

# **The New US Administration: What to Expect for Latin America and Ukraine**

Post-Event Release on the Results of the Roundtable Discussion

The closed round table conducted online under Chatham House rules was organized on February 5, 2025, by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (Kyiv) with participation of the experts from Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Ukraine

## Post-Event Release on the Results of the Closed Roundtable Discussion\*

### **Key Points:**

- *A key factor often underestimated in Washington is the resilience of Ukrainian society. Public resistance to concessions to Russia is critical to internal stability. Ignoring public sentiment, particularly on the part of the United States, could lead to a genuine delegitimization of the Ukrainian leadership - not in the sense of Russian propaganda, but in real political terms.*
- *Trump's approach to the war in Ukraine is focusing on transactional interests such as Ukraine's rare earth resources and weakening China by trying to "cut Russia off" from it which does not seem very realistic.*
- *The tools Trump plans to use against Russia should be asymmetrical.*
- *The polarization in Latin America, driven by ideological imperatives, hinders regional cooperation. President Trump's approach to different governments depends on their ideology. While for the current government of Argentina it seems to be easier to deal with Trump, the US isolationism and Trump's pressure on Latin America help China and other foreign players to strengthen their position in the region.*
- *Brazil sees Russia as a driver of the multipolar world, so a strategic defeat of Russia (its possible collapse or regime change) is undesirable, as Brazil wants to use this trend to strengthen its status on the international arena.*
- *Mexico sees Canada as an ally in the current situation, which helps both countries diversify trade issues.*
- *"America First" approach is a dismantling of the multilateral system (the US withdrew from the WHO, the Paris Agreement, the UN Human Rights Council, etc.) This is an imperialistic and undemocratic vision of the world.*
- *The issue of the inviolability of state borders is no longer as obvious as it was in the past.*

On February 5, 2025, with the support of the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, an expert roundtable discussion "*The New US Administration: What to Expect for Latin America and Ukraine*" was organized. The event was held online according to the rules of Chatham House and brought together analysts and scholars from Ukraine, Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico to consolidate the dialogue between Ukraine and Latin America. In particular, the experts focused on geopolitical, economic and other challenges in international relations with the change of the US leadership.

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*\*The roundtable was held on February 5, 2025. At the time of the discussion, experts expressed their opinions based on available information, and although the international context has changed since the event, the key ideas and conclusions of the experts remain important for understanding broader geopolitical trends.*

One of the key topics was *Ukraine's need to strengthen its position in international partnership*. Ukrainians expressed expectations for security guarantees and the need for international commitments to support a lasting and just peace in Ukraine. Ukrainian participants emphasized that there is a consensus in Ukrainian society on this issue, as evidenced by the results of national opinion polls, which show that resilience remains a critical factor in Ukraine's strategy.

According to Ukrainian experts, from a legal, security, and logistical point of view, preparations for the 2025 elections in Ukraine remain questionable, even risky. From a political point of view, Russia's ongoing hybrid war, including information manipulation, could also have a significant negative effect in this context.

*“If Ukraine were pressured into holding elections shortly after a ceasefire, without a stable transition period, internal destabilization would be a serious risk. Pro-Russian forces — though not explicitly advocating an alliance with Russia — could position themselves as “peace candidates,” pushing for broad concessions. This risk is often underestimated in discussions about immediate elections following a ceasefire.”* Moreover, it is necessary to have security guarantees that Moscow will not restart its aggression right after elections.

During the roundtable, Ukrainian experts emphasized that US support for Ukraine within the framework of the NATO collective defense system is the best option that will prevent Ukraine from being in the so-called “gray security zone”. Ukraine's integration into the security system can increase stability, reduce the risk of a repeat of Russian aggression, and guarantee the new US administration's commitment to the diplomatic path to returning its temporarily occupied territories.

*“Washington's discussions still lack Ukraine’s critical minimum conditions for a ceasefire: security guarantees, NATO membership and binding bilateral agreements stronger than past assurances. Ukraine will seek to ensure that these guarantees are secured alongside ceasefire talks, not as an afterthought.”*

### ***The Position of the New US Administration Amid Russia’s Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine***

The uncertainty and changes in US foreign policy make the future less predictable as to what commitments the US will have to Ukraine under the Trump administration compared to his predecessor.

