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Richard Gere**October 24, 2009**

Biden Dismisses Cheney's Criticisms Over Afghanistan

By **[PETER BAKER](#)**

PRAGUE — Vice President [Joseph R. Biden Jr.](#) had a blunt response on Friday to the latest broadsides from former Vice President [Dick Cheney](#): "Who cares?"

In the latest exchange between old and new administrations, Mr. Biden rebuffed his predecessor's criticism about [President Obama](#)'s handling of [Afghanistan](#) as "absolutely wrong." And Mr. Biden rejected the last review of the war conducted by the White House under former President [George W. Bush](#) and Mr. Cheney as "irrelevant."

The dismissive reply, which came at the end of Mr. Biden's three-day swing through Eastern Europe during an interview with reporters traveling with him, underscored the weariness in the current White House with Mr. Cheney's periodic assaults. At the same time, advisers to Mr. Obama and Mr. Biden consider the former vice president a useful public foil and have not shied away from escalating the debate by taking him on directly.

At the heart of the dispute is a fundamental disagreement on national security, from how to wage war in Iraq and Afghanistan to how to protect Americans at home from possible terrorist attacks. [In a speech in Washington this week](#), Mr. Cheney complained that Mr. Obama was "dithering" in deciding whether to send more troops to Afghanistan and had committed a "strategic blunder" in scrapping the last administration's missile defense plan in Eastern Europe.

Mr. Biden spent much of this week in Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic assuring leaders in the region that the cancellation of Mr. Bush's antimissile shield in favor of a more mobile replacement was not a concession to Russia, as Mr. Cheney and others contended. Mr. Biden secured an agreement with the Czech Republic on Friday to participate in the new missile defense system, as he earlier did with Poland.

Asked about Mr. Cheney's criticism during a half-hour interview at the American ambassador's residence here, Mr. Biden responded indirectly at first, saying leaders in the region now agree that the Obama plan will be more effective. "They believe that the new architecture is better," the vice president said.

But as he warmed to the discussion, he became sharper in his rebuttals of Mr. Cheney. "I think that is absolutely wrong," he said of the "dithering" charge. "I think what the administration is doing is exactly what we said it would do. And what I think it warrants doing. And that is making an informed judgment based upon circumstances that have changed."

Mr. Biden shrugged off Mr. Cheney's point that the old administration had left behind a review of Afghanistan.

"Who cares what — " he said, and then stopped himself to find another way to put it. ("I can see the headline now," said the famously free-wheeling vice president. "I'm getting better, guys.")

But he went on to dismiss the Bush-Cheney review as inadequate. "That's why the president asked me to get in the plane in January and go to Afghanistan," Mr. Biden said. "I came back with a different review."

Moreover, he said, the Bush-Cheney review is now dated. "A whole lot has changed in the last year," Mr. Biden said. "Let's assume they left us a review that was absolutely correct. Is that review relevant and totally applicable to today in light of the changes that have taken place in the region, in Afghanistan itself? So I think that is sort of irrelevant. Not sort of — I think it's irrelevant."

The interview was the first time Mr. Biden had publicly talked about Afghanistan in the weeks since the president began intensively rethinking his strategy and considering Gen. [Stanley A. McChrystal](#)'s request for about 40,000 more troops. Mr. Biden has been a forceful skeptic of General McChrystal's request and an advocate for keeping troop levels roughly the same while focusing attention on hunting down Al Qaeda in Pakistan.

Mr. Biden said that Mr. Obama had lived up to a pre-election pledge to take his vice president's views seriously and added that he would not be upset if the president rejected them at the end of the Afghanistan policy review. "He has sought my opinion not generically but in detail," Mr. Biden said. "And if he reaches a different conclusion than I do, that's O.K. He's the president."

The vice president acknowledged that at every stop on his trip through Eastern Europe he ran into uncertainty from allies about whether America was going to stay the course in Afghanistan. "What they wanted to know was, 'Are you leaving?'" he said, adding that they were satisfied with his reassurances that America was not withdrawing.

Mr. Biden wrapped up his trip on Friday with meetings with Czech leaders. Jan Fischer, the prime minister, said his country would participate in the new antimissile shield. "I used the opportunity to express our readiness as a [NATO](#) member to participate because the new architecture is going to be NATO based and the Czech Republic is ready to participate," Mr. Fischer said.

Mr. Biden said a high-level defense team would visit Prague next month to discuss how to structure that participation. While Poland agreed to host SM-3 interceptors, the Czech Republic might help with research and development or by hosting a command and control center. Yet the Czech commitment remains uncertain since Mr. Fischer is a caretaker prime minister until elections next spring.

Still, securing Polish and Czech involvement in the new system may go a long way toward reassuring the region of America's commitment to its security. Both Poland and the Czech Republic were supposed to host parts of the Bush system and the Obama administration did not inform them of his decision [until just before the announcement](#). As news of his decision was leaking last month, Mr. Obama scrambled to reach Mr. Fischer by telephone after midnight to tell him first.

Mr. Biden acknowledged that the announcement was not handled well. "Could it have been done better?" he asked. "Yeah. Obviously it could have been done better." He added, "That's the reason for the trip."

He said Eastern European leaders were reassured. "There is an understandable reason for the anxiety here. You've got a new administration." But he added, "Missile architecture was more sort of a metaphor for 'Are we committed?'"

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