

Weekly Commentary 39 August 2024

Is Kamala Harris a suitable presidential candidate?

After her anointment at the Democratic National Convention the week before last, there was a lot of noise that said that she was hiding from interviews or debates where she can be scrutinised on her views about how she would run the country as the commander in chief. Nothing about Harris has been known to be intellectually sound, and her views on many national and global problems are unclear. The BBC has just released an article on what her positions are on ten critical issues: Here is what these are:

Where Kamala Harris stands on 10 key issues

23 August 2024

Phil McCausland

BBC News, in Chicago

Vice-President Kamala Harris has been riding high on a wave of favourable polls and energetic rallies since she became the Democratic Party's nominee for president. But beyond the good vibes, **where does she stand on the issues that matter to Americans?**

Although she has yet to release a comprehensive platform, her time as a California senator and prosecutor, her 2020 bid for the presidency and subsequent role in the White House give hints as to where Ms Harris stands on a number of policy areas.

Over the years, some of her positions have shifted and even people close to her acknowledge she has sometimes struggled to define herself.

But as she accepted the Democratic nomination at the party's convention in Chicago, she made an effort to contrast her vision for America with her Republican opponent, Donald Trump.

Here's where she stands on 10 key issues.

Economy

As a senator, Ms Harris championed a number of progressive policies, including paid family leave, affordable housing and free tuition for low-and-middle income families.

As vice-president, she has been Mr Biden's partner in passing major economic legislation - regularly labelled "Bidenomics" - which included major investments in infrastructure and green energy.

But with inflation and high interest rates continuing to bedevil American wallets, polls have shown that the economy continues to be top of mind for many voters.

Ms Harris has thus far released her economic plan, including mortgage assistance for first-time homebuyers, a tax credit for parents of newborns and bans on price gouging at the grocery store to help target inflation.

She said in her convention acceptance speech that her plans would create "an opportunity economy where everyone has a chance to compete and a chance to succeed".

Immigration

Ms Harris's position on the border has changed over time. In 2020, while campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination, she held fairly progressive positions - such as promising to close down immigration detention centres.

In 2021, Mr Biden asked Ms Harris as vice-president to oversee the diplomatic effort around immigration issues on the US southern border.

Many Republicans have characterised her as a "border tsar", but she was tasked specifically with working with Central American countries to address the "root causes" of why people were fleeing to the US.

As part of that effort, she announced in 2023 that she had helped raise about \$3bn - largely from private companies - to invest in communities in the region, hoping to provide opportunities that would make immigrating to the US less attractive.

Earlier this year, she aided the effort to pass a hardline bipartisan border security deal that would have included hundreds of millions of dollars for border wall construction.

But Trump helped kill the deal, accusing Biden's border policies of causing "death, destruction, and chaos in every American community".

Ms Harris said in her DNC acceptance speech that she would "bring back the bipartisan border security bill that he (Trump) killed. And I will sign it into law".

Abortion

Ms Harris has long supported women's right to an abortion.

She played a key role in the Biden campaign's effort to make abortion rights central to the 2024 election, and she has long advocated for legislation that would enshrine reproductive rights nationwide.

That position has not changed.

“When Congress passes a law to restore reproductive freedoms, as president of the United States, I will sign it into law,” she said at a rally for her 2024 campaign in Atlanta, Georgia.

She reiterated that commitment in her DNC acceptance speech.

Ms Harris was the first vice-president to visit an abortion clinic, and she toured the country after the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v Wade in 2022 to speak about the growing number of abortion bans in the US - often framing the issue as one about personal freedom.

Powerful pro-choice advocacy groups, such as Emilys List and Reproductive Freedom for All, have officially endorsed Ms Harris since she started her presidential run.

Nato and Ukraine aid

While much of her early career focused on the state of California, since going to Washington as a senator in 2017, Ms Harris has become more involved on the global stage.

As senator, she traveled to Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan and Israel.

