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EXCLUSIVE

As the curtain begins to fall on Joe Biden's presidency, one can't help but wonder if his legacy will reflect the hope he once inspired or the uncertainty that now looms large over the United States and its future.

Biden's time in office could have been remembered as a progressive chapter in American history, led by a man who once served as vice president to Barack Obama, the nation's first Black president, and who came to power in the midst of a global pandemic after an administration that thrived on the politics of division and hate.

US President Joe Biden (R) meets with US President-elect Donald Trump at the White House in Washington on Nov. 13, 2024.
ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES



As Biden's approval ratings continued to nosedive, other political headaches began to emerge: a surge in illegal immigration, soaring inflation, and, by late 2023, the war in Gaza, waged largely with his administration's political and military support for Israel. The war split the nation's opinion on Biden and added a layer of complicity in genocide and ethnic cleansing to his legacy.

Biden's legacy: The cost of complacency in a Trumpian era



Ironically, it will most likely be viewed as a mere intermission between two Trump terms that threaten to reshape America's future and further erode its values.

For his supporters, Biden's story might be one of triumph against the odds, an improbable political career that has spanned over 50 years—a journey marked by personal loss and resilience as he rose from local Delaware politics, through the halls of the US Senate, to the vice presidency, and finally to the very office he had long coveted; the White House. But even for them, Biden's decision to run again in 2024, despite the murmurs of concern from donors and congressional allies, who questioned whether the 81-year-old could handle the rigors of another campaign, has left his presidential legacy hanging by a thread. In the end, Biden has no one but himself to blame for derauling his presidency and ruining Democrats' shot at remaining at the helm. His insistence on an early and seemingly impromptu debate against Trump turned out to be a double-edged sword. His poor performance exposed the true extent of his cognitive decline and kick-started an unprecedented campaign within his own party to push him off the Democratic ticket.

Biden's decision to finally drop out of the race in July—as was his initial insistence to remain in the race—was arguably an attempt to give the country a chance to close its Trumpian chapter. But he threw in the towel too late, depriving his fellow Democrats of the opportunity to stage an open primary and select a strong candidate supported by the party's rank and file. As Biden exited the race, he

swiftly endorsed his vice president, Kamala Harris, as the Democratic nominee without consulting party leaders, and Harris ended up suffering a bruising defeat to Trump in the November 5 election.

Biden will forever be blamed for that defeat; for running a race he was too complacent—and perhaps too old—to realize he could not win. He will unwittingly become complicit in America's plunge into authoritarianism.

When President Biden took office in January 2021, he faced the daunting task of cleaning up the mess left in the wake of the Trump administration. He made his mission clear: to restore order to the global stage and re-establish the United States as the linchpin of international stability.

While Biden tried to cloak his foreign policy agenda in the rhetoric of democracy and order, it has, in fact, been steeped

in imperial ambition. He oversaw the expansion of NATO, used Ukraine as a strategic pawn to counter Russia, and increased military presence in the Indo-Pacific to keep China in check.

Biden's decision to hastily withdraw troops from Afghanistan in August 2021—driven by a desire to make up for his failure to convince Obama to end the endless war—resulted in a chaotic and embarrassing exit that drew sharp criticism from foes and friends alike. Republicans, who had previously struggled to find a foothold in their attacks, seized the moment to paint him as incompetent.

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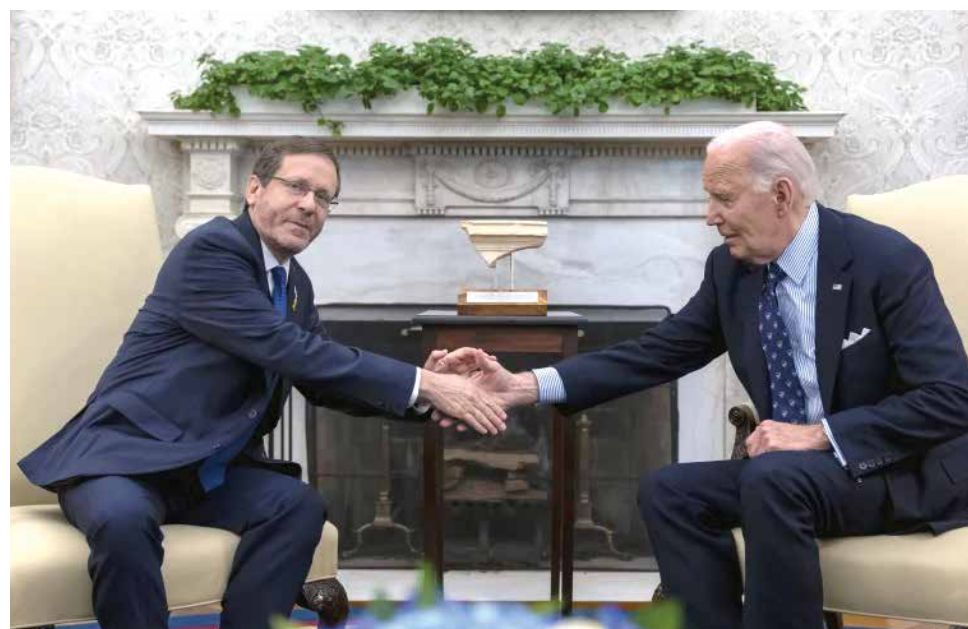
The war, which later spread to Lebanon and other parts of the region, split the nation's opinion on Biden and added a layer of complicity in genocide and ethnic cleansing to his legacy. Biden still has an opportunity, before his term officially ends, to pressure Israel to cease its aggression in Gaza, where approximately 90% of the 2.3 million residents have been displaced, often multiple times, and hundreds of thousands are living in dire tent camps with limited food, water, or basic services. According to the Health Ministry in Gaza, 44,056 people have been killed and 104,268 injured since the onset of the war last October. This could be the chance for President Biden to redefine his fleeting legacy as he nears the twilight of his long political career, at least in the foreign policy arena, which he has long viewed as his strong suit. However, it seems increasingly

unlikely that Biden, a self-professed Zionist, will act on the moral imperative and execute a major policy shift by backtracking on his commitment to multibillion-dollar military aid to Israel.

So far, mass protests, student activism, and internal dissent within the State Department and other federal agencies regarding the administration's complicity in genocide have all failed to rekindle a reckoning for Biden. His historical allegiance and personal bond to Israel will likely constrain his ability to do the right thing in the remaining days of his lame-duck presidency.

With Trump's landslide victory, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, can expect a freer hand than he had under Biden to advance the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and pursue his expansionist agenda in the occupied West Bank. There will be no talk of a Palestinian state and threats of cutting military aid. It's a harsh reality of politics that President Biden will be remembered not for his promise of transcending America beyond the age of division, nor for his ability to remove Donald Trump from the White House, but for setting the stage for his astonishing comeback. The true measure of Biden's presidency may rest not in his accomplishments but in what he could not achieve. Five years ago, he positioned himself as a bulwark against Trump and all that he represented; now, he faces the prospect of being blamed as the architect of a return to that very chaos.

It is not far-fetched to suggest that President Biden's legacy will be overshadowed by Donald Trump's second term in office.



President Joe Biden shakes hands with Israel's President Isaac Herzog (L), during a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, on Nov. 12, 2024.
BEN CURTIS/AP