

Preface

Election Years and Electoral Fears

In 2024, President Joe Biden, despite a strong record in a number of key areas, including economic growth and a successful recovery from COVID-19 destabilization, chose not to seek reelection, instead passing the torch to his vice president Kamala Harris, who became the second woman in history to win the nomination of one of the major parties. This historic development shook up the political field on both sides of the aisle and set up a historic race that would either see the United States elect their first female president or would see the return of traditionalist conservatism under Trump. With the election looming, much of the attention was shifted onto Kamala Harris's campaign and efforts to credit or discredit her featured prominently in many of the most impactful speeches of the year, while less attention was placed on the outgoing Biden administration and on Joe Biden's legacy.

Deciding to voluntarily surrender power places Biden in the company of a very small number of men who decided the same in the past. Some of the former presidents who chose not to seek reelection did so to preserve what they had accomplished, or because they had only planned to serve a single term, and others, perhaps, to hide from their failures.

James K. Polk was one of the former and is often considered one of the most successful presidents of all time, despite his single term. Polk was a surprise “dark horse” candidate for the office and not expected to win, but he won by popular demand. In his single term he accomplished feats that, for better or worse, redefined the boundaries and nature of America. During this fractious time, when the Civil War was looming, it was popular for many candidates to promise to hold only a single term in office, essentially relieving voters by saying “If I don't do well, you can replace me sooner rather than later.” Polk was popular and likely would have won a second term, but he promised he would only serve one term and he kept his word, becoming the first incumbent president to refuse to campaign for a second term. This decision likely spared Polk his legacy, as the years that followed saw Civil War tensions growing ever more intense.¹

James Buchanan also, like Polk, promised to serve only a single term, but, unlike Polk, was so unpopular that it was virtually guaranteed he would have lost if he had run. Ranked as one of the worst presidents in history, stepping away from the race was a way for Buchanan to cut his losses. He virtually ran from the White House before he would be blamed for the Civil War, which was by this time inevitable. His departure did not spare him the shame of his failed presidency. Rutherford Hayes entered the White House in 1877 in controversy, having failed to win the popular vote and he, like Polk, also pledged to serve only a

single term and followed through by declining the nomination, though it is likely he would have been easily defeated had he chosen to run.

The next man to decline a second term was, more like Polk, seen as highly successful. Calvin Coolidge entered office to finish the term of Warren Harding, after Harding's unexpected death. He nonetheless won the 1925 election by a wide margin and served during a time of what was, for white Americans, relative prosperity. Coolidge did very little, but he was extremely well liked and seemed to avoid major mistakes. It is believed that he would've coasted to an easy reelection if he'd chosen to do so, but instead he chose to step away, simply stating, "I do not choose to run for reelection in 1928." The decision was a shock to many and it is even rumored that he had not even discussed the issue at any length with his own wife. A man of few words, Coolidge never saw fit to explain the decision much further than that and it was only in his autobiography that he shed some light on the matter stating that he had never been comfortable with power or fame and had been more than ready to be "relieved of the pretensions and delusions of public life."²

Harry S. Truman chose to step away more in disgrace than triumph, though his presidency was not generally considered a failure and his legacy on some issues was preserved. Truman served during a difficult time and the transformations of the nation and a turn of opinion on the Democratic Party. The next president to voluntarily step away from the office was Lyndon Baines Johnson, another president who came to power at first only through the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Despite this start and lack of popular mandate, Johnson accomplished more than most presidents can in two terms with his single turn in the office. Much of the legislation that was passed under Johnson dealt with protecting natural resources, with significant achievements in the realm of air quality, water, and the preservation of wilderness. His administration oversaw a significant increase in funding to education and the establishment of the Medicare and Medicaid programs that made a major impact on the lives of Americans living with various challenges. In many ways, the Johnson years saw major progressive achievements in many areas, including federal support for the arts, the environment, poverty reduction and, perhaps most importantly, racial justice. This made him an enemy of the conservative elite and the corporate leaders whose interests they serve. In their campaign against him, conservatives enflamed the racial fears of white voters, claiming that Johnson only served the interest of minorities, and they intensified economic fears by propagandizing Johnson's "Great Society" program as a tax burden. Meanwhile, Johnson's effort to avoid a losing quagmire in Vietnam brought him the ire of the political left.

