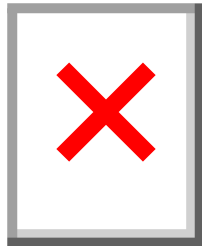


From: POLITICO Playbook <politicoplaybook@email.politico.com>
Sent: Feb 17, 2025 11:09:19.000000000 UTC
Subject: Europe's split-screen moment
To: jperperian@cityofmelrose.org <jperperian@cityofmelrose.org>

Feb 17, 2025

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BY JACK BLANCHARD



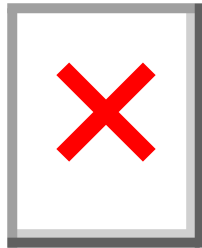
Presented by

With help from Eli Okun, Garrett Ross and Bethany Irvine

Good Monday morning, and happy Presidents' Day. This is Jack Blanchard, still trying to forgive Gen. **George Washington** for that whole armed rebellion business. Give it another 250 years, we'll get there.

Holiday weather watch: Yesterday's high winds should have eased a little this morning to allow for a sunny but still gusty federal holiday, the [Capital Weather Gang predicts](#). But the real action is coming later this week, with another snowstorm expected in D.C. on Wednesday and Thursday. "The potential for a big snow has dropped, but light to moderate accumulations are still in play," CWG reports. Watch this space.

■ DRIVING THE DAY



Like Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, many European leaders are terrified the continent is about to be carved up in their absence. | Sven Hoppe/DPA via AP Photo, Pool

TWO VISIONS OF THE FUTURE: The fracturing Western alliance faces its split-screen moment as the U.S. and Russia start to hammer out the future of Europe — while excluded European leaders huddle 3,500 miles away. President **Donald Trump's** negotiating team is assembling in Saudi Arabia today ahead of high-stakes talks with their Russian counterparts about ending the war in Ukraine, almost three years to the day since Russian President

Vladimir Putin's murderous and illegal invasion. Back in Europe, panicking leaders have called an emergency meeting in Paris to discuss the continent's biggest foreign-policy crisis in decades, as the security norms Europeans have relied upon for the past 80 years — namely, unquestioning U.S. military backing — are torn away.

First, to Saudi: Trump's negotiating team began to arrive in Saudi late last night, with talks with their Russian counterparts to start tomorrow, [per Axios' Barak Ravid](#). As POLITICO's Robbie Gramer and Paul McLeary [scooped at the weekend](#), the U.S. team will be led by Secretary of State **Marco Rubio**, national security adviser **Mike Waltz** and Trump's top negotiator — and NYC real estate pal — **Steve Witkoff**. On the Russian side, Foreign Minister **Sergey Lavrov** and Putin aide **Yuri Ushakov** will lead the talks ([h/t WaPo's John Hudson](#)).

NFI: As has been widely noted, there's no seat at the table this week for Ukraine, for Europe, nor even for Trump's special envoy to Ukraine and Russia, **Keith Kellogg**. Robbie and Paul said U.S. officials were initially claiming Ukraine would be involved ... which came as news to Kyiv.

When we said "involved" ... Witkoff [told Fox News yesterday](#) that Ukraine is, in a sense, *already* involved in negotiations, citing conversations between Trump and President **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** — as well as other top U.S. and Ukrainian officials — last week. "I think Ukraine *is* part of the talks," he said. "I don't think this is about excluding anybody. In fact it's about including everybody." Kyiv is not exactly sold on that.

Race to the finish: Team Trump is hoping to get the entire peace agreement wrapped up by Easter, according to U.S. officials who briefed [Bloomberg's Arne Delfs and colleagues](#). That's just *62 days from now* — an improbably tight timeline in the eyes of many Western diplomats. (Trump, of course, had promised to end the war "on Day One" of his presidency.)

Gulp: That sort of talk is spooking other European leaders, who, like Zelenskyy, are terrified the continent is about to be carved up in their absence. Rubio — seen in Europe as Trump's "good cop," in contrast to the fire and brimstone of VP **JD Vance** and Defense Secretary **Pete Hegseth** — tried to play down those fears yesterday. "Right now, there is no process," Rubio told CBS. "If [real negotiations] were to happen, Ukraine will have to be involved because they're the ones that were invaded. And the Europeans

will have to be involved because ... they've contributed to this effort." Rubio [arrived in Saudi this morning](#); Witkoff and Waltz were due in last night.

