Monthly briefing February 2025: Shifting Sands: Trump’s Peace Proposal for Ukraine and Russia

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Your inside partner in Ukraine

KI Insights is a commercial research, due diligence and risk advisory that aims to facilitate the rebuilding of Ukraine

Supporting policy-shapers, companies and IOs that want to help Ukraine

- Trusted partner – leverages Kyiv Independent's brand and known financial and organizational independence
- Deep network and knowledge of Ukrainian business and political realities
- Know-how in delivering analytical products in challenging and fast-moving environments using mixed methods

Commercial research (own & white-label)

Subscriber analytical packages

Why it matters

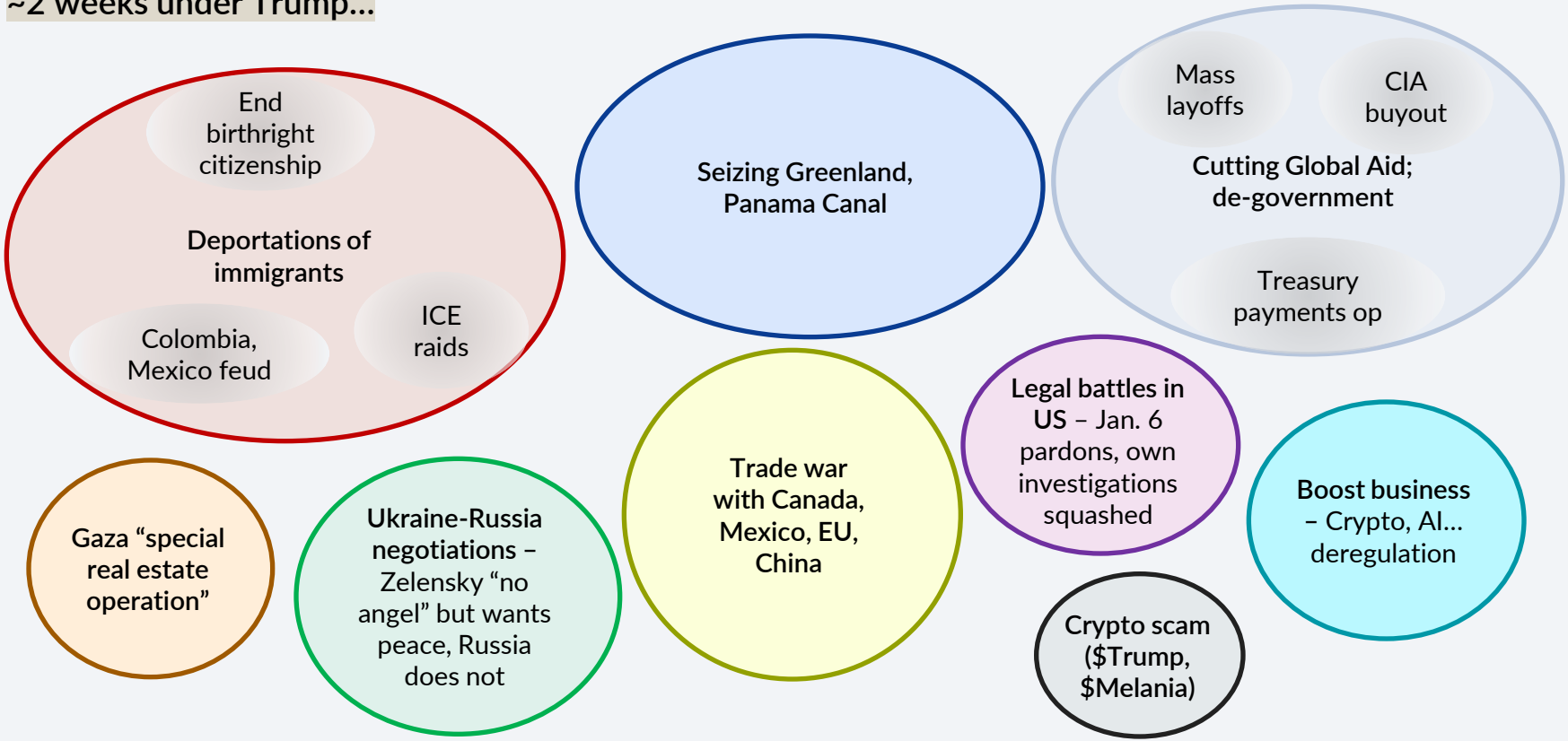
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- Trump election has changed and will continue to change the international context of the war (disruptive factors); Europe is being pushed into a more reactive stance
- Trump has promised to end the war fast; leaked plans suggest an ambitious timetable – expect lots of moves ahead
- Chances for an end of the war, a continuation within a different configuration, or (further) spill-over into regional/ global theatres

