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The Democratic presidential candidates face off in Las Vegas Wednesday night ahead of the Nevada caucuses. Nevada could be a decisive state for candidates who performed poorly in Iowa and New Hampshire, including former Vice President Joe Biden. As Biden hopes for a comeback, a new short documentary sheds light on his extensive role in the Iraq War — an issue that has been raised repeatedly on the campaign trail. Biden has apologized for supporting the war, but the new film, directed by the Center for Economic and Policy Research’s Mark Weisbrot, exposes Biden’s central role in pushing for an Iraq invasion. It’s called “Worth the Price? Joe Biden and the Launch of the Iraq War.” The documentary is narrated by Danny Glover.

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**AMY GOODMAN:** This is *Democracy Now!*, [democracynow.org](#), *The War and Peace Report*. I’m Amy Goodman. The Democratic presidential candidates will face off in Las Vegas Wednesday night ahead of the Nevada caucuses. It’s the first debate with billionaire Michael Bloomberg on the stage. Nevada could be a decisive state for candidates who performed poorly in Iowa and New Hampshire, including former Vice President Joe Biden. As Biden hopes for a comeback, a new short documentary sheds light on his extensive role advocating for the Iraq War — an issue that’s been raised repeatedly on the campaign trail. Biden has apologized for supporting the war.

But today, in a broadcast exclusive, we’re going to bring you a new film, directed by the Center for Economic and Policy Research’s Mark Weisbrot, that exposes Biden’s central role in pushing for an Iraq invasion. It’s called *Worth the Price? Joe Biden and the Launch of the Iraq War*. The documentary is narrated by Danny Glover. But before we go to it, we’re going to the director himself, Mark Weisbrot, to talk, as we go back in time some 16, 17 years, Mark. Just give us a little introduction to why you decided to make this film now about the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

**MARK WEISBROT:** Yes. Well, first, you know, a lot of people think he’s going to lose and maybe it doesn’t matter. But he is still in the race. And even if he loses — and I think he probably will — he’s still going to — he still could very easily play a role if there’s a brokered convention, which you talked about on this show. He could play a role in the decision of who the candidate is. And I think that’s one of the reasons he’s staying in the race, trying to get

through Super Tuesday and so on.

But the second thing is, this is vitally important, and it really hasn't been discussed on television. And I want to thank you for having this show. You've had his vote for the Iraq War, has been brought up. But there's never been a presentation of what he actually did, which was, he was the most important elected official in this country, after George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, in enabling and allowing and getting the authorization for the war through Congress. That was a huge role in bringing us this war. It wasn't just a vote for the war. He was the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. And, you know, when I was going through this footage, it was amazing, all the things that he did. He argued very strongly for the war. He had a lot of influence.

**AMY GOODMAN:** And we're going to hear that in just one minute and then talk to you on the other side. Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research. His documentary, *Worth the Price? Joe Biden and the Launch of the Iraq War*. We'll bring it to you in 30 seconds.

[break]

**AMY GOODMAN:** "Staring at the Sun" by TV on the Radio. I'm Amy Goodman, as we turn now to the new documentary short, *Worth the Price? Joe Biden and the Launch of the Iraq War*. It's narrated by Danny Glover.

**PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH:** Our American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger.

**DANNY GLOVER:** The costs of the Iraq War were enormous. More than 4,500 American soldiers, as well as thousands of military contractors, were killed. Tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers were wounded. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis — and by some estimates, more than a million — were killed. And the war created massive instability, including more wars and terrorism throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Fast-forward to the 2020 presidential race. There's only one candidate for the nomination of the Democratic Party who played a

leading role in actually making the Iraq War happen.

**SEN. JOE BIDEN:** In my judgment, President Bush is right to be concerned about Saddam Hussein's relentless pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and the possibility that he may use them or share them with terrorists. Other regimes hostile to the United States and our allies already have or seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

**DANNY GLOVER:** This was Joe Biden in 2002 speaking as chair of the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. A few months later, when the Senate was debating whether to give President George W. Bush the authority to start a war with Iraq, Biden argued strongly in favor of granting this authority.

**SEN. JOE BIDEN:** The objective is to compel Iraq to destroy its illegal weapons of mass destruction and its program to develop and produce missiles and more of those weapons. Saddam is dangerous. The world would be a better place without him. But the reason he poses a growing danger to the United States and its allies is that he possesses chemical and biological weapons and is seeking nuclear weapons. And unlike my colleagues from West Virginia and Maryland, I do not believe this is a rush to war. I believe it's a march to peace and security. I believe that failure to overwhelmingly support this resolution is likely to enhance the prospects the war will occur.