Panic stations: Europe is now scrambling to make itself relevant amid this rapid-fire Trump/Putin power play. Today's main event will be the emergency summit of European leaders in Paris, called by French President **Emmanuel Macron** following the Vance- and Hegseth-led fireworks at the Munich Security Conference. (French government officials phoned POLITICO to insist this is not actually an "emergency" summit, but just an informal meeting called at short notice. Sure thing.) Lining up with Macron in Paris from **10 a.m. ET** will be the leaders of the U.K., Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland, the Netherlands and Denmark. EU and NATO leaders will also be in attendance.

What's on the agenda? Europe needs to figure out a swift response to show Trump it is ready to step up. Three EU diplomats [quizzed by my Brussels Playbook colleagues](#) listed five possible steps — more sanctions on Russia; more aid for Ukraine; the deployment of frozen Russian assets for the war effort; some kind of commitment on the deployment of European troops ... or nothing at all. But given there's little post-summit media planned, we may not hear much of substance today. Some officials predict there will be no formal announcement ahead of an EU summit next month.

A message from Better Medicare Alliance:

More than 34 million Americans choose Medicare Advantage for better care at a lower cost than Fee-For-Service Medicare. But two straight years of Medicare Advantage cuts have left seniors feeling squeezed, with millions experiencing plan closures, higher costs, and reduced benefits. Seniors are already struggling with high prices for everyday necessities; they can't afford to pay more for health coverage and get less.

Protect seniors' affordable health care. Protect Medicare Advantage. Learn more at [SupportMedicareAdvantage.com](https://www.SupportMedicareAdvantage.com).

Let's get real: What Trump and his team are looking for is a swift ramping-up of Europe's military capabilities and an end to the decades-long reliance upon U.S. security guarantees. Plenty of Americans (and indeed a fair few Europeans) would agree that's exactly what is needed, as part of a

generational reset of transatlantic relations. “You look at triage as a medic, what’s the first thing you do? Stop the bleeding, then you treat for shock ... We’re trying to stop the bleeding,” said Kellogg, [per WaPo’s Michael Birnbaum](#).

And there’s more: “Many NATO allies left a meeting of defense ministers last week convinced that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth planned to pull tens of thousands of troops from Europe in the coming years,” Birnbaum reports, “though they cautioned that the effort still appears nascent.” NYT’s David Sanger and Steven Erlanger [report the same](#), adding that European defense ministers believe replacing high-end U.S. kit like attack helicopters and satellite intelligence would take “close to a decade ... even if ordered tomorrow.”

The bigger picture: The concern in Europe is that this antagonistic language used by Vance, Hegseth et al simply plays into Putin’s hands, raising questions about the solidity of the Western alliance and potentially emboldening further Russian military incursions like the 2014 and 2022 invasions of Ukraine. Neighbors like Latvia and Lithuania are watching nervously and wondering if their own security is guaranteed. “There is a big risk that something that will look nice on the paper will give Russia the possibility to mobilize, to rearm and to continue, maybe in Ukraine or somewhere else,” said Danish PM **Mette Frederiksen** yesterday. [This report](#) from Danish intelligence spells it out.

Reading the room: There is certainly a clear understanding in Europe’s power centers of what this new White House expects, and last night British PM **Keir Starmer** took a big step forward with the first commitment of British peace-keeping troops on the ground in Ukraine. [Writing in the Telegraph](#), Starmer said the U.K. is “ready and willing to contribute to security guarantees to Ukraine by putting our own troops on the ground if necessary.” There has been no Western troop involvement in Ukraine so far. The White House [asked European nations](#) what they could realistically contribute in a questionnaire issued last week — and Hegseth has made clear U.S. troops will not be involved.

