

# WHAT IF YOU HAD A MILITARY SUMMIT DEFENDING THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY AND NO ONE GAVE A DAMN?

If you read the dead tree NYT this morning, you might be forgiven for thinking that Joe Biden was isolated *from America's NATO allies*.



That's because the front page put a big picture of Biden's NATO appearance next to an article describing Biden as isolated *within his own party*. That story described President Biden's press conference marking the end of the NATO summit this way:

He faced a new test on Thursday night in a news conference following the NATO summit in Washington. In an early stumble before it even got underway, Mr. Biden flubbed his introduction of President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, saying: "Ladies and gentlemen, President Putin." He quickly caught himself.

During the news conference, he referred to "Vice President Trump" when he meant Vice President Kamala Harris, a mistake that former President Donald J. Trump immediately mocked on social media.

But Mr. Biden showed a command of the

issues on foreign policy, although he spoke slowly and meandered at times. Lawmakers and aides in Congress said it was a strong enough performance to keep the dam from breaking with mass calls for Mr. Biden to step aside, but with enough missteps to prolong the anxiety on Capitol Hill.

There was no description of the summit itself at all in the article. Nor was there a story on the summit anywhere on the dead tree front page.

That “Biden isolated” story didn’t even make the top of digital front page (at least for me), which looked this way this morning:



At that point, the top news included:

- A story from Peter Baker acknowledging Biden’s command of foreign policy, sandwiched between a description of his flubs and a super helpful explanation of how, “every momentary flub, every verbal miscue, even if quickly corrected, now takes on outsize importance, ricocheting across the internet in viral

video clips”

- Zolan Kanno-Youngs cataloging five takeaways, in which is command of foreign policy was third:
  - He said he is not leaving
  - He got off to a rough start
  - He showed a command of foreign policy
  - He struggled to articulate why he is the best person to defeat Mr. Trump
  - He offered a strong defense of Kamala Harris
- A Nicholas Nehamas story that, when written, focused exclusively on those (like Jim Himes) who called for Biden to drop out
- A piece on how Joe Biden lost Hollywood
- One of the many stories that described Biden’s polling on Kamala Harris’ strength against Trump was “quiet” (though the ridiculous claim that this was quiet has now been relegated to a subhead)
- A purported fact check of Biden’s press conference that claimed Biden’s observation, “He’s already told Putin – and I quote –

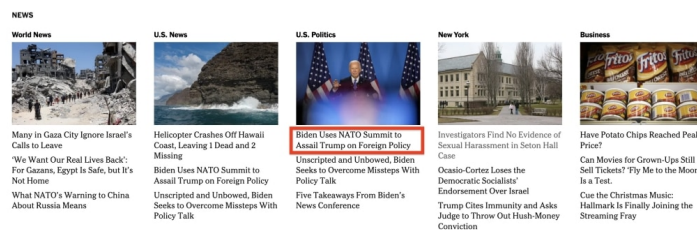
do whatever the hell you want," needed context

The fact check said nothing about Biden's claim, in response to a question from AFP journalist Danny Kemp, that world leaders credited Biden for bringing NATO together.

I'm sure you actually *could* find a world leader who was unimpressed with Biden's summit – like Viktor Orbán, who scurried from the conference to plan capitulation to Putin at Mar-a-Lago. But no one wanted to talk about *that* – about Biden's efforts to stave off authoritarianism, about Biden's efforts to reverse Putin's invasion of Ukraine, about Biden's efforts to save the idea of democracy, about the substance of the summit. So it didn't merit a fact check either.

There's a horse race to be run. And there's absolutely no place for actual policy outcomes when there's a horse race to be had!

When I first started writing this story, I had to look *way down here* at the bottom of the NYT page to find any report that was, substantially, about the NATO Summit at all.



The story has been promoted, placed in a section on Trump, not Biden, though still the fourth horizontal section on the page.

