promoted a cautionary message, Biden referenced the testimony of military expert Anthony Cordesman, who said that war was not a game and quoted from the Roman philosopher Pliny the Elder: “Small boys throw stones at frogs in jest. But, the frogs do not die in jest. The frogs die in earnest.”^[11]

Cordesman, however, promoted an alarmist narrative about Saddam in his testimony, [warning about his possession of anthrax weapons with nuclear lethalties, and capacity for carrying out chemical and biological weapon attacks directed against U.S. bases and troops in the Persian Gulf](#). Cordesman further insinuated the need for a full-scale ground invasion since air strikes would not be enough.^[12]

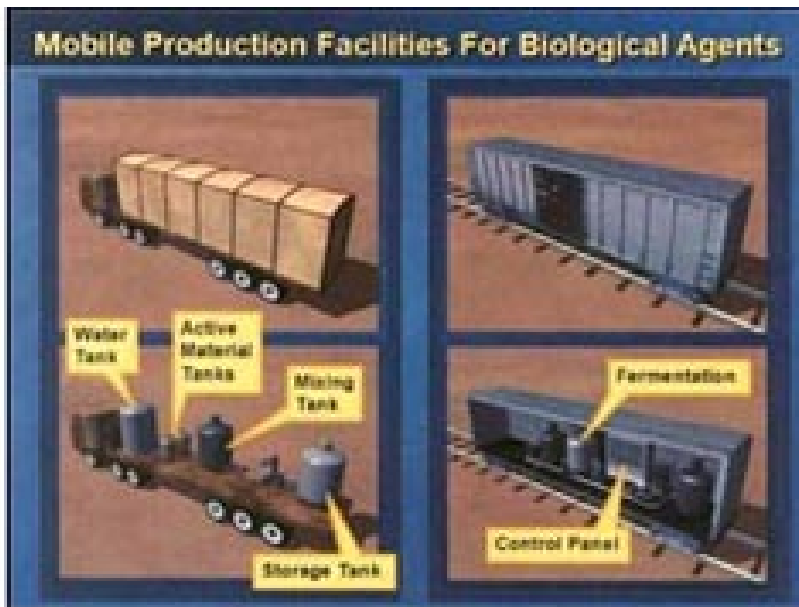
Biden Ignores CIA Director’s Assessment

One month and a half after the hearings, Biden gained access to information that disproved the WMD claims, though he never acted upon it.

In a classified hearing on September 24, 2002, at the urging of a staff member, Biden asked then-CIA Director George Tenet what evidence of WMDs the U.S. had “technically collected.”

[“None, Senator,” Tenet said](#), according to an account in the book *Hubris*, by Michael Isikoff and David Corn. Biden, wondering if there was some highly classified evidence, asked Tenet, “George, do you want me to clear the staff out of the room?” Tenet told him no. [“There’s no reason to, Senator.”](#)

Later in that same hearing, Biden heard from two government witnesses who rejected the [“aluminum tubes”](#) claim that had been circulating, and would later become a centerpiece of Secretary of State Colin Powell’s presentation to the United Nations promoting preemptive war.



General Colin Powell has called his 2003 speech to the United Nations, laying out the Bush administration’s rationale for war in Iraq, a “blot” on his record. The speech set out to detail Iraq’s weapons program, but as the intelligence confirmed, that program was nonexistent. The former Secretary of State acknowledged that his report to the Security Council was only intended to give credit to the accusations from the administration and that the intelligence services had not “worked properly.”

[Source: volatirenet.org]

Biden nevertheless would go on to vote in favor of the war on Iraq, even though he knew that the stated reasons—that Saddam had WMD—was unproven or false, and lied about this later.

Biden Votes for War

After hearing from Tenet, Biden, with Richard Lugar and Chuck Hagel (R-NE), proposed an [alternative to George W. Bush’s war resolution](#) that would only allow Bush to attack Iraq for the purpose of destroying WMD *and* only after seeking UN approval.

If the UN turned Bush down, he would have to come back to Congress and prove Saddam posed a WMD threat so “grave” that only military action could eliminate it.

When Biden’s plan was derailed, however, through the work of Dick Gephardt (D-MI), the Democratic Party leader in the House, Biden backed Bush’s war resolution.

On October 10, 2002, on the eve of the vote, Biden repeated before the Senate his claims about Saddam’s threat and pursuit of nuclear weapons and framed military intervention as a

“march to peace and security,” specifying that the “threat need not be imminent for us to take action.”

