

# “The Dead Zone”, Revisited. Biden’s Political Rhetoric against Trump

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***Days before the attempted assassination of Donald Trump, President Joe Biden publicly declared that “it’s time to put a bullseye on Trump.” While Biden clearly wasn’t openly calling for the assassination of Trump, words have meaning. And at a time when heated rhetoric can fuel political violence, everyone—including the President and former President—need to weigh their words carefully.***

In David Cronenberg’s 1983 film, *The Dead Zone* (based upon a novel written by Stephen King), Christopher Walken plays a schoolteacher named Johnny Smith who, after nearly dying in an accident, awakens from a coma possessed with psychic powers—an ability to see into the future. This new power turns into a curse after Smith shakes the hand of Greg Stillson, a populist third-party candidate for the US Senate, played by Martin Sheen. Smith has a vision of Stillson becoming president and ordering a nuclear strike against the USSR. Smith confers with his neurologist/therapist, Dr. Sam Weizak (played by Herbert Lom), who is cognizant of Smith’s psychic power. Weizak postulates the question, “What would you do if you could go back in time and kill Adolf Hitler?” before he committed his many atrocities. After pondering this question, Smith decides that the only course of action left to him is to assassinate Stillson before he becomes president.

I don’t know what motivated **Thomas Matthew Crooks**, the 20-year-old Pennsylvania resident whom authorities have named as the person who fired the shots that wounded former President Donald Trump and two bystanders, and killed another innocent bystander, before himself being killed by the Secret Service. There will presumably be a very thorough investigation into this criminal act of political violence.

**What I do know is that the rhetoric which had superheated the American political scene in the months, weeks and days leading up to the attempted assassination at a pro-Trump political rally in Butler, Pennsylvania,** mirrored in tone, content, and purpose the advice Dr. Weizack gave to Johnny Smith about how best to deal with the threat posed by the potential election of Greg Stillson.

The perpetrators of this rhetorical lambasting populate the entire spectrum of societal influence and control, from the President of the United States, Joe Biden, to the former Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, to numerous Senators and Representatives in the US Congress, to various pundits, experts, and analysts who provide commentary on political events for the mainstream media, and to their respective echo chambers and independent content creators on social media.

All are complicit in the attempted assassination, just as Dr. Weizack was complicit in the crime planned by Johnny Smith. ***The difference between Weizack and these modern conspirators, however, is that one event takes place as part of a fictional narrative, and the other as part of a national reality.***

Image: A defiant Donald Trump following the failed attempt on his life



**President Biden has emerged as the principal voice among the crowd of politicians, pundits, and politicized activists who have been defining former President Donald Trump as an existential threat to American democracy, and America itself.**

Just to be clear (because words do matter), an existential threat is a threat to something's very existence—when the continued being of something is at stake or in danger.

It is, literally, about life and death.

This apocalyptic description has now been attached to any supporter of Donald Trump (reviled by Biden as “MAGA”, the acronym for “Make American Great Again”, the rallying cry of the pro-Trump movement).

Perhaps Biden and his supporters forgot that Trump pulled in some 74 million votes in 2020—about 47% of the participating electorate. There is no more certain way to incite a literal Civil War than to label one half of the country as an existential threat that must be neutralized come hell or high water.

“I believe in free and fair elections and peaceful transfer of power,” Biden proclaimed at an Arizona election event in September 2023. “I believe there’s no place in

America—none, none, none—for political violence,” Biden said.

If only he had remained on script.

“There’s something dangerous happening in America now,” Biden at the same event. “There’s an extremist movement that does not share the basic beliefs of our democracy: The MAGA movement.”

Later, in December 2023, Biden went further.

“Donald Trump and his MAGA Republicans are determined to destroy American democracy,” Biden declared. “We *cannot let him win*.”

Speaking on the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Normandy landings, Biden invoked the imagery of war when speaking about defending American democracy.

