

Biden Makes Americans Targets in the Middle East, Then Campaigns on Their Deaths

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There may be nothing crasser than a politician seeking reelection. Nevertheless, President Joe Biden has set a new low. He chose to leave thousands of U.S. military personnel needlessly scattered about the Middle East under regular attack from multiple militant groups. After three Americans were killed, he flew to Wilmington, Delaware, and used the dead as props in his reelection campaign.

The president, with the first lady and defense secretary in tow, attended the “transfer ceremony” at Dover Air Force Base for the remains of those who died. Placing his hand over his heart, he carefully posed for the public. By all appearances, he viewed himself as another victim, distressed by the vagaries of a dangerous world that he must tame.

He told family members of those who died, along with the rest of us: “These service members embodied the very best of our nation: Unwavering in their bravery. Unflinching in their duty. Unbending in their commitment to our country—risking their own safety for the safety of their fellow Americans, and our allies and partners with whom we stand in the fight against terrorism.” He added somberly that “they risked it all.”

They did, but not by choice. It was the U.S. government that made them risk it all by deploying them to a dangerous area in a chaotic region with little to do other than act as targets for those who view Washington as an enemy. Nor were those killed risking their lives “for the safety of their fellow Americans.” That claim is similar to the standard pitch made on Memorial Day, July 4th, and Veterans Day, that those who fill Arlington National Cemetery and other hallowed grounds died “in defense of our country and its freedoms.”

Surprisingly few actually did. Sgt. William Jerome Rivers, Sgt. Kennedy Sanders and Sgt. Breonna Moffett, Georgians all, certainly did not. Rather, they died for nothing. For that blame falls on their government, not them. Washington stationed them in Jordan supporting some 900 Americans illegally deployed in Syria. The latter’s role is to control around 30 percent of that country, while promoting separatism and stealing oil. Seriously.

In some bizarro fantasy world, American policymakers imagine this garrison will achieve regime change in Damascus, deter Turkey’s brutal interventions against Syrian Kurds, end Russia’s long involvement in the country, and curb Iranian influence there as well. Alas, Washington has failed at all four tasks after more than a decade of effort. Truly grotesque are stultifying U.S. sanctions, which starve Syria’s people rather than its leaders. The Pentagon justifies an apparently permanent presence where Americans are not wanted as necessary to prevent the Islamic State

from rising again—even though the movement was defeated years ago, has not engaged U.S. forces for years, and today is contained by almost every Mideast government and Islamist militia.

Some 2,500 US personnel also remain in Iraq, the ultimate consequence of George W. Bush's dishonest and foolhardy invasion more than 20 years ago. Iraq remains a political mess but appears capable of preventing an ISIS resurgence there. A nominal partner if not ally, Baghdad objects to Washington's routine retaliatory attacks against local Iran-backed militias, some of which act under the Iraqi military's authority. President Donald Trump was full of praise for himself after the strike that assassinated the commander of Iran's Quds unit, Qasem Soleimani, but the U.S. also killed a top Iraqi militia leader. The Iraqi government protested and Iraqi irregular forces now regularly bombard American military facilities and even the U.S. embassy. Nothing America's troops are doing warrants sacrificing their lives.

In short, again, Rivers, Sanders, and Moffett risked it all *for nothing*. They were not promoting freedom. They certainly weren't strengthening Americans' safety. They were callously left as targets and inadequately defended. Despite the constant prattle about restoring deterrence, Washington evidently hasn't. Else there wouldn't have been the attack that took their lives.

Indeed, deterrence never was established. And, at this stage, deterrence probably can't be established, at least at a reasonable cost. In retaliation, the U.S. launched 85 strikes across Iraq and Syria. Many sites were conveniently evacuated beforehand. Some 16 people, including civilians, apparently were killed. Alas, the undeterred enemy then fired back. Indeed, Washington's foes have shown a stubborn willingness to bear casualties while attempting to push the Americans out. (The Houthis have shown the same resolve. If anything, multiple U.S. and British air attacks have *increased* Yemeni assaults on both commercial and war ships.) So what now?

The Biden administration indicated that there is more to come, but past strikes by Washington and Israel have not deterred Iranian and militia activity. U.S. escalation is more likely to yield deadly escalation by the other side. Noted Bloomberg's Marc Champion: before the latest strikes "there has been just one fatal attack on U.S. forces among more than 160 since October, because many were performative. With gloves off that would change." As with the deadly retaliatory attack on the Syrian Kurds American forces are purporting to protect.

Military action in Iraq poses a special problem. After Washington's latest assaults, Baghdad complained that "This aggressive airstrike will push the security situation in Iraq and the region to the abyss, jeopardizing the efforts of establishing stability." Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al Sudani announced mourning "for the souls of the martyrs of our armed forces and civilians," meaning those killed by Washington. Al Sudani, head of a government subsidized by the U.S., visited Iranian-backed militia members wounded by U.S. military strikes for allegedly attacking U.S. military personnel. His government is now pressing for the removal of American forces, a stance likely to be strengthened if attacks accelerate.

Unfortunately, it is not unusual for U.S. personnel to risk their lives for nothing. Americans celebrate their military heritage, but most of Washington's wars were dubious at best. The War of

1812 was formally defensive but animated by a desire to seize Canada. It also was imprudent given the risks involved and demonstrated little military genius. The Mexican-American war was an aggressive grab for continental supremacy, with the dispute over Texas largely a pretext for seizing territory through California to the Pacific. The Spanish-American War ended with the U.S. brutally crushing Filipinos seeking the same self-government Americans enjoyed, giving the anti-colonial republic its first colony to rule. World War I featured two sets of ugly imperial combatants; the vainglorious Woodrow Wilson intervened so he could sit at the victory table to reorder the world, but his botched efforts ended up promoting totalitarianism and spawning World War II.

In the latter, the U.S. was attacked, though Washington's reckless Asia policy helped bring on the conflict. Unlike most of America's conflicts, the geopolitical challenge was serious, since leaving Eurasia to one totalitarian power or the other wasn't an attractive option. Washington's failure to arm America's Korean client state encouraged the North's 1950 invasion, but, before the war, few thought the peninsula (which the U.S. entered only in 1945) mattered strategically. Moreover, the decision to march to the Yalu drew in China and resulted in years of bloody military stalemate. The Vietnam War was a massive tragedy; that conflict weakened rather than strengthened America. Finally, Washington's multiple wars in the Balkans, Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia were almost uniformly disasters, squandering lives and money with wild abandon for no good reason.

Sadly, Biden is repeating this process. Why are U.S. forces scattered about the Mideast? Why are Americans involved in multiple unsanctioned wars, blasting away with little likelihood of success? Why is the administration repeating the failures of its predecessors?

Military service is honorable. Some military personnel are heroes. They sometimes risk their lives to ensure the safety and freedom of Americans. But not often. And that is not what they are doing in Iraq and Syria. Instead of fighting another unnecessary and illegal war, Biden should bring the troops home from the Mideast.

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