

Our Foreign Policy Nightmare: Vice President Susan Rice

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Susan Rice, former national security advisor to President Obama, is reportedly under consideration for the vice presidential slot in presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden's administration. Biden is currently considering four black women to be his vice president, among them Sen. Kamala Harris of California, Rep. Val Demings of Florida, Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, Rep. Karen Bass of California, and Rice.

Biden said he will make his final decision in early August ahead of the Democratic National Convention which will take place in Milwaukee from Aug. 17 to 20.

All the women Biden is considering have had "some exposure to foreign policy and national defense issues," Biden has said, and he wants someone who can serve as president at a "moment's notice" and with whom he is "simpatico."

Rice, whose office was next door to Biden's during Obama's second term, checks all those boxes.

"The most important attribute that I have is almost two decades of experience in senior ranks of the executive branch," Rice told the Washington Post.

While VP contender Sen. Kamala Harris (D., Calif.) has been accused of planting negative stories about potential rivals in the media, Rice has been keeping her name in the news by writing regular op-eds in the New York Times and appearing on a spate of TV shows.

In *The New York Times*, Rice wrote that Trump "is utterly derelict in his duties, presiding over a dangerously dysfunctional national security process that is putting our country and those who wear its uniform at great risk. At worst, the White House is being run by liars and wimps catering to a tyrannical president who is actively advancing our arch adversary's nefarious interests."

On NBC's "Meet the Press," Rice accused Trump of "doing nothing" about Russian bounties on U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan. On the "Daily Show with Trevor Noah," she trashed Trump's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Obama administration gave the Trump administration a playbook for a possible pandemic, Rice said, and she personally participated in a tabletop exercise with the incoming Trump cabinet

where they discussed the possibility of “a novel SARS-like virus emerging from China,” said Rice.

All that preparation, she said, “seemed to be for naught, because a couple of years into office, President Trump dismantled the office that I set up on global health security; they trashed that playbook or stuck it in some drawer, some shelf and never pulled it out. For two months, January, February and part of March, [Trump] really denied the reality of this virus, equated it to the seasonal flu ... and by that time, it was already well-embedded in our country.”

Whether it’s due to her strengths as a potential VP candidate or her criticism, Rice’s reappearance on the national stage earned the Trump administration’s ire, and senior Trump officials have returned fire. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo slammed Rice on Fox News for what he called her “history of going on Sunday shows and lying;” this week, White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany said Rice had issued a “stand down” order on Russian cyber attacks and did nothing to combat Russian election meddling.

Rice may be about to reprise her role as “the right’s favorite chew toy,” as one commentator dubbed her back in 2012.

Following the Sept. 11, 2012 attack on the U.S. diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya, Rice appeared on the Sunday morning talk shows and recited CIA talking points. Those points, which were based on intelligence assessments at the time, turned out to be incomplete and misleading, and Rice was accused of being “incompetent,” “untrustworthy,” and soft-pedaling terrorism. She has also been criticized for her decision to unmask the identities of senior Trump officials, which President Trump called a crime.

Rice, who was Obama’s national security advisor at the time, told House investigators that she asked for the unmasking in order to understand why the crown prince of the United Arab Emirates was in New York late in 2016. Her explanation satisfied influential Republicans on the House committee that investigated.

“I didn’t hear anything to believe that she did anything illegal,” Florida Republican Rep. Tom Rooney told CNN of Rice’s testimony, which is classified.

Although it was Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, not Rice, who played the lead role in the decisions that led to the Benghazi attacks, Rice has been widely panned in conservative media as responsible for the embassy attack. A Biden selection would give Republicans an opportunity to resurrect Rice as their bogey-woman. But with Democrat voters, there’s a possibility those attacks could backfire, and the left could spin them as Fox News baselessly attacking a blameless black woman.

Whether Rice is chosen as Biden’s vice presidential pick or not, she will likely have a great deal of influence within a Biden administration, particularly on foreign policy. She had a seat at the table during some of the Obama administration’s most momentous decisions. She was Obama’s ambassador to the UN during his first term; during his second, she served as national security adviser. What, if any, lessons did she learn?

What would U.S. foreign policy look like with Biden and Rice working in the West Wing again?

“Even if she is not chosen as Biden’s VP, Rice would be in line for Secretary of State, or another position of that elevated nature. I’m aghast at the thought of her becoming president, because

she's such a hawk," said historian and investigative journalist Gareth Porter, in an interview with *The American Conservative*. Porter pointed to Rice's influence on the Obama administration decision to bomb Libya and Syria, as well as her push for escalation in Afghanistan and her support of aid to the Syrian rebels. "In each case I would argue she was coming out either against Obama's clear-cut instincts or preferences in White House meetings or in a situation where he was hesitant," and that she was part of the pressure he received from "a coalition of hawks" in the administration.

Obama ultimately overruled Rice on Syria, a decision that she says was the right call.

Here's how she describes it:

"Ultimately, we would fail to garner the necessary support for a congressional authorization to use force. Republicans and Democrats had acted precisely as I predicted. Ironically, it turns out, I was right about the politics; but President Obama was right about the policy. Without the use of force, we ultimately achieved a better outcome than I had imagined."

It is difficult to imagine a situation worse than Syria, where nearly half a million have died in a civil war that has been ongoing since 2011.

This incident is illustrative; has Rice learned from her mistakes?

Her nearly 500 page memoir *Tough Love: My Story of the Things Worth Fighting For*, published in 2019, meticulously documents a great deal. Rice is careful to thank nearly everyone she ever worked with, including the White House chef!

Unfortunately, she studiously avoids drawing overarching policy conclusions. Rice, a Stanford graduate and Rhodes scholar with a Ph.D. in international relations, is simply too smart to jeopardize her future Washington career ambitions by offending or criticizing anyone she might have to work with again. Her book is, therefore, a typical one by someone hoping for a position in a future president's administration.

"Susan Rice is right in the middle of the road, when you think about foreign policy hands in DC," said John Glaser, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, in an interview with *The American Conservative*. "She has a lot of high level experience in foreign policy, but I've never been able to detect a way she stands out as a unique thinker, in that she had something to say about the way she'd prefer the U.S. to go. She says things that are plastic, packaged to be right in the center of the foreign policy consensus in D.C. That's how I see her: run of the mill, not an extraordinary pick ... If she were VP, our foreign policy would not be different than what we've seen the past 30 years."

Given that Biden is campaigning on a "return to normalcy," the foreign policy of the last 30 years isn't necessarily something that Biden views negatively.

A Biden-Rice presidency would seek a return to the Paris climate accords, the JCPOA Iran deal negotiated during Obama's second term, and would expand and strengthen NATO. They would likely avoid engaging in any new ground wars like Libya or Syria. Biden and Rice would be more hawkish on Russia, and if Rice's latest op-eds are any measure, they would likely be more assertive with China as well.

“But, I worry that at the end of a Biden administration, we will still be arguing about getting out of Afghanistan, and (about) stopping the bombing of places like Iraq,” Glaser said.