**BARBARA RANSBY:** Joe Biden did so much more than vote for the war. He was the chair of the powerful Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and he really used his control over that committee to make sure that a majority of the U.S. Senate voted to authorize the war. And that's a very serious thing. It's questionable whether the authorization to start the war could have even passed Congress without all that Biden did to get it approved. So, he really did play a major role in bringing us into the Iraq War, a terrible, terrible war. And this was much more responsibility — he bears much more responsibility than many other senators who simply voted for it. Of course, the statement about chemical, biological and nuclear weapons were false. And many experts already concluded this at the time of the Senate hearings, but Biden didn't allow these experts to testify. That's really significant. As chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, Biden was able to control the Senate debate on the war, and therefore much of the information that most senators received and that major media outlets reported was really distorted.

**DANNY GLOVER:** There were other Democrats in the Senate who wanted to put limits on Bush's ability to start a war in Iraq. For example, if there was no imminent threat to the United States and the United Nations did not authorize a war, then President Bush would have to come back to Congress for another resolution. But Biden shot this down.

**SEN. JOE BIDEN:** So, the reason why I oppose the amendment of my friend from Michigan is because the basic premise upon which I began is consistent with where my friend from Connecticut begins, and that is that the threat need not be imminent for us to take action. That's authority we're about to delegate to the president.

**STEPHEN ZUNES:** So, the fact that he would take such a stridently pro-war position, that he would use that role to limit the debate the way he did, played a major factor in getting enough defections from the Democratic majority to join with almost-unanimous Republican support to make the war resolution pass. As a result, I don't think it would be unfair to say that Biden played a more important role than probably anybody in Congress in making the Iraq War possible. The idea that Iraq, which had been rid of its nonconventional weapons and weapons programs and weapons systems, that was under the strictest sanctions of any nation has ever experienced, was somehow a threat to the United States on the far side of the world is totally absurd. I mean, totally ridiculous. I mean, the fact that an educated person like Joe Biden, with foreign policy experience, would believe that really defies the imagination.

**DANNY GLOVER:** But the witnesses mostly reinforced the pro-war arguments.

**CASPAR WEINBERGER:** The question before us really is: Should the United States depose Saddam Hussein? And my answer is clearly yes.

**KHIDIR HAMZA:** My suggestion, as I stated earlier, is that regime change as the stated U.S. policy would be the correct way to deal with this problem.

**CHARLES DUELFER:** In my opinion, weapons inspections are not the answer to the real problem, which is the regime.

**THOMAS McINERNEY:** And the people want a regime change. Let's help them to make this change and liberate Iraq from this oppressor.

**KHIDIR HAMZA:** Iraq has enough to generate the needed bomb-grade uranium for three nuclear weapons by 2005. It is too difficult to see how any measure short of a regime change will be effective.

**SAMUEL BERGER:** A nuclear-armed Saddam sometime in this decade is a risk we cannot choose to ignore.

**RICHARD BUTLER:** It is essential to recognize that the claim made by Saddam's representatives that Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction is false.

**CASPAR WEINBERGER:** We know that Iraq permits known al-Qaeda members to live and move freely about in Iraq. I am told that that is — that that is the case, that the al-Qaeda groups are welcome and that they're being supported, their families are being supported.

**REND AL-RAHIM FRANCKE:** I have to tell you, Iraqis desperately want to be freed of Saddam Hussein, and they also know that the only country that can help them with this is the United States. And they are ready to welcome the U.S. as liberators.

**DANNY GLOVER:** Senator Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island pushed back against the witnesses being stacked. But Biden cut him off.

**SEN. LINCOLN CHAFEE:** And I do think that it would have been good to have that perspective on this panel, that for better balance. I think we've got, from this panel, a perspective that the threat is very real, very immediate. And I maybe would ask you to comment on some of these senior military officials, including, according to the article, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in their view —

**SEN. JOE BIDEN:** Senator will yield just for a moment. I apologize, but —

**SEN. LINCOLN CHAFEE:** Excuse me.

**SEN. JOE BIDEN:** The senator from Florida is going to chair the hearing. I have to leave for a few minutes. And after this panel is over, we'll recess for — how much time for lunch? — 45 minutes for lunch, when this panel — I'm not suggesting we finish now. When the panel is finished, we'll recess for 45 minutes. And I assure you, Senator, there are other witnesses coming along who think the policy of containment is just fine, so I hope you'll find this is extremely balanced, when we finish the whole two days of hearings. But I thank you for letting me interrupt. And I'm turning the gavel over to...

**DANNY GLOVER:** Biden never returned to the problem that Senator Chafee raised about the bias of the witnesses that were allowed to testify.