Trump's strategy is permanent crisis…

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~2 weeks under Trump…



...but there are consistent threads

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Overarching Trump priorities

Implications for Ukraine

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op;

European integration

Source: KI Insights Research

History of what we know (selected episodes)

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March 2024 ▸ Sept. 2024 – Zelensky meets with Trump ▸ Post-election

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Key figures who may shape Trump's Ukraine policy

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Keith Kellogg *(Special UA-RU Envoy)*, Co-authored proposal to use arms deliveries to force both Ukraine and Russia to frontline freeze and negotiated settlement.



Mike Waltz *(National Security Advisor)*. Initially supportive of Ukraine, Waltz voted against aid packages but is seen in Kyiv as reasonable working partner.



Elon Musk *(DOGE head, Tech billionaire)*. Advocates for Ukraine to negotiate with Russia and surrender territory to avoid further loss of life. Controls StarLink; speaks to Putin.



J.D. Vance *(Vice-President)*. Supports freezing the war, no NATO membership; suggests a more diplomatic approach towards Russia; isolationist.



Marco Rubio *(Secretary of State)*. Establishment republican; supports ending the war but tries to avoid damaging US power in the world.



Tucker Carlson *(Journalist and blogger)*. Sympathizing with Putin and Orbán, promotes pro-Russian narratives, and asserting that Ukraine is losing the war. Economic populist.



Richard Grenell *(Special Missions Special Envoy)*. Favors a swift conclusion to the war, potentially at the cost of significant Ukrainian concessions.



Donald Trump Jr. *(President son)*. Argues for engagement of Russia vs. military aid for Ukraine due to nuclear risks. Critical of Zelensky comments on his father.

The Heritage Foundation

AFPI
AMERICA FIRST POLICY INSTITUTE

CENTER FOR RENEWING AMERICA

+ the “Freedom Caucus” (anti-UA aid); Evangelicals (incl. Faith and Freedom, Family Research Council, American Evangelical Alliance) mixed, but broadly isolationist, concerns over UOC-MP “persecution”

What are the elements to negotiate

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Other

Ukraine securit

Russia secu
resources, e

Ukraine pol
society

Ukraine ter

Ukraine in I

Global secu
architecture

Global econom

Needs army ... Limit on Ukrainian ... Wants Ukraine as ... EU: UA not source

... funds ... (challenge to US) ... trade challenge ... for Global South

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“100-day Kellogg (working draft) peace plan” for UA

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Prospective timeline (approximate dates)

- **End-Jan.** Trump-Putin call to set stage on Russian side of negotiations.
- **Mid-Feb. Enabling factors:** UA lowers mobilization age to 21 (to strengthen position), lifts ban on talks with Putin
- **Late-Feb.** Trilateral high-level talks to agree framework.
- **Mar.-Apr.** Fighting continues (to settle final “reality on the ground”); no brakes on current US aid. Ongoing talks.
- **Apr. 20.** Beginning of an “Easter ceasefire” (West and East dates align); fighting stops or shifts to lower intensity
- **End-Apr.** Large POW exchange (potentially “all-for-all”)
- **May 9.** Martial law lapses (potentially extended locally – e.g., within 30 km of frontlines, or specific oblasts)
- **End-Apr.–Early-May** “Peace conference” or a similar summit where US, China, Europe and Global South stakeholders sign of on specific terms
- **May-Jun.** European peace-keeping mission starts duty
- **Aug.-Oct.** Elections take place in Ukraine