#### Martyr Inc.: How Trump Monetized a Persecution Narrative

Donald Trump is blurring the lines between politics and business and turning it into cash — selling Bibles, clothing and the promise of political salvation.

9 MIN READ

President Biden used the NATO summit to attack Donald Trump on foreign policy.

4 MIN READ



Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

The story, from David Sanger, also focused on the press conference and noted Biden's flubs. But it also described how Trump congratulated Putin's genius after Russia invaded Ukraine.

[T]he session also served as a platform for him to show a command of foreign policy, including describing in detail the decisions he has made over three and a half years that have been punctuated by wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

He took credit for warning the Europeans of an impending invasion of Ukraine in late 2021 and early 2022, and for preparing NATO to provide arms and intelligence as soon as war broke out. And he used the moment to remind American voters that Mr. Trump's first reaction to the invasion was to praise President Vladimir V. Putin.

"Here's what he said," Mr. Biden added, his voice dripping with sarcasm: "'It was genius. It was wonderful.'"

The biting comparison, with its suggestion that Mr. Trump admires only brute force and is in Mr. Putin's pocket, was the kind of attack on his opponent that Mr. Biden's supporters were hoping for in the debate between the two men two weeks ago but never heard.

Further down in that story, starting at ¶18 of a 23¶¶ story, Sanger described the news of the summit: that NATO was going to try to disrupt the relationship between China and Russia.

But it was on the question of Russia's rapidly expanding relationship with China – and its alignment with North Korea and Iran, two other arms suppliers to Russia – that Mr. Biden broke the most new ground.

Until the news conference, he had never conceded that the United States was seeking to disrupt the relationship between the two countries, just as President Richard M. Nixon and his secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, did a half-century ago, by surprising the world with a diplomatic opening to Beijing.

He declined to discuss details of the strategy in public, but went on to say that “you’ll see that some of our European friends are going to be curtailing their investment in Russia – I mean, excuse me, in China, as long as China continues to have this indirect help to Russia.”

That was a significant reversal. Two years ago, Mr. Biden expressed doubts that the two countries, with their centuries of enmity and border disputes, could ever get along.

By the time the NATO leaders gathered this week for the 75th anniversary of the alliance, however, they were denouncing China as “a decisive enabler of Russia’s war against Ukraine” and hinting that European nations might restrict their economic interchanges with Beijing.

China “cannot enable the largest war in Europe in recent history without this negatively impacting its interests and reputation,” the summit’s declaration says, wording that was pressed by Mr. Biden’s aides.

So to find actual news of Biden's NATO summit, you needed to scroll down the NYT to find the Sanger article, then scroll down in that article to find the news: that NATO is attempting to disrupt a growing alliance of authoritarian countries challenging democracy.

I'm genuinely not sure how NYT (and other outlets, who offered similar coverage) understand the world, wherein the fate of Joe Biden on a minute-to-minute basis can be divorced from the fate of democracy, globally. You have to have democracy before you can have horse races.

Yes, in an op-ed yesterday, NYT included Trump's disdain for democracy and fondness for "strongmen" among the reasons he's unfit to lead.

Mr. Trump has demonstrated contempt for these American ideals. He admires autocrats, from Viktor Orban to Vladimir Putin to Kim Jong-un. He believes in the strongman model of power – a leader who makes things happen by demanding it, compelling agreement through force of will or personality. In reality, a strongman rules through fear and the unprincipled use of political might for self-serving ends, imposing poorly conceived policies that smother innovation, entrepreneurship, ideas and hope.

But NYT did not mention that Trump not only admires these thugs, he is *allied with them* against democracy.

Yes, it matters that Democrats beat Trump in November. It matters that Democrats have a candidate with the stamina to do that.

But the bigger picture matters, too. And Biden's success at marshalling democratic powers in alliance is one of the reasons he believes he has demonstrated his fitness to remain President.

His efforts to defend democracy are not news,  
apparently.