**MATTHEW HOH:** I was in the Iraq War twice and the Afghan War once. You know, for veterans, these wars have had an impact that lasts for our whole lives. The Iraq War, almost

4,600 American soldiers were killed there. I think as of this — as of the first month of 2020, I think that the total number is 4,575. And that's just the direct number killed. Because war has been privatized and contracted out and companies are making money off of it, the estimates are that a similar number, about 4,500 contractors, men and women who were doing jobs in the military that in past wars soldiers would have been doing, were also killed in Iraq. So, when you look at the number killed, you have to look at, say, 9,000, rather than almost than 4,500. That does not take into account the suicides. The suicides from these wars, based upon Veterans Administration data, runs between 9,000 and 10,000 killed by suicide. We've also had, you know, tens of thousands of men and women wounded in action. I had marines in my command who were hit by roadside bombs nine, 10 times during a deployment. This is why I think so many of us who were in these wars are so disgusted by the political system, so upset and furious that people who were responsible for these wars, who had a constitutional responsibility for oversight, just went along with the groupthink, just got rid of any intellectual honesty or moral honesty.

**PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** ISIL is a direct outgrowth of al-Qaeda in Iraq, that grew out of our invasion, which is an example of unintended consequences, which is why we should generally aim before we shoot.

**STEPHEN KINZER:** We decapitated the government there, left no indigenous leadership. And that not only allowed all sorts of groups within Iraq to revolt against what they saw as an illegitimate occupier, but it attracted jihadist fanatics from around the world. They looked at Iraq and saw: "Here's a place where we can go kill American soldiers." And they poured in. They are there gaining experience for future wars. So, without the sin of the Iraq invasion, we wouldn't be dealing with ISIS today.

**VINCENT CANNISTRARO:** First time in my 27 years in intelligence, the first time I have ever heard of a vice president of the United States going out to CIA and sitting down with desk-level analysts, sitting down and debating with junior-level analysts and pushing them to find support for something he personally believes, that Saddam was trying to acquire uranium. That, to me, is pressure, and that's intimidation. And they're not going to say, "Well, Mr. Vice President, you're full of it."

**LAWRENCE WILKERSON:** They were manufacturing the case in the bowels of the CIA for

Saddam Hussein's possession of weapons of mass destruction.

**DANNY GLOVER:** And in the United States Congress. One of the false stories that the Bush administration used to promote the War with Iraq was that Saddam Hussein was actually connected with al-Qaeda, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks.

**PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH:** Well, the reason I keep insisting that there was a relationship between Iraq and Saddam and al-Qaeda, because there was a relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda.

**DANNY GLOVER:** Al-Qaeda was included in the resolution that Biden pushed through the Senate, which gave Bush the authority to go to war.

**STEPHEN KINZER:** Anybody who had the slightest knowledge about that region would realize the absurdity of the connection between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, who actually were bitter enemies. I was in Iraq when Saddam Hussein was in power. Saddam did not tolerate any form of religious extremism. If you were sitting in a cafe and you said to the person next to you, "Our government really isn't religious enough," or "We should have more piety from our leaders and in our policies," you'd probably be arrested within an hour. There was no chance of al-Qaeda or any kind of religious extremist group from getting a foothold in Iraq while Saddam Hussein was in power.

**DANNY GLOVER:** After Bush invaded, Biden continued to support the war for years.

**SEN. JOE BIDEN:** Some in my own party have said that it was a mistake to go to Iraq in the first place, and believe that it's not worth the cost, whatever benefit may flow from our engagement in Iraq. But the cost of not acting against Saddam, I think, would have been much greater. And so is the cost, and so will be the cost, of not finishing this job. The president of the



United States is a bold leader, and he is popular. The stakes are high, and the need for leadership is great. I wish he'd use some of his stored-up popularity to make what I admit is not a very popular case, but I and many others will support him. Nine months ago, I voted with my colleagues to give the president of the United States of America the authority to use force. And I would vote that way again today. It was the right vote then, and it'd be a correct vote today.

**LAWRENCE WILKERSON:** And President Obama, in the Roosevelt Room, essentially told me this, September the 10th, 2015. He started off the conversation with these words: "There's a bias in this town toward war." I almost fell off my seat. And then he told us, for the next 20, 25 minutes, that he didn't know what to do about it. "There's a bias in this town toward war," said the president of the United States. We have a machine in Washington. It consists of predatory capitalists, like Lockheed Martin and ExxonMobil, and all they represent. ExxonMobil sells more fossil fuel to the Department of Defense than any other entity in the world. Lockheed Martin, the biggest weapons merchant in the world, makes a fortune off war. So does Raytheon, Grumman and Boeing. As long as you have these dollars rolling in, you're going to have constant, endless war.

**ADOM GETACHEW:** I think, in the United States, Biden represents a kind of long-standing, bipartisan commitment to U.S. preeminence on the global stage, in which the U.S. acts as the policeman of the world. I think a lot of Americans are frustrated by this position. They want to have a different kind of relationship to the world. And they want a leader, a president, and a Congress, that can present a vision of prosperity for all Americans. I think that only happens when we break with the cycle of endless wars. It is going to be very difficult, I think, for a Democratic Party candidate who basically reiterates the *status quo* of endless military interventions, endless wars in the Middle East, to win against Donald Trump.