As vice-president, she has met 150 world leaders and visited 21 countries.

She attended the Munich Security Conference in the past year, and she delivered remarks in support of western security alliance Nato that denounced isolationism.

She has also vowed to support Ukraine in its war against Russia “for as long as it takes”. Ms Harris represented the US in June at the “peace conference” convened by Ukraine in Switzerland where she reaffirmed Washington's support.

She noted in her DNC speech that had she met with President Volodymyr Zelensky five days before the Kremlin ordered the invasion of Ukraine to "warn him about Russia's plan to invade". She said that she then "helped mobilise a global response".

In her speech she also pledged to ensure that "America - not China - wins the competition for the 21st Century" and that "we strengthen - not abdicate - our global leadership".

Israel-Gaza War

Ms Harris has been a longtime advocate for a two-state solution, and she has called for an end to the war in Gaza.

As president, she said during her DNC acceptance speech that she would ensure "that Israel is secure, the hostages are released, the suffering in Gaza ends, and the Palestinian people can realize their right to dignity, security, freedom, and self-determination".

While serving as vice-president, she has been more open to criticising Israel during the Israel-Gaza war than Mr Biden.

She was one of the first members of the administration to call for an "immediate cease-fire", raised concerns over the "humanitarian catastrophe for Palestinians" and charged Israel with ending the conflict.

She held what she called "frank and constructive" talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu when he visited Washington in July.

She said she told Mr Netanyahu that she had "serious concerns" about casualties in Gaza and that the way Israel defended itself mattered.

"It is time for this war to end," she said after face-to-face talks at the White House.

She has not supported an arms embargo on Israel, however, as some on the US left have called for.

At the convention, she said she would "always stand up for Israel's right to defend itself and I will always ensure Israel has the ability to defend itself".

Taxes

In 2017, while a senator, Ms Harris supported a number of progressive tax programmes, co-sponsoring a bill with Bernie Sanders to expand social security for the elderly by increasing the tax rate on investments.

As a presidential candidate in 2019, she supported a corporate tax rate of 35%, up from 21%. This was more aggressive than President Biden's proposal, which she also supported, of an increase to 28%.

A campaign official told the BBC that the vice-president would continue to back President Biden's proposal of not raising taxes on Americans earning less than \$400,000 (£310,000).

Ms Harris said during her DNC acceptance speech that she would "pass a middle class tax cut that will benefit more than 100 million Americans", though details on that plan remain fairly sparse.

Healthcare

As California's attorney general, Ms Harris and her office often used anti-trust laws to keep insurers, hospitals and drug companies from raising customer costs.

When she became a US senator and later a 2020 candidate for president, she held more progressive views than Mr Biden, supporting expanding Medicare and publicly-funded health-care programmes.

Medicare is US government-funded healthcare that covers those aged 65 and older and those younger with disabilities.

Ms Harris previously had supported Medicare for All, a policy that would allow all Americans access to the system. It was a position that became popular among many progressive Democrats before Mr Biden's presidency.

During the same period, she also backed eliminating private healthcare insurance but then partially walked that back, releasing a plan during her 2020 presidential campaign that would put the US on track to offer government-funded health insurance over 10 years but wouldn't fully eliminate private insurance companies.

That's not the case now. Her campaign told the BBC that, as president, she would not push for a single-payer system.

While she was vice-president, the White House reduced prescription drug costs, capped insulin prices at \$35, allowed Medicare to negotiate drug prices and capped out-of-pocket expenses for Medicare drug coverage.

Crime

Ms Harris started her legal career prosecuting child abusers and sex traffickers before being elected district attorney of San Francisco, then California's attorney general.

Her offices increased conviction rates, particularly of violent criminals, though that history led to criticism from the progressive left, which at times labelled her "a cop".

Meanwhile, the right has accused her of being soft on crime, although her record is contradictory. As a prosecutor, she declined to seek the death penalty against someone who killed a cop, but as California's attorney general, she fought for the state's right to keep using it.