The next day, Biden was one of 77 Senators who [voted to authorize military force in Iraq](#), joining fellow Democrats Hillary Clinton, Chuck Schumer, Harry Reid, John Kerry, and Dianne Feinstein.

In early November, Biden introduced the Iraqi Scientists Liberation Act before the Senate, which granted [permanent residency status to 500 Iraqi scientists](#) if they supplied information on weapons of mass destruction.

The clear intent was to lure defectors like Khidir Hamza who could validate the Bush administration’s stated reasons for going to war, while giving the impression that the U.S. was trying to destroy Iraq’s WMD.

Years later, when campaigning for higher office, Biden told NPR that he had voted for war only after he got a commitment from Bush that he needed the vote to get inspectors into Iraq to determine whether or not Saddam was establishing a nuclear program. According to Biden, his [mistake was to trust Bush](#).

Bush’s office denied Biden’s version of events, however, saying that [his recollections were wrong](#).

Biden later conceded that he had misspoke and at a Democratic Party debate said that he [“never should have voted to give \[President\] Bush the authority to go in and do what he said he was going to do.”](#)

Staying the Course

When Bush issued an ultimatum to Saddam on March 17, 2003—leave or be invaded—Biden predictably backed him.^[13]

Four months later, Biden told a gathering at the Brookings Institution that he had cast [“the right vote](#) [on the war], and it would be a correct vote today.”

Biden went on to [praise the leadership of the Coalition Provisional Authority](#), a [corrupt and incompetent organization](#). Its chief, Paul Bremer, was [“first-rate,”](#) Biden said mere months after Bremer disbanded the Iraqi army, leading directly to the rise of an insurgency and civil war.

Biden called Bernard Kerik, the former NYPD Commissioner tasked with building a new police force, “a serious guy with a serious team.” However, Iraq’s police would soon become [indistinguishable](#) from [sectarian death squads](#), and Kerik would later [plead guilty to tax fraud](#) and other federal corruption charges.

In the summer of 2003, as security broke down in Iraq, Biden’s solution was [“more foreign troops to share our mission.”](#)

At the 2004 Democratic Party Convention at the Fleet Center in Boston, Biden tried to deflect responsibility away from himself and onto President Bush.

Biden admitted at the time that [the intelligence “was hyped to justify going to war,” causing](#)

[“America’s credibility and security \[to\] have suffered a terrible blow.”](#)

This was a stunning admission in light of the role Biden had played in “hyping” the Iraqi threat.

Biden said he felt that the worst legacy of the Iraq war was not its human costs, but rather a “further [hardening of the Vietnam syndrome](#) that afflicts some in the Democratic Party—a distrust of the use of American power.”

These comments reflected Biden’s longstanding neoconservative outlook and disdain for the Vietnam era anti-war movement, which was unaffected by his shifting position on Iraq.

As a law student at Syracuse University in the late 1960s, Biden had derided Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) activists who occupied the Chancellor’s office to protest the Vietnam War, calling out “look at these assholes.”^[14]

A Neocolonial Solution

In July 2005, as Iraq descended into nightmarish sectarian violence, Biden told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he remained “[hopeful](#)” about the situation, despite some of his earlier critical comments, and that U.S. forces had “[turned a political corner of sorts.](#)” Subsequently, Biden said that “calling it quits and withdrawing” would be a “[gigantic mistake.](#)”

Biden in this period routinely voted for billion-dollar war appropriations and used his status as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee to “advocate loudly for more troops and better police training,” which he considered key to successful counterinsurgency.^[15]

In May 2006, Biden penned [a New York Times op-ed, with Leslie Gelb of the Council on Foreign Relations](#), which rejected the false choice of “staying the course” or “bringing the troops home,” but aimed to wind down the U.S. military presence “responsibly.”

This was to be achieved by establishing three largely autonomous regions, one for each of Iraq’s major ethnic and confessional groups, presided over by a nominally national Baghdad government, something he called “[unity through autonomy.](#)”

The model was the Dayton accords on Bosnia, which kept the country whole by dividing it into ethnic federations, and allowing Muslims, Croats and Serbs to retain separate armies. These accords were deeply flawed, however, in that they [enshrined the violent division of Bosnia along ethnic lines.](#)

In September 2007, Biden prevailed upon his fellow senators to endorse his flawed [proposal](#) in a lopsided [75-23 vote](#). Outside of Kurdistan, there was zero support among Iraqis, who saw the proposal as a neocolonial strategy designed to break up, divide and weaken their country.

