

Kamala Harris Makes Last-Ditch Appeal for Peace Putin Is Poised to Ignore

Vice President Kamala Harris warned Russia against invading Ukraine on Saturday during a trip to Germany that marks an opportunity for her to stand out on the world stage and show her foreign policy skills at a critical moment.

But at the same time, by wading into the Russia-Ukraine crisis, Harris took on another assignment that may provide little in the way of political victory for her or the Biden administration, at a time when she faces low approval ratings.

Harris' Saturday remarks at the Munich Security Conference came less than 24 hours after President Joe Biden said Russian President Vladimir Putin has already made the decision to invade Ukraine.

During her speech, Harris said that if Russia "further invades Ukraine," the U.S. and its allies "will impose significant, and unprecedented economic costs," with "far-reaching financial sanctions and export controls."

"Make no mistake: the imposition of these sweeping and coordinated measures will inflict great damage on those who must be held accountable," the vice president said.

Just under 38 percent of Americans have a favorable view of Harris, while about 52 percent have an unfavorable view, according to an analysis of polls compiled by Real Clear Politics between December 5 and February 15. Meanwhile, this month, an average of polls show Biden with an approval rating of 41 percent, while 53 percent say they disapprove of his performance.

Harris' low approval comes after she has taken on a portfolio of duties that has arguably been more challenging than the one Biden handled when he served as vice president. She has also faced rumors of overseeing a toxic workplace amid high-profile staff departures.

Harris was tasked with addressing the causes of migration from Central America and curbing the flow of immigrants entering the U.S. She has also led the Biden

administration's push for voting rights legislation, which was recently put on hold after two Democratic lawmakers objected to changing Senate filibuster rules.

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Matthew Dickinson, a political science professor at Middlebury College, said the matters the vice president has taken on, including the Russia-Ukraine crisis, are "intractable issues."

"If [Harris] is hoping to establish...the sense of the person who can get things done, these aren't issues in which you can do that," he told Newsweek on Friday. "The odds that there's going to be some resolution to this crisis in a way that satisfies everybody is very low."

But with her trip to Germany and her address, he added, Harris "has an opportunity here, in the midst of a crisis to articulate a vision. And do it in a way that, even if it is the president's vision, she amplifies that in a way that reminds people of some of her strengths."

Conservatives criticized the Biden administration's decision to send Harris to Germany to address the crisis.

"This was the border czar, Kamala Harris, and what did we get from her valiant activity on the southern border? We got the most encounters in January that we've had in 20 years," said Kayleigh McEnany, who served as press secretary to former President Donald Trump, on Fox News Friday. "Now she's in Europe trying to stop World War III, and forgive me if I'm less than hopeful that she has the skill and acuity to stop the war. I hope she does."

Since taking office, Harris "has been the target of a constant barrage of negativity from the opposition," according to Audrey Haynes, a political science professor at the University of Georgia.

In an email to Newsweek, Haynes wrote that Harris "stands out from earlier peers as being the first woman, the first person of color, and the first person of South Asian descent to serve as vice president, and she is doing so when polarization and culture wars make her a target no matter what she does or how she performs."

She added that the Biden administration has given Harris "what many believe are

impossible tasks,” noting her immigration role and the trip to Germany.

“She has been labelled a failure when her position has very limited political capital to start, and she has been put into tasks, that again, are serious and complex and cannot be solved with a speech or a visit,” Haynes wrote.

When reached for comment, Harris’ office referred Newsweek to the vice president’s Saturday remarks in Germany and a Biden administration press briefing about the trip.

In an interview with Newsweek, Christopher Fettweis, a political science professor at Tulane University, said he “wouldn’t put too many hopes on a big breakthrough” in the Russia-Ukraine crisis following the vice president’s trip.

“There’s been a lot of high-profile meetings—not with the vice president so far—but about this crisis, and really not much has come out of any of them. So I wouldn’t get hopes up too high that this one is going to be different,” he added.

But he said that the trip offers Harris an opportunity to build up her foreign policy credentials, and is more likely to help than harm her reputation.

“If she’s trying to burnish executive credentials for a down-the-road run...it could help. But it’s probably not going to hurt,” Fettweis said.

“If the Russians invade, no one’s gonna say, ‘Boy if [Harris] had done something different in her conversations with the Germans, it might have come out a totally different way,’” he added.

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