

# Amid furor over Biden's age and acuity: The deeper issues in the Democratic Party crisis

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The crisis that has erupted in the Democratic Party in the wake of the special counsel's report on President Joe Biden's handling of classified documents is a manifestation of a far more profound crisis of the entire American political system.

The president, his White House aides, Vice President Kamala Harris and leading congressional Democrats have all fired back at special counsel Robert Hur, denouncing his claim that he did not recommend prosecution of Biden because no jury would convict a "sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory."

The Democrats have attacked Hur's report as politically motivated and the product of a partisan Republican, although Hur was appointed by Biden's own attorney general, Merrick Garland. Such allegations, however, are entirely beside the point. The Hur report has had a devastating impact, in the first place, because its description of Biden as "elderly" and "with a poor memory" is so obviously true.

The US president is a man who looks every day his age. He walks stiffly, gestures haltingly, is frequently distracted and off target in his speaking, and he makes verbal slips and mistakes that cannot be dismissed as a remnant of the stuttering he had to overcome as a youth. He has been engaged in intensive political activity at the highest level of the capitalist state for more than 50 years, since he was first elected to the US Senate in 1972, and the wear and tear is there for all to see.

The Hur report has not created the crisis in the Democratic Party, only brought it to the surface.

The underlying causes include the massive unpopularity of the Biden-Harris administration. This is due above all to its unshakable commitment to imperialist war in Ukraine and in the Gaza Strip, as

well as the continued deterioration of conditions of life for working people, and particularly the younger generation: declining real wages, exploding debt for college education, rampant police violence and attacks on democratic rights.

Significant sections of the US ruling elite now fear that, on its present trajectory, the 2024 election is likely to end with Trump returning to the White House. Their concern is not over Trump as a threat to democracy—the financial aristocracy has ample experience making use of dictatorial regimes all over the world—but over the foreign policy implications, where the ex-president is regarded as unstable and impulsive.

Trump triggered even more anxiety on this score with his remarks at a campaign rally on Saturday night in South Carolina, when he denounced NATO countries that spent too little on the military and suggested that he would encourage the forces of Russian President Vladimir Putin to do "whatever the hell they want" with them.

Trump's influence in the Republican Party has already produced a seeming deadlock over Biden's proposed \$60 billion in additional military aid to Ukraine, which has been passed by the Senate but so far is blocked in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives. The fascist ex-president is no pacifist, of course, but is focused more on China and a purely economic approach to trade and foreign policy.

This cuts across the central focus of the Biden administration, the Democratic Party, Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, which is to bring about a decisive defeat of Russia in the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine. The Ukrainian regime, brought to power by a US-backed coup in 2014, spearheaded by neo-Nazi forces, is now facing a debacle. Its 2023 "spring offensive," which dragged on into autumn,

accomplished little except the slaughter of more than 100,000 Ukrainian troops. Last week the political crisis in the regime exploded to the surface, with President Volodymyr Zelensky ousting the top military commander, General Valery Zaluzhny.

Some editorial comments in the big business press have expressed the hope that Biden will step down, announcing he will withdraw as a candidate in the 2024 election. There have been a few comparisons to 1968, when another deeply unpopular Democratic president, Lyndon Johnson, announced on March 31 of that election year that he would not run again, but would instead devote the rest of his time in office to overseeing the war in Vietnam.

This parallel is in many ways apt, since it hints at the deeper causes of the US political crisis, beyond its sometimes bizarre and accidental aspects. Like Johnson, Biden's political downfall is a deeply unpopular war. What finished Johnson was the Tet Offensive, beginning in late January 1968, which cut through the lies of the White House, the Pentagon and the corporate media about steady progress in the counterrevolutionary war against the Vietnamese people.

What has staggered the Biden administration, as well as the ruling class as a whole, is the military/political debacle in Ukraine and the worldwide popular revulsion against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. The mass protests in the United States, particularly by young people, have laid bare the gulf between the policies of the US ruling elite and the democratic and humanitarian sentiments of the vast majority of the American people.

There are other implications of this crisis suggested by the analogy to 1968. The withdrawal of Johnson was only the beginning of an immense political upheaval in America, which proceeded that year through two assassinations—Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy—a summer of urban rebellions, and the chaos at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, with the accompanying mass violence by police, leading ultimately to the victory of Republican Richard Nixon, a much-hated political figure who had already been defeated in a previous presidential campaign.

It is not possible to determine the exact course of the convulsions that lie ahead. But it is clear that the American political system is in terminal crisis. The

presumptive candidates of both the Democratic and Republican parties, Biden and Trump, are deeply unpopular. The choice they offer--World War III with the Democrats and fascist dictatorship with the Republicans (though these are not mutually exclusive--is no choice at all. The frailty and disorientation of the Democrat and the raging dementia of the Republican are themselves symbolic of the sclerotic character of the capitalist system they represent and defend.

But as Trotsky warned a century ago, there is no final crisis of capitalism, in the sense of the ruling class simply leaving the stage of history of its own accord because it is utterly bankrupt, economically, politically and morally. The working class must provide an alternative. This means the fight for an independent political course for working people in the 2024 elections, and in the class struggle more generally, through the building of the revolutionary party of the working class, the Socialist Equality Party.



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