Ms Harris has also used her past as a prosecutor to serve as a major contrast with her opponent, who was convicted on 34 charges in a hush-money scheme to illegally influence the 2016 election.

She made mention of his conviction in her DNC acceptance speech: Trump "was found guilty of fraud by a jury of everyday Americans. And separately, found liable for committing sexual abuse."

Climate

Ms Harris has long advocated for tough laws to protect the environment.

As a prosecutor, Ms Harris defended California's climate laws and sued oil companies for environmental damage. She also called for climate change policies via a "Green New Deal" during her 2020 presidential campaign - some of which has come to fruition under the current administration.

During a CNN presidential debate in 2019, she said that "there is no question I'm in favour of banning fracking", which is a technique for recovering gas and oil from shale rock. She has reversed her position since throwing her hat into the 2024 presidential race.

As vice-president, she helped pass the Inflation Reduction Act, which has funnelled hundreds of billions of dollars to renewable energy and electric vehicle tax credit and rebate programs.

Last year, she noted in a speech that it constituted "the largest climate investment in our nation's history" and emphasised the need to protect against extreme weather.

She only made brief mention of the climate in her DNC acceptance speech: "The freedom to breathe clean air, drink clean water, and live free from the pollution that fuels the climate crisis."

Gun laws

Ms Harris has a history of backing gun safety regulations throughout her political career, and she successfully defended California's gun laws when they faced legal challenges as the state's attorney general.

As vice-president, she has overseen the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, and earlier this year announced the creation of resource centres to support the implementation of red-flag laws - aimed at keeping firearms from those who may harm themselves and others. She also encouraged states to tap into \$750m in federal funds that the Biden-Harris administration made available for crisis intervention programs.

As a result of these demands for airtime, Kamala (and prospective VP Walz) was exposed to an interview by CNN. Did she do a good job at this interview?

Everybody can judge her performance based on her own words. Here is a report of her interview, by the New Yorker magazine, with Dana Bash of CNN, which lasted 48 minutes but only 18 minutes of it was aired.

During the lead-in to CNN's much anticipated interview with Vice-President Kamala Harris and Governor Tim Walz, which the network showed on Thursday night, the correspondent and anchor Dana Bash described what would follow as a "defining moment" in the race for the White House. That was a bit of hype for what was otherwise an illuminating piece of television, the stakes for which had been raised by the Harris campaign's tardiness in agreeing to an on-the-record interview with a mainstream media outlet. As Fox News had been constantly reminding its viewers, more than a month had passed since Joe Biden had dropped out of the race.

Given that this CNN interview is much anticipated and you would imagine that she would have prepared very hard for it, what exactly did she say? Here are her own words:

In the first part of the interview, which took place at Kim's Café in Savannah, Georgia, Bash calmly pressed Harris on two matters that many political commentators regard as potential weaknesses for her: the Biden Administration's economic record and Harris's changing stances over the years on some contentious policy issues. The Vice-President acknowledged that "prices, in particular for groceries, are still too high," and she mentioned her proposals to expand the child tax credit and subsidize first-time home buyers. She also listed a number of the Administration's achievements, including capping the cost of insulin for seniors at thirty-five dollars a month, creating eight hundred thousand manufacturing jobs, and making the U.S. economy less dependent on global supply chains for basic needs. "I'll say that that's good work," she said. "There's more to do, but that's good work."

The Lede

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Indeed, it is, and Harris's eagerness to defend the underrated Biden economic record was commendable. Reacting to the charges of inconsistency on policy issues, she said, "I think the most important and most significant aspect of my policy perspective and decisions is: **my values have not changed.**" But she also emphasized the commitments she is making now. Pointing to the Administration's hefty investments in green energy, she said she had come to realize that "we can grow and we can increase a thriving clean-energy economy without banning fracking." When Bash asked her about raising her hand at a 2019 Democratic primary debate to support decriminalizing unauthorized border crossings, she replied, "I believe there should be consequences. We have laws that have to be followed and enforced that address and deal with people who cross our border illegally."