One to watch: Starmer is emerging as a possible conduit between the White House and Europe, having struck up a surprisingly positive relationship with Trump so far. Despite their political differences — Starmer’s Labour Party is a center-left, liberal outfit — Trump has [showered praise](#) on his opposite

number, describing Starmer as a “nice guy” doing “a very good job.” Starmer is expected at the White House for face-to-face talks with the president next week. (Let’s hope he doesn’t run into **Elon Musk**, who has described Starmer as [“evil”](#) and [“tyrannical”](#) and [demanded he be put in jail.](#))

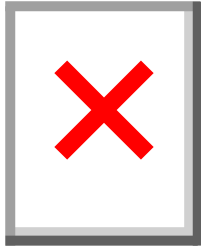
Coming attractions: [Bloomberg confirms](#) Starmer’s big play is only the start, with Europe preparing a major defense announcement for after the German elections this coming weekend. It says NATO chief **Mark Rutte** is suggesting the European proposal will “focus on military training, speeding up aid, weapons deliveries and what Europe can offer for security guarantees.” “We will launch a large package that has never been seen in this dimension before,” said German Foreign Minister **Annalena Baerbock**. “Similar to the euro or the corona crisis, there is now a financial package for security in Europe. That will come in the near future.”

So in other words ... Trump appears to be getting results. Don’t come at me.

But take a step back: These are incredibly high stakes indeed for Europe, Ukraine and the West, and in truth, it’s impossible to know at this stage how it all plays out. In Europe, most observers think Putin is licking his lips at the prospect of a land settlement imposed upon Ukraine, combined with a broader American military retreat. But plenty of Americans will see Trump’s approach as a combination of smart brinkmanship and simple common sense.

And finally ... a question for Presidents’ Day: From reshaping the global security map to triggering a global trade war; from gutting the federal government to transforming the conversation around immigration, diversity and gender rights (plus plenty more besides) ... Trump has been back in the White House for just *four weeks*. Has *any* previous U.S. leader made such an impact in such a short space of time?

A message from Better Medicare Alliance:



Millions of seniors are experiencing higher costs and fewer benefits due to Medicare Advantage cuts. Seniors can't afford to be squeezed more. [Protect Medicare Advantage.](#)

THE MAGA REVOLUTION

MOMENT OF TRUTH: The first big Supreme Court clash of Trump's second term is almost upon us. The White House yesterday asked the highest court in the land to permit the firing of Office of Special Counsel chief

Hampton Dellinger, [per POLITICO's Josh Gerstein](#). Dellinger, an independent watchdog appointed by **Joe Biden** to prevent the politicization of the civil service, was fired by Trump but then reinstated by lower courts due to federal laws restricting the power of the presidency. The big question now is whether the Supreme Court's conservative supermajority chooses to overturn that precedent — removing more guardrails from around Trump. Watch this space.

Important footnote: For all the liberal wails (not to mention the rabble-rousing tweets by [Trump](#) and [Vance](#)) around the president's supposed refusal to follow the law, it's worth noting that his lawyer's weekend court filing made clear the White House has scrupulously complied with the lower-court order to restore Dellinger to his post. "The Executive Branch takes seriously its constitutional duty to comply with the orders of Article III courts, and it has fulfilled that duty here," acting Solicitor General **Sarah Harris** wrote.

The mass firings: Meanwhile, many more federal workers continued to get the boot across the government this weekend. Within HHS, a "chaotic" and "haphazard" firing spree hit probationary employees at the FDA, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and emergency preparedness office, [POLITICO's Adam Cancryn and colleagues report](#). To civil servants, the Department of Government Efficiency's "deep cuts ... at times seemed indiscriminate — with even some Trump political appointees unaware which of their employees were being fired or why."

More cuts: A quarter of the Energy Department's Loan Programs Office, which doles out federal funding to new clean-energy projects, is gone, [WSJ's Scott Patterson scooped](#). Hundreds of FAA employees who work on "critical air traffic control infrastructure" were ousted, [CNN's Pete Muntean reports](#). At the Transportation Department, dozens of employees were fired for what the administration said in part was poor performance — but most of them actually had "exceptional" job reviews, [NBC's Allan Smith reports](#). And NASA is in a state of limbo as potential DOGE cuts loom, along with uncertain futures for its moon rocket and its own HQ, [WaPo's Joel Achenbach reports](#).

