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We need a serious conversation about Joe Biden's brain

BY BECKET ADAMS, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 07/03/23 7:00 AM ET

Speaking to reporters Wednesday, President Biden falsely claimed that Russia is at war with Iraq. Russia is at war with Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is "clearly losing the war in Iraq," Biden told the press pool, "losing the war at home. And he has become a bit of a pariah around the world."

On Tuesday, during an unrelated fundraising event in Chevy Chase, Md., Biden made the exact same slip-up, mistaking Ukraine for Iraq.

"If anybody told you … that we'd be able to bring all of Europe together in the onslaught on Iraq and get NATO to be completely united," the president said, "I think they would have told you it's not likely."

Although many journalists did a fine job this week highlighting the president's apparent confusion regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine, one can't help but feel as if the news industry as a whole is avoiding the obvious follow-up question. Namely, "Is Biden OK?"

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It's not an unfair question, either, considering the Iraq/Ukraine gaffes were not an isolated series of incidents. They are simply the latest in a string of bizarre, confused and mostly unintelligible statements from Biden in the much longer string of bizarre, confused and mostly unintelligible statements that have come to define the Biden presidency.

"We have plans to build a railroad from the Pacific all the way across the Indian Ocean," the president said this month during an address before the League of Conservation Voters.

There is no such plan, of course, to build a railroad from the Pacific coast to the Indian Ocean. According to his White House handlers, the president was referring to a plan that would connect railroads across the African continent, linking ports on the Atlantic Ocean to ports on the Indian Ocean. Atlantic, Pacific. Tomato, *tomato*.

On June 19, the president promised to conserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and water by — the year he won the presidency?

"I've committed to — by 2020, we will have conserved 30 percent of all the lands and waters the United States has jurisdiction over and simultaneously reduce emissions to blunt climate impact," he said.

Following a June 16 speaking engagement at the University of Hartford in Connecticut, where Biden promoted gun control efforts, the president signed off by saying, "God save the Queen, man."

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The press pool, which observed and reported on the president's address in real time, was left befuddled by his remarks, not least of all because Queen Elizabeth II is still dead, and her son is still king.

"Several of you have asked me why he might have said that," the Dallas Morning News's Todd Gillman said in his pool report. "I have no idea. Other poolers likewise have no idea." The White House, for its part, claimed the president was merely sharing a joke with a member of the audience, a detail that apparently went unobserved by the entire White House press pool.

There's also the fact that Biden keeps claiming his late son, Beau, died in Iraq. Beau did not die in Iraq. Beau died in Bethesda, Md., six years after returning from a tour of duty in Iraq.

During his 2022 State of the Union address [emphases added], Biden declared, "**Putin may circle Kyiv** with tanks, but he will never gain the hearts and souls of the **Iranian people**."

In July of that same year, during his visit to Israel, the president said, "We must do every, every day — continue to bear witness, to keep alive the truth and honor of the Holocaust." He corrected himself later, replacing "honor" with "horror."

Earlier, during an event near the White House, Biden inquired about the whereabouts of the late Rep. Jackie Walorski (R-Ind.), whose death the president himself had commemorated in a public statement just weeks prior. The White House flag had been even flown at half-staff for two days following the congresswoman's death.

Or how about when Biden accidentally endorsed regime change in Russia, when he said during an overseas trip in Poland: "For God's sake, [Putin] cannot remain in power." This one was a particular headache for Biden's handlers.

One could go on, but you likely get the picture. The kindest thing that can be said of this president is that he has lost his fastball.

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This isn't just about whether Biden has the stuff to finish this term, let alone serve a second one. This is also about why we in the media aren't having a more robust debate regarding Biden's mental acuity. The apparent lack of interest in the matter certainly feels like a change of pace for an industry that historically hasn't shied from the issue.

During the Trump years, for example, there was no shortage of coverage and commentary questioning the president's physical and mental fitness. In those years, there were three parts to every sentence published by the press: A noun, a verb, and "Is Donald Trump insane?"

Psychiatrists became cable news famous overnight simply for their willingness to leverage their credentials against Trump. Earlier, when then-Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) ran for president in 2008, a popular newsroom theme at the time was, "Is he too old?" Then, there was former President George W. Bush, whose lifelong battle with the English language became so much fodder for media speculation and late-night jocularity. Lastly, of course, there's former President Reagan, whose administration was dogged by the press's persistent questions regarding whether his brain had finally turned to mashed potatoes.

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Fast-forward to 2023, and we see the current president confuse basic world events, praise rail projects that don't exist, mourn war casualties that aren't real, wander around stages and TV sets as if he is lost and struggle to make it through speaking engagements without getting flustered or exhausted. Yet, despite the press's normal reflex to ask whether the president is up to the demands of the office, we in the media have responded to Biden's bizarre presidency with little more than a bored shrug.

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The point here isn't to highlight the press's treatment of past presidents and presidential hopefuls, to shout "hypocrisy!" Rather, it's to state that the public deserves to know whether Biden is capable of performing the bare minimum required of his office. If anything falls under the heading of "public interest," this is surely it. And yet the broader press, the industry tasked with asking and exploring this question, has staked out a position of casual indifference.

But if ever there was a time to snap back to attention, to engage on the issue of "presidential fitness," this is it. There's a presidential election just around the corner. The time to get serious about "fitness," and to address it fairly and seriously, is now. Not for the sake of the media's credibility, but for the sake of the public, which has every right to know whether the leading candidates for president are actually capable of carrying out their duties.

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