On March 31, 1968, facing division from both sides, Johnson announced that he would leave the office behind:

Throughout my entire public career I have followed the personal philosophy that I am a free man, an American, a public servant, and a member of my party, in that order always and only.

Remarks during the Nationwide “Fight for Reproductive Freedoms” Tour

By Kamala Harris and Sarah Traxler

“How dare these elected leaders believe they are in a better position to tell women what they need, to tell women what is in their best interest. We have to be a nation that trusts women.” Vice President Kamala Harris spoke at a Planned Parenthood clinic in St. Paul, Minnesota, addressing the ongoing fight for reproductive rights and freedoms, and the many peripheral impacts to women from the loss of clinics and reproductive care facilities around the country.

The Vice President: Good afternoon, everyone. I first want to thank the governor, Tim Walz, for your leadership both for this beautiful state, but nationally you’ve been a great friend and advisor to the President and me. And thank you for all of that.

Governor Walz: Thank you.

The Vice President: Congresswoman—I mean, just an extraordinary leader. She is strong, she is powerful, she is committed, and always working on behalf of the people of the state. And I thank you, and thank you for traveling with me to be here today.

Representative McCollum: It was an honor.

The Vice President: And, Mayor, thank you, as well. We shared a lot of stories about your leadership. And I know that you have a lot of support here in the city for the work that you have done. Thank you for that.

So, many of you have asked why am I here at this at—this facility, in particular. And I will tell you, it is because, right now in our country, we are facing a very serious health crisis. And the crisis is affecting many, many people in our country, most of whom are, frankly, silently suffering after the United States Supreme Court took a constitutional right that had been recognized from the people of America, from the women of America.

In states around our country, extremists have proposed and passed laws that have denied women access to reproductive healthcare. And the stories abound.

I have heard stories of—and have met with women who had miscarriages in—in toilets. Women who were being denied emergency care because the

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healthcare providers there, at an emergency room, were afraid that because of the laws in their state, that they could be criminalized, sent to prison for providing healthcare.

So, I'm here at this healthcare clinic to uplift the work that is happening in Minnesota as an example of what true leadership looks like, which is to understand it is only right and fair that people have access to the healthcare they need and that they have access to healthcare in an environment where they are treated with dignity and respect.

And please do understand that when we talk about a clinic such as this, it is absolutely about healthcare and reproductive healthcare. So, everyone get ready for the language: uterus. That part of the body needs a lot of medical care from time to time. Issues like fibroids—we can handle this—breast cancer screenings, contraceptive care—that is the kind of work that happens here, in addition, of course, to abortion care.

So, to have laws in states that have caused clinics like this to shut down so that women have no access within any reasonable distance of where they live to get this vital care that is necessary to address their health needs and concerns.

So, again, I say thank you to the governor, the congresswoman, the mayor, and the doctor and all those who work here, and the staff.

This work includes having people here who go out and talk to young people—our young people in high schools. And sadly, in so many places around our country, Sex Ed is a thing of the past, which leaves our young people to learn about their bodies and reproductive systems on social media—often with a profound amount of misinformation, which leaves them confused about what is happening to their own bodies.

The work that happens here is about providing assistance to women who do not live in the state of Minnesota, because, sadly, this state exists in a neighborhood where laws have been passed to deny people reproductive healthcare. And so, women have to travel here.

You know, the majority of women who receive an abortion are mothers. God help her that she's got affordable childcare. If she is working, God help her she's got paid family leave so she can figure out how is she going to get to the place that will provide her the care she needs.

Well, the work that happens in a clinic like this includes answering those questions for someone who might be in great distress, letting her know what is available to her in terms of transportation, in terms of housing or a hotel, what is available to her in terms of assistance for her childcare needs.

So, I'll close with this. In this environment, these attacks against an individual's right to make decisions about their own body are outrageous and, in many instances, just plain old immoral.

How dare these elected leaders believe they are in a better position to tell women what they need, to tell women what is in their best interest. We have to be a nation that trusts women.

Address at the National Rifle Association's Annual Meeting

By Donald Trump

"We're under siege with the guns, the rifles, and everything else. We're under siege. But they didn't move us an inch, and we have to stand strong." Republican Presidential Nominee Donald Trump spoke at the National Rifle Association (NRA) annual meeting in May of 2024. Trump claimed that gun rights are being threatened and urged gun owners to vote for him to protect their freedoms to own weapons.