Join POLITICO on February 19, for the Playbook First 100 Days: Health Care Breakfast Briefing where we will gather key leaders in health care and

Washington to discuss the looming issues that will shape health care policy in 2025. [RVSP to attend](#).

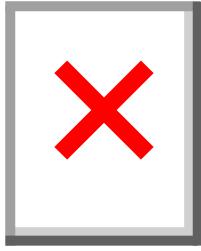
In the DOGE house: The White House is trying to install DOGE official **Gavin Kliger** at the IRS with access to an ultra-sensitive system of every taxpayer's personal information, [WaPo's Jacob Bogage and Jeff Stein scooped](#). The agency is considering the request, which hasn't been finalized but "has raised deep concern" among employees. **Related read:** [WaPo's Lisa Rein on](#) why Musk & co. have been able to crash through the government's guardrails.

The fallout: In South Africa, the U.S. foreign aid freeze has triggered alarms that some of the millions of people taking lifesaving HIV medication will lose access to treatment, [AP's Mogomotsi Magome reports](#). On CBS' "60 Minutes" last night, [Scott Pelley zoomed in](#) on the thousands of USAID employees abroad whose lives were upended as Trump seeks to dismantle the agency in spite of the law. Meanwhile, looming funding cuts to indirect costs for scientific research has the science world grieving and freaked out for the future of research, [NYT's Raymond Zhong reports](#).

Dynamic to watch: As the Trump administration forces federal workers to return to the office, as soon as next week at some agencies, labor unions argue that the orders violate contracts. That ultimately "will test a conservative legal theory that collective bargaining agreements aren't binding from one administration to the next," [WSJ's Laura Kusisto and colleagues report](#).

Evergreen reminder: Despite this intense, daily barrage of negative reporting, Trump's drive to slash the size of the U.S. government remains one of his most popular policies. And there's no sign of it stopping anytime soon.

A message from Better Medicare Alliance:



More than 34 million Americans rely on Medicare Advantage for affordable health care. [Learn more.](#)

BEST OF THE REST

MIDDLE EAST LATEST: Rubio is due to discuss the future of the Middle East with Crown Prince **Mohammed bin Salman** in Saudi Arabia today. Rubio met with Israeli PM **Benjamin Netanyahu** yesterday and warned that Hamas must never be able to control Gaza, backing Trump's plan to seize

the territory and remove the Palestinians, [per the WSJ](#). (Netanyahu called it “the only viable plan,” [per the AP](#).) Most concretely, new heavy MK-84 bombs arrived in Israel from the U.S., which Trump OKed after Biden had blocked their export, [per Reuters](#).

BIG WEEK FOR BUDGET FANS: The House is in recess this week, but Speaker **Mike Johnson** has canceled plans to attend a meeting of conservative group ARC in London today. Instead, he’ll address the conference via video link, organizers said, given the ongoing dispute between the House and Senate around a budget resolution. By contrast, the Senate *is* sitting this week — and it’s possible we’ll see a budget vote in the coming days, as POLITICO’s [Jordain Carney reported](#) Friday. Nothing has been confirmed as yet.

ERIC ADAMS FALLOUT: How did acting deputy AG **Emil Bove** find prosecutors to sign off on the order seeking to end the corruption case against NYC Mayor **Eric Adams**, after several chose to resign rather than doing so? [NYT’s Devlin Barrett and colleagues report](#) that veteran prosecutor **Ed Sullivan** decided to fall on the sword to protect younger colleagues and other cases in the public integrity section. Critics of the DOJ move are angrier at the other prosecutor who signed on, **Toni Bacon**. For his part, Adams declared defiantly that “I am going nowhere,” [per NYT’s Emma Fitzsimmons and Sean Piccoli](#).

IMMIGRATION FILES: [“Relatives and records cast doubt on Guantánamo migrants being ‘worst of the worst,’”](#) by WaPo’s Silvia Foster-Frau, Ana Vanessa Herrero and María Luisa Paúl: “The Post spoke with family members of six migrants whose relatives said they have confirmed through photos and lawyers that their loved ones are being held in Guantánamo. ... All involve men who fled Venezuela’s economic and political crisis and were detained immediately upon entering the United States ... Nearly all had tattoos that relatives said aroused the suspicion of U.S. authorities. Families of two of the men said they believed their loved one had been singled out because they were born in the Venezuelan state of Aragua.”

