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“In fact, the issue is always between two points”

Weekly
Political and Geopolitical
Developments

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 TEMA GRUP



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Geopolitical and Global Developments:

A NEW PHASE IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR THROUGH TRUMP'S CEASEFIRE INITIATIVE: STRATEGIC CALCULATIONS OF THE PARTIES AND POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

1. Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine War, which erupted into open conflict in February 2022, has deeply shaken the European security architecture and reshaped the policies of NATO, the EU, and the United States. Recently, a new phase has emerged in the diplomatic dimension of the conflict following Donald Trump's unexpected involvement.

2. Background of Trump's Ceasefire Initiative

During his 2024 election campaign, Trump emphasized his promise to "end conflicts," showcasing a pragmatic and economically driven approach to foreign policy. He is now attempting to fulfill his pledge to end the war within the first 100 days of his term:

- January 2025: Trump initiated unofficial contacts with both Moscow and Kyiv through special envoys, making the diplomatic initiative more visible.
- February 2025: Initial contact was made in Budapest between Trump-backed delegations and Russian and Ukrainian representatives. U.S.-Russia talks were held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. A crisis occurred in the Oval Office when Trump reportedly told Zelensky, "Either you sign this deal or we're out. You're gambling with World War III."
- March 2025: Trump's earlier claim that he could end the war "within 48 hours" resurfaced. Following a lengthy phone call between Presidents Trump and Putin, Russia agreed not to strike Ukraine's energy and infrastructure facilities for 30 days. The U.S. called for immediate peace negotiations.

U.S. media reported that Trump proposed opening rare earth elements and energy infrastructure in eastern Ukraine to American private companies.

3. Strategic Expectations of the Parties

a. Russia (Putin Administration)

- Territorial Gains: Maintaining de facto control over Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions is presented as a non-negotiable condition.
- NATO Expansion: Russia demands Ukrainian neutrality and a formal renunciation of NATO membership.
- Sanctions Relief: A gradual lifting of sanctions, particularly in the energy and financial sectors, is targeted.

b. Ukraine (Zelensky Administration)

- Security Guarantees: Concrete security assurances, such as a potential U.S. military base, are requested as an alternative to NATO membership.
- Territorial Bargaining: Some regions along the Kursk border are being used as temporary bargaining chips.
- War Crimes and Accountability: Kyiv seeks to include international accountability for Russia's war crimes on the negotiation agenda.

c. United States (Trump Wing)

- Economic Interests: Securing access to rare minerals, control over energy facilities, and prioritizing U.S. companies in reconstruction projects.
- Domestic Political Impact: Building an image of a "conflict-solving leader" during the election campaign.
- U.S. Presence in Europe: Using the conflict as leverage to renegotiate NATO's budget and reduce European dependency on U.S. security.

d. European Union

- Security Concerns: Russia's aggressive posture is seen as a direct threat by Poland, the Baltic states, and Germany.
- Financial Aid Fatigue: Ongoing economic and military support to Ukraine is increasingly questioned by European public opinion.
- Pursuit of Independence from the U.S.: Trump's involvement has reignited debates over "strategic autonomy" within the EU.

4. Current Situation (As of March 2025)

- **Ceasefire Efforts:** No formal ceasefire agreement has been reached yet; however, parties are engaging in discussions through third-party intermediaries.
- **Diplomatic Activity:** Countries such as Turkey, Hungary, and the United Arab Emirates are seeking mediator roles.
- **Zelensky's Position:** He remains cautious of Trump's offers and prioritizes coordination with the EU.
- **Putin's Stance:** While more willing to work with Trump, he shows no sign of backing down from gains in Ukraine, avoiding a Pyrrhic victory.

5. Possible Developments and Scenarios

Four key scenarios are assessed below in light of current power dynamics:

Scenario 1: Controlled Ceasefire and Economic Bargaining

- **Description:** A limited ceasefire along the Donbas line is brokered by Trump. The status quo in Russian-controlled areas is temporarily maintained.
- **Expectations:** The Trump administration demands priority for U.S. companies in Ukraine's reconstruction and resource sectors. Ukraine negotiates temporary territorial concessions in exchange for security guarantees.
- **Risk:** Exclusion of the EU could strain the transatlantic alliance.