Both of these statements—which will disappoint, even enrage, some Democratic activists—reflected a straightforward political calculus. In the critical electoral state of Pennsylvania, the Trump campaign is trying to make fracking a pivotal issue, and polls suggest that **voters nationwide consider the issue of immigration and the southern border secondary only to the economy.** Harris and her advisers clearly

believe that being accused of flip-flopping is a lesser threat to her campaign than giving her opponent the ammunition to brand her as a radical. They may well be right. Many voters have a jaundiced opinion of politicians to begin with and hardly expect them to display the constancy of a Carthusian monk. Moreover, there is no flip-flopper more unabashed than Trump, a former Democrat who donated to Harris's 2011 and 2013 campaigns in California. Earlier this year, he boasted, "We broke Roe v. Wade." Now he is claiming that a second Trump Administration would "be great for women and reproductive rights."

Bash didn't ask Harris about abortion. She did ask whether Harris would appoint a Republican to her Cabinet, and the Vice-President answered in the affirmative. The idea isn't without precedent. In 1997, Bill Clinton appointed William S. Cohen, a Republican senator from Vermont, as Defense Secretary. George W. Bush picked Norman Mineta, a California Democrat, as his Secretary of Transportation. In 2009, Barack Obama appointed two Republicans to his first cabinet: Ray LaHood, a former Illinois congressman, who also became Transportation Secretary, and the former C.I.A. boss Robert M. Gates, who stayed on from the Bush Administration as Defense Secretary. (Obama also nominated the Republican senator Judd Gregg for Commerce Secretary, but Gregg withdrew his name.)

The Transcript:

We are back now with more of our special coverage of CNN's exclusive interview with the Democratic presidential ticket, Vice President Kamala Harris and Governor Tim Walls. For the first time, we are hearing about how President Biden broke the news to his own vice President that he was dropping out of the race. Listen.

[00:00:19]

I'm just curious, staying on President Biden, when he called you and said he was pulling out of the race, what was that like? And did he offer to endorse you right away, or did you ask Go for it?

[00:00:31]

It was a Sunday. So here, I'll give you a little too much information. Go for it.

[00:00:37]

There's no such thing, Madam Vice President.

[00:00:39]

My family was staying with us, including my baby nieces. And we had just had pancakes. Auntie, can I have more bacon? Yes, I'll make you more bacon. And then we were sitting down to do a puzzle. And the phone rang, and it was Joe Biden. And he told me what he had decided to do. And I asked him, Are you sure? And he said yes. And that's how I learned about it.

[00:01:23]

And what about the endorsement? Did you ask for it?

[00:01:26]

He was very clear that he was going to support me.

[00:01:29]

So when he called to tell you, he said, I'm pulling out of the race, and I'm going to support you.

[00:01:32]

Well, my first thought was not about me, to be honest with you. My first thought was about him, to be honest.

[00:01:40]

Let's bring in Dana Bash. She's in Savannah, Georgia, where this interview took place. Dana That is very interesting. And for those of us who lived through that weekend in a lot of different ways, she found out that morning, and she asked him, Are you sure? That's extraordinary.

[00:01:58]

It is extraordinary. First of all, I just want to say that I wasn't sure what she was going to say and what she would offer, if anything, about that conversation, which was obviously private, but it was also historic, which is clearly why she wanted to get some of it on the record for history now, because it's going to come out probably eventually. But are you sure? You're exactly right. That moment where, look, it wasn't as if it was a surprise in the instant that it happened, a lot of people weren't sure that the President was going to finally decide, You know what? I'm out of here. But obviously, we remember the pressure was mounting. We do know that from our reporting that just in case, she was not doing anything, but just in case, some of the people who are in the Kamala Harris orbit were just getting everything ready just in case it happened. But that was a human moment. This is a man who took her out of the United States Senate, made her his running mate. She made history with that. And he was giving her some pretty big news about himself.