Proposed terms and conditions (initial prospects)

- = Freeze along the current line of contact, introduction of 30 km demilitarized zone (with local exceptions for population centres).
- = Tariffs are applied to restarted Russian oil and gas exports to the EU and are used to finance the reconstruction of Ukraine (no direct transfers from Russia to Ukraine, rather via Europe).
- \+ No limits on the size of Ukraine’s army. No return of Western weapons or equipment.
- \+ US pushes Europe to deliver a fast-track EU accession for Ukraine by 2030.
- \+ European and/or UN peacekeeping force is stationed in Ukraine (unclear end-date). Potential for symbolic US troop presence (i.e., advisors or “sneakers on the ground”).
- \+ US provides annual support to Ukraine to purchase US arms and equipment. European allies contribute a larger share to ensure a high militarization of Ukraine.
- – NATO renounces from taking in Ukraine as a member (but strategic cooperation continues). Ukraine declares a policy of “heavily armed neutrality” (i.e., a “Finnish model”).
- – Ukraine does not recognize occupation of territories but renounces from pursuing their recovery or otherwise limits ambitions in this direction.
- – Ukraine makes political concessions, enabling the operation of a soft “pro-Russian” political force, removes “restrictions” on use of Russian, legalizes ex-Moscow Patriarchate Church

Source: Confidential, Strana.ua, Daily Mail

Problem – there is no trust

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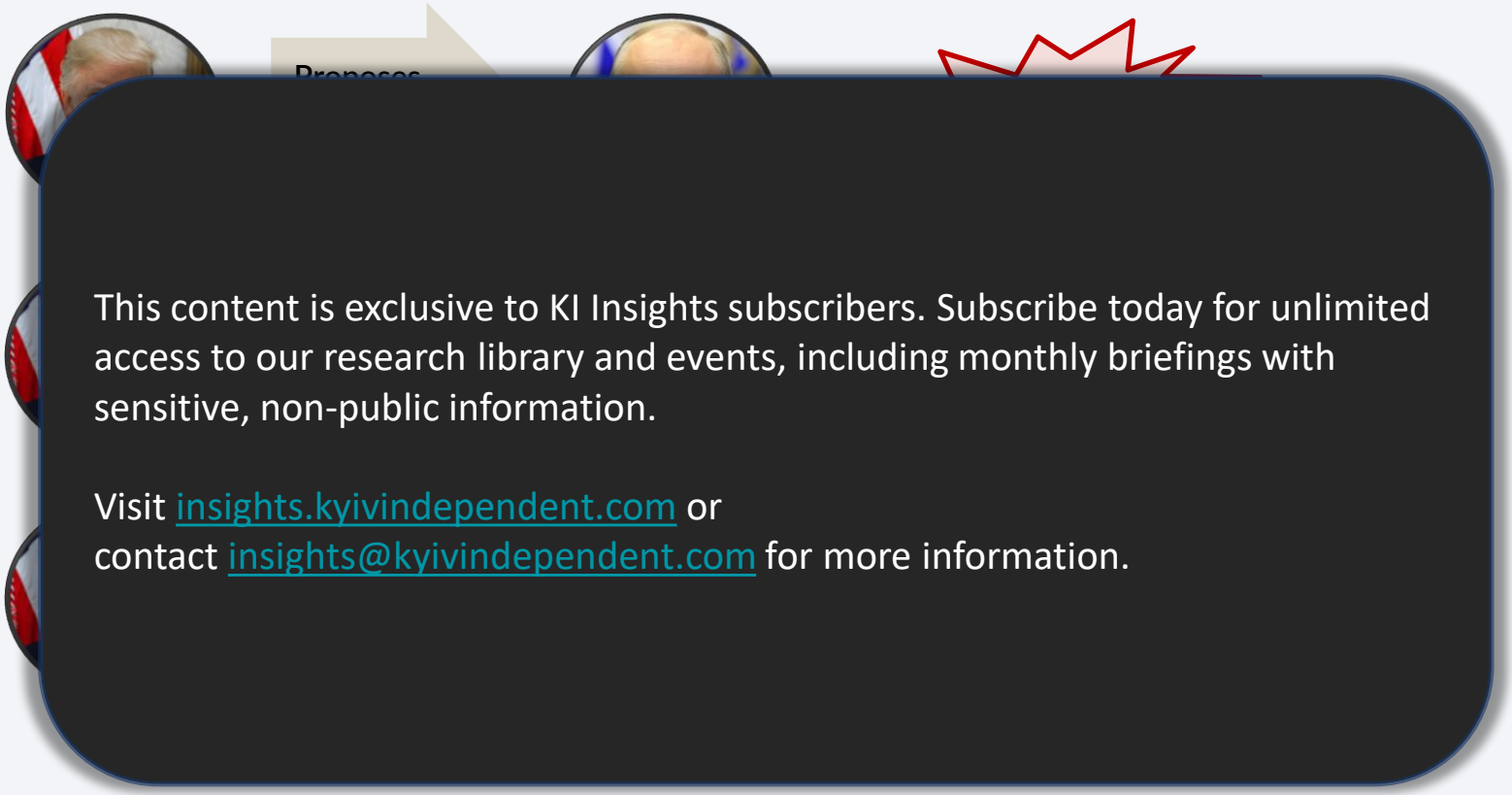
Possible actual scenario (per UA security analysts)