**SEN. DICK DURBIN:** At the time of this debate, I was a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee. And I would read the headlines in the paper in the morning, and I'd watch the television newscasts, and I'd shake my head, because, you see, just a few hundred feet away from here, in a closed room, carefully guarded, the Intelligence Committee was meeting on a daily basis for top-secret briefings about the information we were receiving, and the information we had in the Intelligence Committee was not the same information being given to the American people. I couldn't believe it.

**PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH:** Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof, the smoking gun, that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.

**SEN. DICK DURBIN:** So, what happened? We invaded, turned loose hundreds, if not thousands, of people scouring Iraq for these weapons of mass destruction. Never found one of them. Looked for nuclear weapons. No evidence whatsoever. Went into our intelligence files and said, “OK, Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, let’s get this linkage put together once and for all.” No evidence at all of a linkage. The American people were deceived into this war.

**MATTHEW HOH:** I tell you what, I don’t understand how any of these politicians who claim to support the troops and support their families — I don’t understand how anyone could hold a mother at the funeral of her son, who just turned 20, who was killed either in the wars or because of suicide — and I’ve done both, and there’s no difference for the mother — and act as if somehow there’s some benefit to these wars, when it’s demonstrably not. You know, and then you’re over there, and you’re fighting in it, and you’re taking part in it. And as an officer, I was responsible for my marines and for my sailors and for — I had their lives, and I was responsible to their families for that. And you do. You think, “Can I go home and say to the families that it was worth it, that their son was killed, their husband was killed, their brother was killed, for something that was good or something that was beneficial?”

**SEN. JOE BIDEN:** As I said at the outset, if we can make the case, which I think — well, I won’t say what I think yet; the hearings aren’t finished — but if we can make the case that the threat is real and dire, that a free and democratic Iraq, if it could be accomplished, could have a cleansing impact on that part of the world and make our life easier significantly down the road, which I think could be made in an ideal circumstance — not even an ideal, if we do things right — that it is worth the price.

**AMY GOODMAN:** That’s the broadcast exclusive of *Worth the Price? Joe Biden and the Launch of the Iraq War*. It’s narrated by Danny Glover, directed by Mark Weisbrot with the Center for Economic and Policy Research, who is joining us from Washington, D.C. So, in these last two minutes we have, Mark, now, again, on the campaign trail, presidential candidate Biden has said, in one form or another, he made a mistake on Iraq. Your response?

**MARK WEISBROT:** Well, I think that's just too little and too late. It's not enough. You know, this really has to be an issue. This can't be swept under the rug. And we're entering a different period right now, I think, is very crucial. We could have another war even before the election. You had President Trump come very close to a war with Iran when he ordered the assassination of General Soleimani just a month ago.

And this is something that also, the other part of it, on the positive side, there's enormous resistance to this in Congress. You have Bernie Sanders, for instance, introduced the No War with Iran Act. And he also led the fight, which was successful, to get both houses of Congress — and this is using the War Powers Resolution for the first time in 45 years. Both houses of Congress voted to order the U.S. military to get out of this war in Yemen, which has killed hundreds of thousands of people. So, there's a real strong movement now to put an end to these endless wars.

And these wars will go on forever if we don't allow this to even be discussed. We have to have this discussion. This is somebody who's running for president of the United States, and he played a major role in bringing about this war, that killed, you know, by the best estimates, a million people and thousands of U.S. — over 4,500 U.S. soldiers. And here it is. It hasn't — his role hasn't even been discussed. At the very least, people voting in the Democratic primary should know what he did.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Interestingly, Mark Weisbrot, the *Los Angeles Times* recently had a [piece](#). Here you have Joe Biden apologizing for what he did, and you really lay out clearly how he was not only supporting the war, but leading the support. Mayor Bloomberg, when interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times*, said he didn't regret backing the Iraq War back then.

**MARK WEISBROT:** Yes, that's another reason, I mean, because it's Bloomberg, too. So, this is an issue in the race. And, you know, this is even bigger than that, because for the last 50 years the peace movement has always pointed out that when you build a fighter plane, you're giving up on healthcare for thousands of people. But it's even worse than that now, because now the intellectuals of the so-called national security state are —

**AMY GOODMAN:** We have five seconds.

**MARK WEISBROT:** — well, they're talking about an arms race with China. You could forget about the Green New Deal, Medicare for All and everything else, because their economy is already 30% bigger than ours, and it's going to be twice as big within 10 years. So, this affects everything that anybody who cares about this presidential election wants.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Mark Weisbrot, I want to thank you for being with us, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research. That does it for our show.