[00:03:14]

And then, of course, it was off to the races for her to try to do something even more historic to be the President, but also just with regard to the campaign process to scramble, to secure the nomination, which wasn't really, if you remember, Abby, It wasn't really set in stone that she was going to get it as quickly as she did. We weren't sure what the process was, but she sewed it up in about 24 hours. I also just want to say that just that human element there of what she was doing, you know this, you've covered her, and I know a lot of people at the table. She loves the Sunday dinner. She loves to cook. Being there in the morning with her family, making them bacon, about to do a puzzle. It was just the picture of it all.

[00:03:58]

It's certainly not what you would expect. It's really stunning. It's not what you would expect if somebody were, say, expecting big news that weekend, having the grandnieces over, going about your morning. I mean, it really was, despite all of the talk around it, she was continuing on. And you know this as well as I do, when you talk to people around her, that was the mentality that came from the top down in Harris world, was that they were going to be blinders on moving forward. And in that moment, that is exactly what she was doing.

[00:04:30]

Yeah, it was. And she was very careful. We've heard Republicans say, Oh, it was the former President. It was a coup, and she threw him overboard. That's not what

happened. There were some Democrats who wanted him to go. She personally, from your reporting, my reporting, everybody else, she was being very, very cautious and very respectful of to let him make his decision in his own way, in his own time.

[00:05:05]

All right, Dana, stay with us because we'll be back with you shortly for more from this great interview, but I want to bring it into the panel here. The word loyalty is something I heard from people in Harris world about how she approached what was happening with Joe Biden. But I know Scott, I mean, obviously, we've been talking about this on this show a lot because I know that you feel very strongly that maybe she should have, in your view, been more honest. I want to play what she told Dana about that question of what did you tell the American people about what Joe Biden was like as President, and was it the truth?

[00:05:40]

Right after the debate, you insisted that President Biden is extraordinarily strong. Given where we are now, do you have any regrets about what you told the American people?

[00:05:51]

No, not at all. Not at all. I have served with President Biden for almost four years now, and I'll tell you, it's one of the greatest honors of my career, truly. He cares so deeply about the American people. He has the intelligence, the commitment, and the judgment, and This position that I think the American people rightly deserve in their President. By contrast, the former President has none of that.

[00:06:25]

It was a carefully worded answer, but one that really was very very careful not to even in the slightest way undermine President Biden.

[00:06:33]

Yeah, I simultaneously admire the loyalty, actually, because it would be tempting to just say, You know what? This was ridiculous. But she didn't. But at the same time, before he got out of the race, upwards of 80, 90% of the American people thought he was too old to run again, and she was out there in the face of that saying, No, he's fine. She's still saying that, and no one really believes it. I guess the real fundamental question is, are people going to give her the grace on that and say, Well, she's got to say that because it's her boss Or give it her credit for having grace, which is, I think, what-That's the point that she was showing.

[00:07:05]

We're not talking about, and maybe it's not relevant, but obviously, there's so much about how she is where she is, in part because of her friendship with the late Bo Biden. There There is a real friendship there. There is some respect there, and I think it did affect the relationship that she has with Joe Biden. I don't think that loyalty is perfunctury because there is a personal connection there.

[00:07:26]

Even when a year or two ago, when people were speculating about whether Joe Biden should throw Kamala Harris off the ticket, that loyalty played a key role in the reason why Biden was tuned all of that stuff out. She has been like this since the day she was

selected and made a very clear decision that this is how she was going to see the role of president. I think that served her and her relationship with Biden, who feels like that's how he treated that role. I think it informed her decision for Tim Walsh, who said that he would be a similarly deferential figure.