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Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

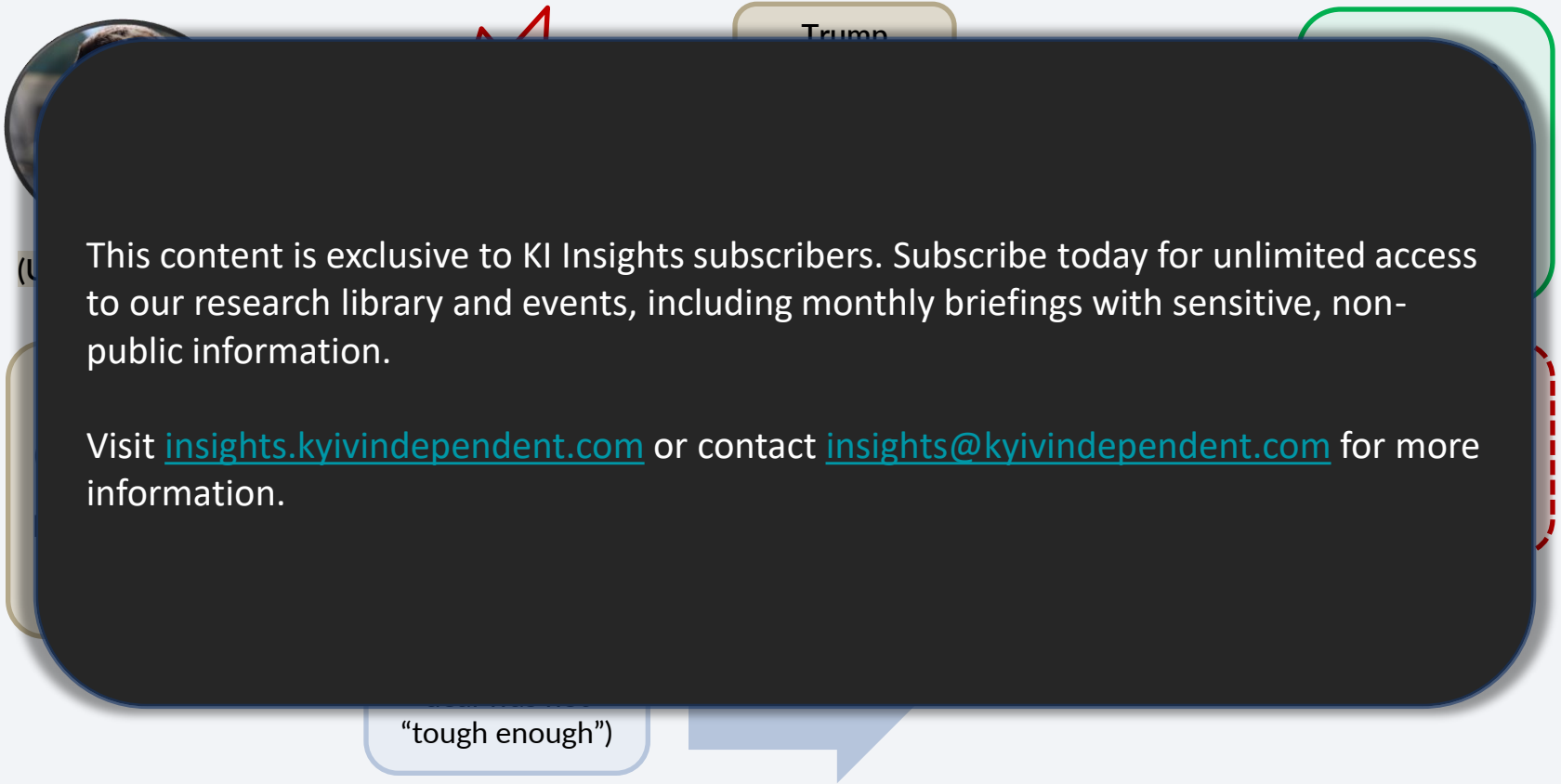


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Zelensky: most likely strategy

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The waiting game

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Basis of “waiting strategy”

Key risks

- Internal turmoil in US,
- Internal unrest

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Theory of collapsing Russia







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A lot of asymmetric escalation could still be ahead

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Potential escalation measures

Key risks







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Scenarios for the end of the war

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1: Peace with frozen lines, security guarantees

- Optimistic. Peace with rock-solid safeguards (e.g., long-range strike assets, Europe-led peace-enforcers monitor DMZ, Ukraine-compact)
- Free Ukraine integrated into Europe's security architecture
- Question: Why would Russia agree to such terms?



2: Peace with frozen lines, no security guarantees

- Freeze on current lines; no hard deterrent to repeat invasion (elements of Minsk, arms limits…)
- Distracted, divided West wants no more fighting and not lose too much face
- RU may be unable to sustain offensive, flatter Trump into bigger prize, and/ or expects easier re-invasion later
- Unpopular but acceptable in Ukraine (least bad option)



3: Desperate, compromised peace (“soft capitulation”)

- Fast worsening battlefield position – soft capitulation to avoid annihilation (e.g., limits on military, RU co-official, constitutional amendments permanently undermine UA sovereignty)
- RU retains option for "hard capitulation" (puppet state(s), more territory)
- Unthinkable in UA unless doomed situation, frontline collapse



4: Russia doesn’t stop

- No convincing answer to "Why should Russia stop?".
- Aid is insufficient to stop Russia, manpower crisis opens holes in UA defenses
- UA either refuses to sue for a capitulation or is rejected. Millions of refugees, UA govt. becomes unstable
- Russia reaches key cities but likely sticks to pushing into open terrain. Endgame depends on maximum goals

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Support our upcoming research!

Proposed research project

Gen-U? Deciphering Ukraine's 1st-time voters

Shaped by social media, Covid-19 and war with Russia (but insulated from mobilization), Ukraine's 18-24 y.o. demographic stands apart from previous demographic co-hort. We want to understand their values, goals, concerns and role in potential elections.

Reach out to insights@kyivindependent.com to discuss potential collaboration.

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Thank you!

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