The plan so [tarnished Biden’s reputation](#) that, in August 2008, when he was named Barack Obama’s running mate, Iraqis across the political spectrum reacted with dismay.

“This choice of Biden is disappointing, because he is the creator of the idea of dividing Iraq,” Saleh al-Mutlaq, head of National Dialogue, one of the main

Sunni Arab blocs in parliament, [told Reuters](#) that day.

“We rejected his proposal when he announced it, and we still reject it. Dividing the communities and land in such a way would only lead to new fighting between people over resources and borders. Iraq cannot survive unless it is unified, and dividing it would keep the problems alive for a long time.”

Obama’s Point Man

Despite Biden’s unpopularity and complicity in the destruction of Iraq, Obama appointed him as his point man there, allegedly telling him: [“Joe, you do Iraq.”](#)

This was not in hindsight a very smart move.

Robert Ford, a one-time diplomat at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, [blames Biden for helping to fuel the rise of the Islamic State](#) when he decided to support the return of the sectarian Shia politician Nouri al-Maliki as Prime Minister in 2010.

According to Emma Sky, who was the political adviser to Raymond Odierno, the commanding general of U.S. forces in Iraq that year, Biden seemed preoccupied with the idea of irreconcilable sectarian differences during a visit.

Odierno told Biden that the previously secular al-Maliki had become so sectarian and authoritarian that Iraqis feared him, and a secular leader would be more welcome, [Sky recalled](#) in her memoir, [“The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq.”](#)

“I tried to explain the struggle between secularists and Islamists, and how many Iraqis wanted to move beyond sectarianism,” Sky wrote. “But Biden could not fathom this. For him, Iraq was simply about Sunnis, Shia and Kurds.”

As Sky pushed back on Biden’s belief that sectarian differences were the key to Iraq, she wrote: “He was clearly irritated by me. ‘Look, I know these people,’” he went on. “‘My grandfather was Irish and hated the British. It’s like in the Balkans. They all grow up hating each other.’”

The result, as Reidar Visser [observed in 2011](#), was an al-Maliki government “made up of mostly pro-Iranian Shiite Islamists,” with the secular Iraqiya Party, which had won a plurality of votes in the March 2010 parliamentary elections, sidelined.

Though Biden was close to al-Maliki, when Arab-Spring style protests erupted, Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry quietly worked to help install Haidar al-Abadi, the former communications minister who was committed to privatizing Iraq’s economy in line with the original goals of the 2003 military invasion.

Al-Abadi tried to [increase Sunni participation in government](#) and root out corruption in the army and police, while securing a \$1.5 billion pledge from the Obama administration to train the Iraqi security forces and sell [F-16](#) fighter jets.

In 2016, frustration with Al-Abadi’s government resulted in a revolt led by Shia cleric [Mogtada al-Sadr, who won parliamentary elections in 2018](#).

Al-Sadr had mobilized his Mahdi army to resist the U.S. occupation of Iraq after the toppling of Saddam Hussein and drew Iraq closer to Iran. His ascendancy reflected the failings of U.S. policy, which Biden had been integral to.

Supporting Another War on an Enemy He Helped Create

Image below: Moqtada al-Sadr [Source: wikipedia.org]



After overseeing troop withdrawals in 2011, Biden played an important role in the second Iraq War, which began when the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS)—led by former Saddamist Generals, al-Qaeda terrorists and disaffected Sunnis—took over swaths of territory in Iraq in the summer of 2014 with Turkish backing.

In June 2014, the Obama administration ordered thousands of troops back into Iraq without authorization from Congress, claiming that the troops would serve in an advisory capacity, and that ISIS was equivalent to al-Qaeda, against which the U.S. had already declared war.^[16]

According to Brett McGurk, a former U.S. official with extensive experience in Iraq, Biden supported the strategy known as [“by, with, and through”](#) to fight ISIS, in which America left most of the fighting to local soldiers and used its special forces, intelligence, and air power.

The heavy focus on air strikes deriving from Biden’s strategy resulted in untold civilian casualties. [A study published in the New York Times Magazine](#) determined that one in five of the 27,500 coalition air strikes over Iraq resulted in at least one civilian death, more than 31 times that acknowledged by the coalition. The second war in Iraq, the authors noted, “may be the least transparent war in recent American history.”^[17]

The U.S. forces in Iraq were commanded by General Lloyd Austin, whom President-elect Biden appointed as the first African American Secretary of Defense.

Austin helped oversee the razing of Mosul by U.S. and Iraqi forces which deployed rocket-assisted munitions and powerful explosive weapons that caused blast-related injuries.