Well, thank you very much, and thank you, Randy. It's a true honor to be here today to receive the endorsement of the proud American patriots at the NRA. These are great patriots. These are great people, and we're going to do things like nobody can believe. We're going to win this election at levels that nobody's ever seen before. Thank you very much for that endorsement. It means a lot to me.

When I started off, as you know, in 2016, I got that endorsement early, and I got it. Some people thought they had it made, but we got it. We got it again, and we've lived up to everything, as you know, everything I said. We're under siege with the guns, the rifles, and everything else. We're under siege. But they didn't move us an inch, and we have to stand strong. You know that we have to stand very strong. So thank you very much, everybody. I appreciate it.

The NRA has stood with me from the very beginning, and with your vote, I will stand strong for your rights and liberties. Four or more years in the White House, we're going to do things like nobody can believe. We're going to turn our country around. We're going to, quite simply, make America great again. But one thing I'll say, and I say it as friends, we've got to get gun owners to vote because you know what? I don't know what it is.

Perhaps it's a form of rebellion because you're rebellious people, aren't you? But gun owners don't vote. What is that all about? I've heard that. I heard it a few weeks ago. If the gun owners voted, we would swamp them at levels that nobody's ever seen before. So I think you're a rebellious bunch, but let's be rebellious and vote this time. Okay? If you go out and vote ... I understand exactly why you don't, but we have to win this election. It's the most important election in the history of our country.

You've got to get all your friends, all the gun owners. They have to go, and they have to vote. If they vote, there's nobody that can beat us, nobody. So it's very important, and I want to thank the NRA president, Charles Cotton, your first

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vice president, Bob Barr, and interim executive vice president, Andrew Arulanandam. That's a terrific group of people.

We're also grateful to be joined by a very special man. He's a hot politician, very hot, Governor Greg Abbott. Where is he? He's around here someplace. He's around here. Thank you, Greg. You're a hot politician, Greg. You know why he's hot? Because he's doing a good job. That's a good reason, right? Right, [inaudible]? Thank you very much, Greg. Appreciate it. Great job.

Also, a friend of mine is the chairman of our campaign in Texas. We're 2 and 0, and we have lots of people running. So far, I think we're 51 and 0 in Texas. I don't know. I like Texas, and they like me. Somehow it works together. But this man is very, very strong, very popular. Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick. Thank you, Dan. Very strong guy, very popular guy.

Thank you very much. Great job. How are we doing, Dan? Are we doing okay? We're way up in Texas. We're way up. Thank you very much. Members of Congress here, we have a lot of them, but a few of them I'm going to introduce. We also have senators, and we're going to just introduce a small group because we have to get on about our business, don't we? Members of Congress.

The only man to hit a ball in Washington out of the stadium, he hit a home run, slow pitch. They play the Democrats and ... Slow pitch meaning about 55 or 60 miles an hour, not that slow. But nobody's ever hit a home run over the fences except this one man, and he was wearing a MAGA hat. I didn't know him at the time, but I said, "Who's the guy that hit the home run?" This was a couple of years ago. He hit it right over the fences in the deepest part of the park.

That's not an easy thing to do for a civilian. If you're a baseball player, you could do it. If you're a civilian, you're not supposed to be able to do it. But he was wearing that beautiful red MAGA hat, and I said, "Who is that guy?" His name's Greg Steube, and he's here today. He's my friend with his incredible wife. Thank you, Greg Steube. Where are you, Greg? Where's Greg? What a shot that was. When they wear a hat that says MAGA that means they're with us all the way. Thank you, Greg.

Also a terrific congressman and a friend of yours, very good friend of you in the state and the country, Pat Fallon. Pat. Pat. Thank you, Pat. Great, Pat. Great job. Another man, he was the doctor for ... I don't think any of you have ever heard of this gentleman, Barack Hussein Obama. Has anyone ever heard of Barack? No, he was a doctor. Very talented doctor, too. He's got a lot of things on his resume. He was a great doctor. He was a great admiral, and now he's a great congressman.

