

Biden's Bitterness Came Back to Bite Him

di Karl Rove

[Joe Biden](#)'s presidency will end in a few days. But an intriguing subplot of the Biden years will endure: his animosity and that of his key lieutenants toward Barack Obama and his team.

The rupture between America's 44th and 46th presidents began nearly a decade ago. Mr. Biden's 2017 memoir, "Promise Me, Dad," shows his disappointment—even anger—at how Mr. Obama and his advisers treated him before the 2016 presidential primaries.

The memoir portrays Mr. Obama as duplicitous. He counseled his vice president on running even though, as Mr. Biden writes, Mr. Obama "had concluded that Hillary Clinton was almost certain to be the nominee, which was good by him."

When Mr. Obama suggested Mr. Biden talk to the president's pollster and strategist about a memo Biden aides prepared on a possible 2016 bid, he promised Mr. Biden that "they could be trusted to keep it quiet." Mr. Biden writes, "I guess he didn't know that at least one of them was already helping Hillary."

Later, Mr. Obama tried dissuading Mr. Biden by saying, "I think I can do more [after the White House] than I was able to do as president." According to Mr. Biden, Mr. Obama then asked, "Joe, are you focused on that?" In response, Mr. Biden writes that he thought "giving up on the presidential race would be like saying we were giving up on Beau," his elder son, who had wanted his father to run and was losing his battle with brain cancer.

Mr. Biden felt Mr. Obama wasn't forthcoming. At one point, "I found myself saying, 'Look, Mr. President, I understand if you've made an explicit commitment to Hillary and to Bill Clinton.'" In August 2015, as the vice president closed on a decision, he writes, "the president must have been getting an earful from his political team—a few

of whom were actively working for Hillary’s nomination”—because Mr. Obama raised the subject in his next private meeting with Mr. Biden. “The president was not encouraging,” Mr. Biden writes tersely.

Being passed over by Mr. Obama for Mrs. Clinton had consequences for Mr. Biden’s mindset and that of his closest aides. Mr. Biden ran in 2020 on the promise that he’d be a transitional figure who would settle things down after the turbulence of [Donald Trump](#). He signaled that he would work with both parties and after one term give way to a new generation. Normalcy was his message, moderation his promised method.

Instead, Mr. Biden unleashed a flood of progressive policies, including the American Rescue Plan, the Inflation Reduction Act and a flurry of costly, intrusive regulations. He proposed the Build Back Better Act, so expensive and sprawling even a Democratic Senate wouldn’t approve it. He claimed credit for a bipartisan infrastructure bill that the White House delayed passing, fearing it would undermine Build Back Better. He also took credit for a chip-manufacturing bill that was really the work of a bipartisan pair of senators.

It’s telling that as this radical policy unrolled, White House aides and outside allies began calling Mr. Biden the most transformational president since Lyndon B. Johnson or maybe even Franklin D. Roosevelt. This was a direct slap at Mr. Obama and the Clintons.

But Mr. Biden’s bitterness endured. In 2023, when former Obama adviser David Axelrod raised questions about whether Mr. Biden should run again, an anonymous source let the press know Mr. Biden had called him a “prick.” If Mr. Biden didn’t like the advice, he should have ignored it. His crude name calling—and its leaking—diminished him, not Mr. Axelrod.

In January 2024, Mr. Obama was worried the Biden campaign lacked enough strategic brainpower. Its manager had never run a campaign. So the former president privately suggested adding David Plouffe, the 2008 Obama-Biden campaign manager, to the Biden-Harris re-election leadership. Almost immediately, the White House let it be known publicly that the former president’s advice had been rejected. This rebuff was a swipe at both Messrs. Obama and Plouffe, a Delawarean who’d helped Mrs. Clinton in the 2016 race.

Mr. Obama's high-profile efforts for [Kamala Harris](#)'s campaign probably rankled Mr. Biden further, adding to his and his inner circle's delusion that he could have won if he'd stayed in the race.

It's said that time heals all wounds. Maybe. But the feelings of Mr. Biden and his longtime advisers that they were disrespected during his vice-presidential years seem to have staying power. With his exit from office, the country is saved from any further consequences of Mr. Biden's distaste for Team Obama. But the resulting damage inflicted on Mr. Biden's reputation, largely by himself, won't be undone.

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