

Opinion Biden has succeeded all along. The media can't ignore it.



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This week, I'll look at evolving coverage of President Biden, pick the pol of the week and share something off the (political) beaten path.

What caught my eye

Until recently, the gulf between President Biden's performance in office and the coverage of his presidency was as vast as it has been in any modern presidency. Biden has steered the country out of a recession and pandemic, gotten through a slew of critical legislation (some bipartisan), avoided a default on the debt, set the stage for about 14 million new jobs and overseen a resurgence of manufacturing. Internationally, he has restored the United States' image and solidified and expanded NATO in defense of Ukraine. Nevertheless, mainstream media coverage has been incessantly negative, dwelling on fears of recession, pointing to failure to "unite the country" (as if unity were possible in the MAGA era), obsessing over premature polling of dubious value and regurgitating MAGA talking points about his age.

[Jon Allsop](#) at the Columbia Journalism Review captured the cycle of negativity that has distorted coverage of Biden. "If Republicans are pushing a *But her emails!* media strategy in an attempt to tar Biden, the primary motivation, as I see it, is to foster cynicism; the aim is not a false equivalence that equally apports credit, but one that conveys a sense that everyone in politics is just as old, just as corrupt, just as *bad* as each other, and that consequently, integrity doesn't really matter and anything goes," he wrote. "Journalists who indulge this effort can convince themselves that they're only *asking questions*, or covering *what voters think* or *what politicians are saying*." He added, "It's the logical endpoint of a media ecosystem that approaches every story through the prism of elections — an approach that has always been cynical itself." And worse, it legitimizes unacceptable Republican behavior and distorts the threat MAGA forces pose to democracy.



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Then came the horrific pogrom in Israel in which Hamas murdered at least 1,400 men, women and children and kidnapped about 220. Biden stepped into the role of consoler-in-chief for American and Israeli Jews, distinguished between the Palestinian people and Hamas terrorists, negotiated privately with Israel to allow humanitarian aid to get through to Gaza and, in an impressive Oval Office address, explained why supporting Israel and Ukraine against barbarism is essential to our own security.

Now, the media declares Biden has reached an “inflection point.” Politico, in keeping with its habit of turning every event into a content-neutral political horseshoe, declared that Biden’s allies are “leery of appearing to politicize the Middle East crisis” but “see the opportunity presented by an unexpected crisis to feature Biden’s strengths.” Actually, the voices quoted simply reaffirm their belief he is doing an impressive job, defying critics’ characterization of him. (Sen. Christopher A. Coons, a Democrat from Delaware, said, “This is a real leader, and I think the American people are not ready to retreat from the world.”) Politico, not Biden allies, is framing this in political terms.

The report asserts that “the Biden team appears to be betting that the new war between Israelis and Palestinians could be a kind of tipping point” but cited no sources. Again, without sourcing, the report proclaimed that “the 80-year-old Biden is trying to change the narrative on what has become his biggest liability, his age.” Perhaps his recent trip to Israel was no different from his wartime journey to Ukraine. It might just be that Biden’s performance has been consistent, but the media only now grudgingly acknowledges what has been in front of their noses. (The Post’s Dan Balz presented a spin-free account of recent events: “a case study in the value of experience, expertise and preparation when the unexpected happens.”)

In short, Biden’s accomplishments are now too obvious to ignore. If the Israel-Gaza war becomes an inflection point *for the media*, it will be long overdue.

Distinguished person of the week

Former congresswoman Liz Cheney remains a singular voice of sanity and principled leadership on the right. She promptly denounced then-President Donald Trump after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, joined only nine other House Republicans to vote for impeachment and then helped steer the House Jan. 6 select committee. As vice chair of the committee, she provided moral counseling to Republicans (“There will come a day when Donald Trump is gone, but your dishonor will remain”), helped lay out a powerful case against Trump through testimony of Republican witnesses and co-authored a report documenting the coup plot.

She has continued to denounce GOP lies. She told an audience in a speech in Minnesota earlier this month that Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) “knew more about what Donald Trump had planned for January 6 than any other member of the House of Representatives.” Cheney continued, “Jim Jordan was involved, was part of the conspiracy in which Donald Trump was engaged as he attempted to overturn the election.” She minced no words in warning that had they elected Jordan speaker, Republicans would never be able to say they “could be counted on to defend the Constitution.”

On Sunday, she appeared on CNN's "State of the Union." With regard to Biden's Oval Office speech, she observed that "the forces of freedom are at war with the forces of tyranny and terrorism around the world, and America has got to lead." In praising his comments, she said "those themes of the indispensable nature of America and America's leadership in the battle for freedom globally, that's exactly right, exactly what we need to be saying."

As for Trump, she denounced his praise of Hezbollah. "They were appalling comments. And you're absolutely right that there should have been a response," she said. She argued every GOP House member and presidential candidate "ought to be asked about those comments." She also recounted that Trump "reportedly shared Israeli intelligence with the Russians very early in his term" and, according to the federal indictment, "shared highly classified military documents apparently relating to military action potentially against Iran." She reiterated that "it's simply the latest example of why Donald Trump is not fit to be president of the United States."

Though she criticized Biden's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and defends the Iraq War, she remains above tribal loyalty. Asked whether Biden or Trump is responding best to the war, she answered, "Oh, certainly Biden."

She also promised to help elect candidates loyal to the Constitution, denounced Republican opponents of Ukrainian aid such as Sen. J.D. Vance (R-Ohio) ("completely wrong, ignorant, uninformed") and slammed Republicans in the speaker fight for "elevating those members, frankly, some of whom are white supremacists, some of whom are antisemitic, a number of whom were involved directly in the attempt to seize power and overturn the election." Finally, she reiterated her view that support for the "big lie" should be disqualifying for future office. In her view, "Donald Trump is the single most dangerous threat we face."

Whatever one thinks of her policy views, Cheney remains a voice of moral clarity and devotion to constitutional principles. Republicans' vilification of her tells us everything we need to know about her — and them.

Something different

In a brief visit to Chattanooga, Tenn., I viewed a memorial dedicated Ed Johnson, a Black man falsely accused of raping a White woman and sentenced to death. After the Supreme Court issued a stay (in a case argued by two Black lawyers), a White mob took him from jail and lynched him on the Walnut Street Bridge.

The memorial, rendered to be accessible to people of all ages, races and backgrounds, is an exquisite example of racial reconciliation and remembrance. At the dedication in 2021, the mayor issued a formal apology. Eddie Glaude Jr., a professor of African American studies at Princeton University, told the audience, "It is rare in these trying times that communities come together to recognize a profound wrong, a wrong that haunts."

It has taken far too long to take down racist memorials to the "Lost Cause." It should not take as long to fill the spaces with meaningful, accurate depictions of our true history. In small ways, the Ed Johnson and other memorials produced through community efforts offer hope for increased understanding and progress toward a "more perfect union."

From my weekly Q&A

Every Wednesday at noon, I host a live Q&A with readers. Read a [transcript of this week's Q&A](#), or [submit a question](#) for the next one.

Debra: Isn't Israel creating a breeding ground for future terrorists? With its systemic rather than surgical strikes in Gaza and its decision to cut off water, bomb refugee camps, etc., isn't Israel creating a breeding ground for terrorists? I think the average age among Palestinians is young.

Jennifer Rubin: Israel is hitting military targets. Hamas's ongoing existence is the source of terrorism and the cause of the Palestinians' misery. Your argument is akin to saying Jews in the 1930s should not have fought back for fear of angering the Germans.