Before I introduce him, I just want to say, when he was the doctor at the White House, they asked him, "Who's healthier? Who's a better physical specimen? Is it Trump or is it Obama?" And he said, "It's not even close. It's Donald Trump. Not even close." I said, "I love this guy." Dr. Ronny Jackson, your congressman, great congressman from Texas. Then he had to louse it up. You know what he did? He said, "And he'd live for 200 years, except he likes junk food, so

Speech to the European Parliament on the Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea

By Josep Borrell

“We are now here to discuss the repeated and unacceptable Houthi attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea, which violate international law, threaten maritime security and peace in the region, and disrupt global trade.” The Commissioner for Jobs and Social rights for the European Union gives a speech to the Diplomatic Service in January of 2024 speaking about Houthi rebel pirates launching attacks on the Red Sea in support of Palestinians during the Israeli occupation.

Madam President, Honourable Members [of the European Parliament],

We are now here to discuss the repeated and unacceptable Houthi attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea, which violate international law, threaten maritime security and peace in the region, and disrupt global trade. Until today, 28 attacks were carried out by the Houthis since mid-November. The Houthis are presenting their repeated attacks as a support to the Palestinian people, and they have launched some missiles toward Israel. The Houthis, together with Hezbollah and some Iraqi and Syrian militias, are aligned with Hamas.

The EU has continuously condemned those acts and underlined that they must stop, notably through the EU Spokesperson’s Statements of 5 and 13 December and through our latest EU27 Statement of 12 January. The EU also called for the immediate release of the “Galaxy Leader” vessel and its 25-member crew, illegally seized on 19 November.

EU services are also following closely the joint military response of the United Kingdom and the United States, members of the ‘Prosperity Guardian’ Operation, to repeated Houthi attacks against maritime vessels. The United States and the United Kingdom have carried out joint strikes on 11 and 12 January on over 60 targets at 16 sites in Yemen, with the support of Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands, as a response to repeated and escalating Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, notably the complex attack of 9 January following repeated messages from the international community.

The EU continues actively engaging and coordinating with partners in all diplomatic fora, to counter the Houthi threats to commercial vessels and find effective solutions. The High Representative, on behalf of the EU and its Member States, issued a joint statement, published last Friday welcoming the 10 January UN Security Council resolution 2722. The UN Security [Council] resolution

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recognises that States are entitled to defend themselves against the attacks against their vessels—[that are] in perfect contradiction, by the way, of international law.

The EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta shares maritime awareness with the multi-nation Operation “Prosperity Guardian” from its operations in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Further options will be discussed at the level of the European Council concerning the EU maritime response.

However, it is unlikely that the Houthis will be deterred immediately given the international visibility they have enjoyed with these actions. Houthi leaders have already indicated they will continue their attacks as long as the situation in Gaza remains. They have already resumed attacks with a missile fired towards US forces on 14 January.

The last point of concern is the impact these developments in the Red Sea can have on peace efforts in Yemen which had reached a new positive phase on 23 December with the UN’s takeover of the peace process following a year of Saudi-Houthi backchannel talks.

Closing Remarks

The debate today illustrates the importance and the complexity of the situation in the Red Sea and the Gulf region, as a whole, and the challenges that the European Union faces indeed in relation to this conflict but also to other conflicts.

The European Union is actively working on solutions to restore maritime security in the Red Sea.

This is an international problem that requires an international solution and coordination.

As you asked me about what the European Union is preparing in relation to the EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta, further options concerning the European Union’s maritime response will be discussed at Council level based on proposals presented by the High Representative.

The European Union is engaging with partners in different diplomatic fora. To protect navigational freedoms and maritime security, the European Union considers ways to enhance its presence, assets, and capacity of actions in the Red Sea and beyond.

It is too early to evaluate the impact of the Houthis attacks and United States/United Kingdom retaliation on the discussions concerning an internal cease-fire in Yemen. The European Union will continue to support UN Special Envoy [for Yemen, Hans] Grundberg’s work and the UN-steered peace process leading to a final comprehensive and inclusive peace deal, including a permanent nation-wide ceasefire.

And just one personal remark: I am a bit surprised that those who are bombing every night civilians, killing civilians, destroying infrastructures, houses, apartments, that they are in the full front to condemn what finally is a military operation against terrorist attacks against the peaceful vessels.

Thank you.