[00:07:55]

But it's not just this interpersonal stuff. It's also on policy. Yes. Dana asked her, you've said Bidenomics is a success. She said, effectively, yes. She talked about prescription drug prices, she talked about manufacturing jobs, she talked about bringing down child poverty. She didn't back away from even the idea of Bidenomics.

[00:08:16]

You know what? I'm sorry, Ashley. Go ahead. No, please. If you ask the American people about any of those things, they would give those things high marks. The problem that the President got into is he personalizing all of this and any criticism of the economy, he took as a personal affront to him. He thought shepherding the economy through this disaster was one of his achievements, and those points were achievements. What she did in this interview that he never did was say, all those things are true, and yet people were feeling the effects of costs, and that's something we have to redouble our efforts to address. That is the right way to answer the question.

[00:08:56]

I agree. That's why I let you go first. No, I totally agree. I just want to say one thing on the loyalty and the vice president. I'll sound like a broken record. I don't think that's the fight you want to pick with this ticket when you look at-I'm not picking any fights. Are you not? No. I just don't think it's something that you can go down. I'm not the one here. I'm not picking fights. Okay. Well, I don't think Donald Trump wants to pick that fight when we look about what happened to his last vice president. I think there is a constant contrast that we owe it to the American people to remind them of. Is that Joe Biden and Kamal Harris were loyal. They were, I remember the night he spoke, she went up and said, I love you. It's real, and that's not what we can talk about.

[00:09:35]

It is such an important point because I think sometimes we get caught up in the spin. The spin that this was a coup does not make any sense because Joe Biden himself made the decision to step aside, A, and B, that the two of them still, apparently, maintain a very good relationship. We saw it on full display, what was it, a week ago?

[00:09:55]

Well, her involvement in it may have been more minimal, but there were people pushing him out.

[00:09:59]

Let's be honest. It feels bizarre to still be talking about something weeks ago. On the debate stage, is that how you want to spend time?

[00:10:04]

No, it's absolutely not.

[00:10:06]

But you know something? I'm sorry. There's a level at which this presidential politics works that is nonlinear, that is not all about paint to dot policy discussions. It's about who is this person? What is their character? In that sense, and that's why I said at the beginning of this discussion, I was actually impressed by the way she talked about the president because it reflected character. I think people want character in their president. They may not be thinking they're going to find it in Donald Trump.

Trump Mocks Harris's Interview, Claiming She 'Rambled Incoherently'

On Truth Social and at his events, Donald Trump used Kamala Harris's interview on CNN to complain that she was boring and unpresidential.

By Michael Gold

The New York Times

Aug. 29, 2024

Even before Vice President Kamala Harris's interview with CNN aired on Thursday night, former President Donald J. Trump began attacking it.

In the morning, he criticized her for having her running mate, Gov. Tim Walz of Minnesota, on hand beside her. After seeing a clip of the interview, he criticized her for rambling "incoherently." And about half an hour before the interview was broadcast, he told a crowd in Wisconsin that the setting — a table for four at a restaurant in Savannah, Ga. — made Ms. Harris look unpresidential.

"She was sitting behind that desk, this massive desk, and she didn't look like a leader today," Mr. Trump said at a town hall in La Crosse, Wis. "I'll be honest. I don't see her negotiating with President Xi of China. I don't see her with Kim Jong-un, like we did with Kim Jong-un. So we're going to have to see what happens."

After the interview concluded, the usually loquacious Mr. Trump reduced his take to a single word on Truth Social, his social media platform: "BORING!!!"

Mr. Trump and his campaign have spent weeks criticizing Ms. Harris for not holding a news conference with reporters or sitting for a major interview. After she became the Democratic nominee, Mr. Trump held two news conferences aimed at taunting Ms. Harris and showing his willingness to address the media. Last week, he granted a number of interviews to mainstream media outlets.

But after Ms. Harris agreed to an interview with Dana Bash on CNN, Mr. Trump began criticizing her almost immediately.