“American democracy asks the hardest things: to believe that we’re part of something bigger than ourselves,” Biden said. “So, democracy begins with each of us.”

As Biden spoke, his campaign released a video which declared,

“There is nothing more sacred than our democracy. But Donald Trump’s ready to burn it all down.”

Biden literally invoked the struggle against Hitler as being synonymous with his struggle against Trump and the MAGA Republicans.



Biden speaking in Arizona in September 2023

A day before the attempted assassination of Donald Trump, Biden, speaking in Michigan, announced that the gloves were coming off.

“We’re going to say who he is, what he intends to do. Folks, Donald Trump is a

convicted criminal.” Biden later declared that “Most importantly, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart, Trump is a *threat to this nation*.”

Donald Trump is no more a threat to the United States than Joe Biden.

Each articulates policies the other finds reprehensible.

But these policies must pass through the gauntlet of constitutional processes before becoming policy.

And, when speaking of the United States, it is these very processes that give us the right to call ourselves a Constitutional Republic.

There is nothing undemocratic about having differences of opinion.

That is what elections are all about.

But there is something inherently unconstitutional in promoting political violence by converting these political differences into articulations of existential gravitas, where literal life and death outcomes hinge on who prevails in an election.

By labeling Donald Trump as a threat to America, Joe Biden was—literally—saying that to preserve America, this threat must be eliminated.

This is not an extreme interpretation of how Biden’s words can be construed by those inclined to believe Donald Trump is a danger to the Republic. The actress Lea DeLaria, who appears in the popular television drama, *Orange Is the New Black*, recently uploaded a video to her Instagram channel.

“Joe,” DeLaria declared (referring to the current President of the United States), “you’re a reasonable man. You don’t want to do this. But here’s the reality: This is a fucking war. This is a war now, and we are fighting for our fucking country. And these assholes are going to take it away. They’re going to take it away. Thank you, [Supreme Court Justice] Clarence ‘Uncle’ Thomas. Joe, you now have the right to *take that bitch Trump out*. Take him out, Joe. *If he was Hitler, and this was 1940, would you take him out? Well, he is Hitler. And this is 1940. Take him the fuck out!*”

As Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes noted in a landmark 1919 decision regarding the First Amendment of the US Constitution, free speech does not give one the right to shout “fire” in a crowded movie theater.

Nor should it empower anyone, from the President on down to radical personalities such as Lea DeLaria, the right to incite political violence—especially against a former US President who aspires—not without reasonable justification—to be the next President of the United States.

Threatening the president of the United States is a federal felony under United States Code Title 18, Section 871. The law prohibits anyone from making “any threat to take the life of, to kidnap, or to inflict great bodily harm upon the president of the United States.” The law also includes presidential candidates, vice presidents, and former presidents. The Secret Service is responsible for investigating suspected violations of this law.

The Secret Service needs to pay Lea DeLaria a visit. So does the FBI. She should be detained, questioned and charged appropriately.



Lea DeLaria (left), Jacqueline Marsaw (right)

So, too, should anyone who articulates in favor of political violence against Donald Trump or Joe Biden. This includes US Congressman Bennie Thompson, who has openly called for Donald Trump to be stripped of his Secret Service protection if sentenced to prison, holding that prison authorities would be responsible for the protection of Trump.

Ask Jeffrey Epstein how that worked out.

And, just to prove the point that Bennie Thompson's intention behind his proposed legislation wasn't driven by pure legislative motive, enter, stage right, Thompson's Field Director, Jacqueline Marsaw, who posted on her Facebook page the following comment: "I don't condone violence but please get you some shooting lessons so you don't miss next time oops that wasn't me saying that."

But it was Jacqueline Marsaw that said it. Her subsequent removal of the post doesn't erase the deed.

And she should be held accountable.

So, too, should everyone who articulates actual violence as a solution to the issues that divide the nation when it comes to presidential politics.