Scenario 2: Frozen Conflict and Western Withdrawal Trends

- **Description:** No formal ceasefire is reached, but large-scale attacks decrease. The conflict continues at a low intensity. NATO and EU support gradually wanes.
- **Expectations:** Ukraine experiences war fatigue and internal instability. Russia continues building administrative infrastructure in occupied areas.
- **Risk:** Ukraine's integration with the West may be hindered.

Scenario 3: Comprehensive Negotiation Process – "Trump Plan"

- **Description:** Trump's diplomatic push succeeds, and parties begin broad peace talks in Riyadh or Istanbul.
- **Expectations:** A U.S.-Ukraine security deal replaces NATO membership. Gradual lifting of sanctions on Russia is discussed. U.S. companies are granted privileges in energy and reconstruction projects.
- **Risk:** Exclusion of the EU inflames debates on strategic autonomy.

Scenario 4: Ceasefire Collapse and New Offensives

- **Description:** Diplomatic efforts fail, and Russia launches a new spring offensive. Trump's credibility is damaged in domestic politics.
- **Expectations:** The EU and NATO are compelled to supply Ukraine with heavier weaponry. The war may spill over into wider regions (e.g., Moldova).
- **Risk:** A new wave of migration and sharp rises in energy prices across Europe.

6. Assessment

- **A New U.S. Diplomatic Dynamic:** Trump's pragmatic stance emphasizes freezing the conflict and prioritizing U.S. economic interests. This contrasts sharply with Biden's approach.
- **The EU's Diminishing Role:** The EU risks being sidelined in the peace process. Statements by Macron and Scholz highlight the Union's lack of unified leadership.
- **Russia's Time-Buying Strategy:** Putin is using war fatigue to his advantage and sees Trump's approach as an opportunity to ease sanctions.
- **Ukraine's Dilemma:** Kyiv is trying to balance preserving territorial integrity with maintaining Western support. Zelensky's "Kursk border negotiation" should be closely monitored.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND POSSIBLE ANSWERS

1. Is The U.S. Ceasefire Initiative A Move To Weaken The EU?

Holding talks in non-EU locations such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE excludes the EU from the process. Trump’s recurring message that “Europe should finance its own security” reflects a broader strategy to pressure NATO’s European pillar. Granting U.S. companies access to Ukraine’s rare earth elements and energy infrastructure puts EU companies at risk of being sidelined in reconstruction. The Trump administration (and U.S. geopolitical thinking more broadly) appears to aim at positioning the EU as a secondary actor in the Ukraine peace process. Additionally, the U.S. wants to be seen as the primary problem-solver, overshadow the EU’s strategic autonomy efforts, reduce its NATO burden, and expand its economic influence in Ukraine.

2. What is the U.S. Plan Against China? (In the Ukraine Context)

The U.S. views the Russia-Ukraine War as part of a broader containment strategy against China. Achieving a ceasefire in Ukraine would allow Washington to shift resources toward the China front. Trump and the broader Republican camp argue that Europe’s war must end so the U.S. can focus on Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the tech war. The U.S. seeks to isolate China by balancing Russia-China ties and potentially reaching a temporary understanding with Russia. Following a ceasefire, resources may be redirected toward chip restrictions, AI technology embargoes, and counter-infrastructure projects against China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

3. What is the UK’s Position? (Pursuit of Leadership Independent from the EU)

Post-Brexit, the UK has pursued a “Global Britain” vision with an assertive foreign policy role. The Ukraine crisis has provided an opportunity for this. The UK, aiming to lead diplomatically outside the EU, is trying to play a central role in European security through summits like the London Conference. Simultaneously, it is working to strengthen ties with the U.S. and revive the “special relationship” under Trump. The UK is also expanding defense exports—military equipment sent to Ukraine creates a lucrative market for British defense firms. By aligning closely with the U.S. and presenting itself as a counterweight to the EU, the UK seeks a dual geopolitical balance. Additionally, it is building a security network outside the EU by deepening cooperation with the Baltic and Nordic states.