He opened Thursday with a social media post predicting “inevitable Kamala stumbles” and tried to press Ms. Bash to be “fair but tough.” He argued that Mr. Walz might give Ms. Harris an undue advantage and seeded doubts about the interview’s integrity.

And after CNN aired a clip on Thursday evening in which Ms. Bash asked about Ms. Harris’s shifting positions since her failed 2020 presidential bid, Mr. Trump criticized the “very weakly-phrased question” and Ms. Harris’s answer, which he said “rambled incoherently.”

While the interview was airing, Mr. Trump suggested that he was not impressed with Ms. Harris’s responses.

“I look so forward to Debating Comrade Comrade Kamala Harris and exposing her for the fraud she is,” he wrote on Truth Social, repeating “Comrade.” He added: “Harris has changed every one of her long held positions, on everything.”

Stripping things down to essentials: Harris is running on the same platform that Biden ran on in 2020, as an antidote to the Trump insanity. The Trump camp wants to turn the election into a referendum on inflation and immigration. Within this basic framework, both candidates have to negotiate the historic norms of American elections, which encompass a willingness to engage with the press and with each other in televised debates.

After the unprecedented drama of the June Presidential debate, Biden’s subsequent withdrawal, and elation among Democrats about the emergence of the Harris-Walz candidacy, Thursday’s interview indicated that the 2024 campaign is now shifting onto this more familiar terrain. It came as a series of new polls confirmed that Harris is still gaining momentum and Trump is struggling to counter her rise. A survey of battleground states from the Bloomberg News/Morning Consult poll showed Harris slightly ahead in Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, and North Carolina, and with widening leads in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. (Arizona was tied.) Earlier in the week, a Fox News survey also showed Harris leading in Georgia, Nevada, and Arizona—three places where Trump had been running well ahead of Biden.

Harris’s unflustered performance at Kim’s Café will have reassured Democrats that she is unlikely to trip. Arguably, her most astute answer was her shortest, and it came in response to a question about Trump’s effort, last month, to play the race card against her. “He suggested that you happened to turn Black recently for political purposes, questioning a core part of your identity,” Bash said. “Yeah,” Harris replied. “Same old tired playbook. Next question, please.” Bash: “That’s it?” Harris: “That’s it.”

In these few words, Harris demonstrated a determination to not get distracted by Trump's gibes and antics which she will certainly need to draw upon between now and November. In recent days, the former President has staged a political photo op at Arlington National Cemetery and reposted on his social-media account QAnon slogans and sexist, misogynistic remarks about the Vice-President. He's flailing about. On Thursday night, toward the end of the CNN broadcast, he pronounced the Harris-Walz interview "BORING!!!" If that was the best he could come up with, it was a surefire indication that his opponent hadn't stumbled.

If you ask me, this interview is no different from what she did not say in her own acceptance speech at the DNC a week ago in Chicago. At that time, she spoke for too long about her mother and her sojourn from India to America. Is that important? It was a long discourse on platitudes. Yes Trump is right – her interview was boring. And she wasted valuable talking about her breakfast with her family at home. She was given a great opportunity to explain to voters how she would improve their lives but did she do that? Sad.

She is a light weight on foreign policy. In the FT in the last week, an editorial by Gideon Rachman spoke of how America is now on the brink of WW3. Here is the article?

Ukraine has crossed Moscow's and Washington's red lines

Zelenskyy is prepared to ignore Russia's nuclear threats. But the Biden administration is still wary of escalating the war

GIDEON RACHMAN

AUGUST 26 2024

With its Kursk offensive, Ukraine has not only crossed Russia's borders. It has also crossed red lines set in Washington. Ever since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the US has insisted that its goal is to help Ukraine defend its territory and survive as a sovereign state. Any suggestion that the war could be taken into Russia has been regarded as dangerous.

In the aftermath of the Kursk incursion, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine has been contemptuous of the restraints that America has placed on Ukraine's war efforts, denouncing the "naive, illusory concept of so-called red lines regarding Russia, which dominated the assessment of the war by some partners".