At the same time, experts from Ukraine noted that from the point of view of Ukrainian decision-makers, Trump represents not only threats but also an opportunity for cooperation: *“[Donald] Trump is still unpredictable, don't let us be confused on that, but is awesomely unpredictable not only on Ukraine, on the democratic West, on all other democratic*

*countries. He is also an unpredictable and chaotic character in relation to Russia.” Also, he does not want to be seen as ‘weak’ or even ‘a loser’ in dealing with Moscow.*

The discussion highlighted two main interests that President Trump has in his foreign policy aspirations for Ukraine: the first and the greatest interest is to create his own image. He is trying to present himself not only as the head of the United States, but also as a great international leader.

*“Trump is still this New York businessman that he has been for most of his life. He tries to make any foreign relations profitable and lucrative for himself and for his country, and essentially both of these narratives Ukraine can provide Trump with.”*

Experts from Latin American countries, in turn, analyzed the region's positioning in global affairs, noting that relations between the countries of the region and the United States have historically fluctuated.

*“During the last decades, the US has had a low intensity relationship with Latin America in general, even when it is supposed to be its area of influence during the Cold War. And moreover, its policy towards Latin America has not been homogeneous, (...) bilateral relationship with any country in the region could change according to political changes in that country. This disengagement of the [United] States provoked a void, which was naturally at the advantage of others extra regional powers, like China in the whole region, practically; Russia in some countries like Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, or Bolivia recently; Iran, especially in Venezuela; as well as a growing interest from India in our region”.*

According to the experts, US policy toward the region should be based on cooperation and partnership, if not for the sake of the region's welfare, then at least in view of the US global geopolitical interests. The current world order demonstrates that countries are no longer so willing to join a particular sphere of influence, but rather are guided by their own national or economic interests.

China and Russia are doing everything they can to engage countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in economic, financial, or military cooperation, often using disinformation. That is why it is in the interests of the United States to use soft power and expand cooperation in the region that is closest to it and also shares Western values.

*“During his inaugural address, President Trump announced that he was going to recover the Panama Canal. And so Panama was the first country to be visited by the new Secretary of State, Marco Rubio. That is not only to make Latin America the first region in the world to be visited during a new administration. New Secretary of State is of Latin American descent from Cuba, who speaks Spanish very well and knows the region very well. So that was a good message. We are hopeful that it will bring closer relations among countries in the hemisphere.”*

### ***The Economic Aspect of Regional and Interregional Cooperation***

The roundtable participants expressed concern about the economic vulnerability of the Latin American region and the possible consequences of the US protectionist policy. Some countries maintain close trade relations with Russia, particularly in terms of imports of fertilizers, energy and raw materials. This economic dependence affects the shaping of political positions and diplomatic strategy.

Brazil, for example, has been similarly influenced. Although it declares neutrality, it is more on the side of Russia.

Brazil's support for Russia can be explained by three main factors: normative, “materialistic” and the status ones. Brazil's diplomatic tradition is generally based on formal neutrality. At the same time, Brazil seeks to play a significant role in global diplomacy, and its support for Russia is in line with its vision of a country developing the status of an influential player.

Brazil's economic dependence on Russia, including fertilizer imports (*Brazil is the largest fertilizer importer in the world, with Russia supplying Brazil with an average of 30-35% of all fertilizers*) and diesel fuel, also affects the country's position. In recent years, Russia has been ranked 4th in terms of trade with Brazil, although it used to rank only 14th, which is a “materialistic” explanation for neutrality.