I don't take these matters lightly. On March 21, 1981, I was in the Student Union of Franklin and Marshall College checking my mail when the news broke about the attempted assassination of President Reagan. "I hope he dies," one of my fellow students announced, after watching the shooting on a television located in the common area.





The attempted assassination of President Reagan, March 1981

I immediately put him up against the wall and told him I took violent exception to his support for the attempted assassination of my commander in chief (I was fresh out of the Army at that time).

My antics earned me a trip to the Dean of Student Affairs, who informed me (I was a newly arrived Freshman) that I would probably be expelled from college.

“We don’t tolerate acts of violence among students,” the Dean said.

“But you do tolerate the promotion of the political assassination of the President of the United States,” I retorted. “I’m curious what the Secret Service would think about that.”

The Dean thought on my words, and the incident was resolved by having me apologize to the student in question for roughing him up, and the student apologizing for his “insensitive” comments about President Reagan.

Today I made the decision to suspend the chatroom associated with my Telegram channel. This suspension will last 24 hours.

I made the decision after participants commented in response to a post I made about the attempted assassination.

The post was as follows:

**The attempted assassination of former President Trump underscores the extraordinarily precarious situation America finds itself in at this point in time in history.**

Political violence is tragically not unknown in America—the assassination and attempted assassination of American Presidents is a sad reality of the American experience.

That an estranged citizen would convert his personal demons into an action designed to

end the life of the person he blamed for what haunts him is sadly a byproduct of a society conditioned to accept violence as a means of resolving disputes, regardless of the underlying legality of the action. The Second Amendment, and the Supreme Court's current interpretation of its articulation and implementation, is the living manifestation of this reality.

But America has never before experienced a situation where the political environment itself has contributed so heavily to an atmosphere where political violence is openly advocated by a sitting President and his political party.

The depiction of Donald Trump by President Joe Biden as a criminal who represents a direct threat not only to democracy but also the existential survival of the American Republic creates a causal linkage that leads inevitably to the attempted assassination. Biden's words have been echoed by the Democratic Party and anti-Trump activists on mainstream and social media in such a fashion that it constitutes a veritable green lighting of political violence against the former President.

At a time when the American people and nation are fundamentally divided on political issues for which it seems there is no middle ground, when these divisions are articulated in stark existential terms, and when the Democratic Party is already being accused—with good reason—of politicizing and weaponizing the apparatus of judicial power to prevent Donald Trump from successfully challenging Joe Biden in the upcoming presidential election, the articulation by Biden and his supporters of Trump as a threat to the survival of the Republic that must be stopped at all costs is little more than an open directive for political violence.

America has never been closer to Civil War at any time since 1861. The assassination of the former President on the orders—perceived or otherwise—of a sitting president and the establishment he directs would likely result in the permanent irreconcilable division of the nation along ideological grounds and lead to massive outbreaks of violence and the potential fracturing of the physical unity of the nation.

We live in a very precarious moment. The fever pitch of political rhetoric must be cooled down immediately. If both sides cannot walk back their respective political passions, then what happened in Butler Pennsylvania yesterday will become the inevitable norm, and violence, not reason, will become the chosen means of ideological differences.

And if that is the direction America is heading, God help us all.

In response to this post, several chat participants posted content which endorsed political violence in America, to include the attempted assassination of Donald Trump.

You can't shout "fire" in a crowded theater.

And you can't advocate for the assassination of a candidate for the presidency of the United States.

Not in my chat.

And not in my America.

**Postscript (movie spoiler alert):**

*Johnny Smith doesn't shoot Gregg Stillson. Stillson's loathsome character is exposed to the public, which rejects him, ending his political career. Therein lies the lesson: let politicians be themselves. And trust the American people to make the right choice. And if your choice doesn't win, do better next time. Because in America, if we actively participate in the democratic processes that underpin our Constitutional Republic, there will always be a next time.*

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*Featured image: Christopher Walken, as Johnny Smith, draws a bead on Martin Sheen's Greg Stillson in The Dead Zone / All images in this article are from the author unless otherwise stated*

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