That view, said the Ukrainian president, has now "crumbled".

But has it?

The difference between the caution in Washington and the risk-taking in Kyiv reflects not just a difference in analysis about how far Vladimir Putin can be pushed. It is also a reflection of a subtle difference in war aims.

At the start of the conflict, President Joe Biden set his administration two goals. The first was to support Ukraine. But the second was to avoid world war three. If forced to choose between those two aims, the US would clearly choose the latter.

But Ukraine is fighting for its survival. It would accept direct US involvement in a war with Russia.

According to a recent book by David Sanger, Biden even suggested to his aides that Zelenskyy might be deliberately trying to draw America into a third world war.

As a result, there is a different appetite for risk in Washington and Kyiv. The US has been consistently cautious about the kinds of weapons it supplies to Ukraine. When HIMARS long-range missiles were first supplied to Ukraine, the Biden administration placed limits on how far they could be fired. It was only in May that Washington gave permission for US-supplied weaponry to be used against targets just inside Russia.

Those prohibitions are still in place, although the Ukrainians are pushing hard for them to be lifted. The difference in the tolerance for risk between America and Ukraine is reflected within Europe. Countries that are close to the frontline and feel directly threatened by Russia — such as Estonia and Poland — have pushed to give Ukraine more advanced weapons and more latitude to use them. Germany has consistently been much slower to act.

The Ukrainians have long complained that the caution of their most powerful allies means that they are being asked to fight with one hand behind their back.

Russia is free to strike deep inside Ukraine, but Ukraine is forbidden from punching back. Both the Ukrainian and US governments say that the Biden administration was not informed of the Kursk offensive before it took place. Although it is clearly in America's interests to deny direct involvement in planning an attack on Russian soil, that seems to be true.

With the Kursk offensive, the Ukrainians have taken a leaf out of Israel's book — by taking military action that has not been approved in Washington. The assumption by both Ukraine and Israel is that, if the action is successful, it will receive retrospective approval by America.

If it fails, the US will ultimately help them deal with the consequences. For the moment, there is cautious optimism in Washington about the Kursk offensive — although doubts remain about whether Kyiv's forces can hold the ground they have taken, and withstand Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine.

But even Ukrainian success is unlikely to lead to the US throwing caution to the winds. The Americans are still intent on avoiding a direct conflict with Russia and still take the threat of nuclear conflict seriously.

The US knows that Putin has publicly threatened to use nuclear weapons and that Russia has consistently practised their use in military exercises. In 2022, US intelligence intercepts picked up frequent and sometimes detailed conversations between Russian military officials about going nuclear. It is possible that some of those conversations were intended to be overheard.

Nonetheless, the Americans took Russia's public threats and private chatter seriously enough for Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security adviser, to warn Russia of "catastrophic consequences" should it go nuclear. The Americans point to that warning by Sullivan to refute the idea that they simply folded in the face of Russian threats. Rather than respecting Russia's red lines, the US and its allies have gradually tiptoed over them — testing how far Putin could be pushed through gradual escalation.

Some western analysts believe that the Kursk offensive has now decisively debunked Putin's nuclear threats. Phillips O'Brien of the University of St Andrews argues that invading Russia "has always been the last assumed red line of nuclear weapons usage — and the Ukrainians are marching . . . right across it."

But the US does not believe that the last red line has been successfully crossed. Biden's advisers continue to think that — if Putin believed his regime was on the point of total defeat — the Russians could resort to the use of nuclear weapons. When the Ukrainians complain that their allies are scared of the idea of victory, they have a point. gideon.rachman@ft.com

What does Presidential candidate Harris think about all this? She has not uttered a word on it. On the other hand, Trump has long said he will shut down the Ukraine war, via negotiations with Putin. One candidate will keep us all safe. The other is a gamble with our lives. In a WW3 with nuclear weapons, we will all be dead.

Why should Harris become president??

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