Russia also takes advantage of the fact that Brazil and other Latin American countries are vulnerable to foreign trade and price fluctuations. Despite this, the public in Brazil and the region supports Ukraine: *“More than 50% of Brazilians are in favor of Ukraine. Only 10% of the Brazilian population supports Russia.”*

As part of the discussion, the roundtable participants also discussed the relationship between the countries within the BRICS international grouping and its approach to reducing dependence on the US dollar. One of the Latin American experts emphasized that the introduction of the BRICS currency is mainly China's initiative. Brazil, although participating in this format, remains generally oriented towards Western financial institutions due to its significant foreign exchange reserves in US dollars and euros. Russia remains the most active supporter of abandoning dollar dominance, while Brazil, South Africa, and India are more restrained and pragmatic.

Mexico occupies a unique position in the region. Its geographic duality as part of North America and Latin America at the same time allows it to act as a bridge between the two regions. At the same time, Mexico, the United States, and Canada have strong economic ties, as a significant portion of exports flow between these countries, and despite political tensions, these economic ties play an important role in the functioning of the US economy: *“80% of Mexican exports and 70% of Canadian exports go to the United States.”*

According to Latin American experts, the United States, under the influence of political figures such as Donald Trump, is moving toward a model that undermines multilateral cooperation, which creates risks of a new world order dominated by the principle of “America First.”

### ***Expert recommendations and visions for future cooperation***

As a result of the discussion, the experts voiced recommendations for both Latin American countries and Ukraine in the context of President Trump's unpredictable foreign policy steps.

### ***Recommendations for Latin American countries included:***

- Development of cooperation in the field of digital transformation and cybersecurity - experts emphasized the need to strengthen cooperation in the field of digital technologies to increase economic resilience and security in the region.
- Strengthening regional economic integration - reducing dependence on a single external economic partner by strengthening regional trade agreements and dialogue should be among the key strategic priorities of Latin American countries.
- Defining Latin America's role in global politics by adapting to changes in US foreign policy - Latin American countries should become more actively involved in international diplomacy, using their geographic and economic positions to adapt to changes in global alliances. Given the “pragmatic” and transactional nature of the Trump administration's foreign policy, Latin American countries should be flexible and proactive in securing favorable economic and diplomatic agreements.

### ***For Ukraine, the expert community recommends:***

- Counteracting Russian disinformation and strengthening public relations in Latin America - Ukraine should clearly formulate its priorities, step up measures to counter Russian propaganda in the region, including clarification of constitutional and other restrictions on holding elections under martial law.
- Expanding diplomatic ties beyond Europe and the United States - Experts emphasized the need to strengthen Ukraine's presence in Latin America, using common democratic values and multilateral platforms to expand international support for Ukraine in its fight for freedom. Ukraine should prepare for possible changes in support from the United States and global alliances, while maintaining its strategic priorities.
- Prioritize security guarantees in future negotiations - Ukraine should insist on clear and credible security guarantees in any potential negotiations, especially on a possible ceasefire.

The discussion emphasized the growing geopolitical uncertainty, in particular the unpredictability of US foreign policy under the Trump administration. The absence of a clear US strategy for Latin America creates space for alternative global players to increase their influence, which could lead to further polarization and destabilization of the region.

Participants emphasized the need for continued dialogue, mutual understanding and pragmatic cooperation between Ukraine and Latin America to jointly overcome challenges.

## **Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF)**

Founded in 1992, Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF) is an independent, respected think tank focused on the study of Ukrainian society, its geopolitical orientations, and democratic processes based on public opinion trends analysis. The DIF conducted more than 100 national and regional opinion polls including 17 national exit polls, hundreds of expert surveys, focus group interviews, and a number of civic awareness campaigns. In 1998, the DIF conducted the first exit poll in Ukraine. Its exit poll during the 2004 presidential elections revealed falsifications done by the authorities and, therefore, it became an impetus for the non-violent Orange Revolution.

According to the Global Go To Think Tank Index, which is compiled within the framework of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania, the DIF is rated among top 50 influential non-governmental think tanks in Central Eastern Europe in 2016-2020.

Since 2014, the DIF has been conducting analysis of Russian aggression and its international implications.

Iryna Bekeshkina, the DIF Director in 2010-2020, was rated by influential Ukrainian *NV* magazine among the 100 most influential Ukrainians of all time.

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