CASH DASH: Democrats and liberal groups are facing a worrisome slowdown in fundraising, as big donors close up their pocketbooks out of demoralization, fear of Trump’s retaliation or anger at the Democratic Party, [NYT’s Lisa Lerer, Reid Epstein and Teddy Schleifer report](#). It’s a huge shift

from the well-funded resistance to Trump's first term that emerged from small-dollar donors. And many progressive groups are staring down layoffs or worse.

THE MAHA WORLD: [“How the Food Industry’s Main Lobbyist Became a Top Nuisance,”](#) by WSJ’s Jesse Newman: “[**Scott**] **Faber**, 58, has a reputation as a tenacious gadfly, campaigning against food chemicals, including artificial dyes like Red 3, sweeteners and preservatives. For big food companies, he’s extra troublesome: He previously spent years lobbying for the industry and knows its playbook. ... Recent successes have come mostly at the state level, especially in California. The Trump administration could change that.”

IMAGINE THIS ... A populist right-wing president being indicted over dubious crypto tweets! MAGA favorite **Javier Milei**, the president of Argentina, is facing fraud charges for promoting a cryptocurrency on his social media. [The AP got the scoop on that one.](#) It could never happen here, right?

With a new administration in place, how will governors work with the federal government and continue to lead the way on issues like AI, health care, economic development, education, energy and climate? Hear from Gov. Jared Polis, Gov. Brian Kemp and more at POLITICO's Governors Summit on February 20. [RSVP today.](#)

■ TALK OF THE TOWN

Donald Trump, riding in The Beast, [took a lap at Daytona International Speedway.](#)

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. [posted a picture with a lizard](#), **Russell Brand** and a shirtless **Mehmet Oz**.

TRANSITION — Courtney Knight is now manager of government relations at WK Kellogg Co. She previously was a professional staff for the Senate Agriculture Committee under Chair Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.).

HAPPY BIRTHDAY: Reps. **Jim Jordan** (R-Ohio), **Suzan DelBene** (D-Wash.) and **Brian Jack** (R-Ga.) ... **Sam Vinograd** ... **Betsy Fischer Martin** ... **Lachlan Markay** ... **Keegan Goudiss** ... **Kristin Roberts** ... **Ashley Berrang** ... **Dianna Heitz** ... **Cara Camacho** ... AARP's **Barbara Shipley** ... **Danielle Most** ... POLITICO's **Kelsey Tamborrino** and **Mitchell Cain** ... **Annamarie Rienzi** ... **Mark Shriver** ... **Drew Cantor** ... **Frederick Hill** of House Oversight ... **Steven Grossman** ... **Allison Hunn** ... **Emmanuel Guillory** ... **Shana Marchio** ... **Stephanie Young** ... **Cliff Sims** ... former Reps. **Randy Forbes** (R-Va.) and **Jake LaTurner** (R-Kan.) ... PwC's **Shantanu Chandra** ... **Sonia Vasconcellos** of Global Counsel ... **Edith Honan** ... **Surya Gunasekara** ... **Baker Landon** ... **Anna Koval** ... **Robert Giuffra** ... Newsmax's **Haley Gillman** ... **Paris Hilton** ... **Kelsey Rohwer** ... **Fred Schwien** ... **Mike Sager** of New Harbor

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A message from Better Medicare Alliance:

Medicare Advantage is now the primary form of Medicare coverage in the United States. Over 55% of Medicare beneficiaries — more than 34 million seniors and people with disabilities — choose Medicare Advantage for comprehensive care that delivers better health outcomes at a lower cost than Fee-For-Service Medicare.

But for two years in a row, Medicare Advantage has been cut even as medical costs and utilization have been going up. Now millions of seniors who rely on Medicare Advantage are feeling squeezed, with widespread plan closures, higher costs, and reduced benefits.

President Trump and his Administration can keep their promise to protect Medicare for seniors by ensuring adequate funding for Medicare Advantage moving forward.

Seniors need affordable health care. That means protecting Medicare Advantage.

Learn more at [SupportMedicareAdvantage.com](https://www.supportmedicareadvantage.com).

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