The New York Times described “a panorama of destruction in the neighborhood of Judida so vast one resident compared the destruction to that of Hiroshima,

Japan. There was a charred arm, wrapped in a piece of red fabric poking from the rubble, rescue workers in red jumpsuits who came wore face masks to avoid the stench, some with rifles slung over their shoulders, searching the wreckage for bodies.”^[18]

Biden’s involvement in Iraq by this time had come full circle.

During his vice presidency he found himself championing another dirty war against an enemy he had been instrumental in creating—first by supporting preemptive war against Saddam Hussein, and then by supporting the ethnic division of the country and sectarian politicians like Nouri al-Maliki.

Biden himself has suffered from his poor decisions—his son Beau died from brain cancer suspected to have [derived from toxic exposure](#) at Balad Air Base north of Baghdad, where the U.S. military burned an estimated 140 tons of waste a day in open air burn pits.^[19]

It is unclear as of this writing what President Biden might do to further torture Iraqis in the next four years.

Certainly, he will follow through with previously announced troop withdrawals, but will also continue to sustain military advisory and training programs, special forces operations, air strikes and private military contractors as part of a light footprint approach.

The ultimate aim is to gain access to military bases and Iraq’s oil fields, which is what the long Iraq War has always really been about.

*

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Notes

[1] Branko Marcetic, *Yesterday’s Man: The Case Against Joe Biden* (London: Verso, 2020), 159.

[2] Marcetic, *Yesterday’s Man*, 140.

[3] Marcetic, *Yesterday’s Man*, 148.

[4] Ryan Grim, “Five Years Before Invasion, Said the Only Way of Disarming Iraq Is ‘Taking Saddam Down,’” *The Intercept*, January 7, 2020, <https://theintercept.com/2020/01/07/joe-biden-iraq-war-history/>. Biden repeated his call for war in an oped in *The Washington Post* in September 1998 in which he wrote: [“as long as Saddam Hussein is at the helm, no inspectors can guarantee that they have rooted out the entirety of Saddam Hussein’s weapons program.](#) And I said [at the Senate hearing] the only way to [remove Saddam is a massive military effort, led by the United States.”](#)

[5] Marcetic, *Yesterday’s Man*, 151.

[6] Many of the skeptics endorsed a strengthening of economic sanctions—which were known to have

resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children from disease and malnutrition—and expanded aid to Iraqi opposition groups, even though the U.S.-sponsored ones were led by charlatans like Ahmed Chalabi, who had been sentenced to twenty-two years in prison in Jordan for bank fraud.

[7] The Senate Foreign Relations Committee was willing to fly one witness in from Australia but would not allow authors of the anti-war statements appear in person—even though at least one, Phyllis Bennis, lived in Washington.

[8] Marcetic, *Yesterday's Man*, 151.

[9] Joe Biden, *Promises to Keep* (New York: Random House, 2007), 332, 333.

[10] Biden, *Promises To Keep*, 332.

[11] Biden, *Promises to Keep*, 333.

[12] According to an article in [National Business Review](#), Cordesman was said to have been “48 per cent” convinced on the need to invade Iraq in 2003, but contends that “concerns over [Saddam's weapons of mass destruction](#) were valid.” Jeremy Hall, “The Clash Within Civilizations,” *National Business Review*, September 17, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110611061421/http://www.nbr.co.nz/article/the-clash-within-civilizations>

[13] Marcetic, *Yesterday's Man*, 153.

[14] Biden, *Promises to Keep*, 159. It is uncertain if this story is true.

[15] Biden, *Promises to Keep*, 348.

[16] See Jeremy Kuzmarov, *Obama's Unending Wars: Fronting the Foreign Policy of the Permanent Warfare State* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2019), 180.

[17] Azmat Khan and Anand Gopal, “The Uncounted: An on-the-Ground Investigation Reveals That the U.S. led Battle Against ISIS—Hailed as the Most Precise Air Campaign in History—is Killing Far more Iraqi Civilians than the Coalition Has Acknowledged,” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 19, 2017, 43-47.

[18] Kuzmarov, *Obama's Unending Wars*, 181, 182.

[19] In a [2019 speech](#) to the Service Employees International Union, Joe Biden said that, because of Beau's “exposure to burn pits, in my view, I can't prove it yet, he came back with stage four glioblastoma. Eighteen months he lived, knowing he was going to die.”

Featured image: Biden was sworn into office by Associate Justice John Paul Stevens on January 20, 2009. (Public Domain)

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