

Aiming to break Putin’s hold on Trump

With his proposed compromises, Zelensky retains critical U.S. support.

By MICHAEL WILNER

WASHINGTON — Standing alongside President Trump at his Palm Beach estate, Volodymyr Zelensky could only smirk and grimace without overtly offending his host. “Russia wants to see Ukraine succeed,” Trump told reporters, shocking the Ukrainian president before claiming that Vladimir Putin is genuine in his desire for peace.

It was just the latest example of the American president sympathizing with Moscow in its war of conquest in Europe. Yet Zelensky emerged from the meeting Sunday ensuring once again that Ukraine may fight another day, maintaining critical if uneasy support from Washington.

Few signs of progress toward a peace agreement materialized from the meeting at Mar-a-Lago, where Zelensky traveled with significant compromises — including a plan to put territorial concessions to Russia before the Ukrainian people for a vote — in order to appease the U.S. president.

But Zelensky won concessions of his own from Trump, who had for weeks been pushing for a ceasefire by Christmas, or else threatening to cut off Ukraine from U.S. intelligence that would leave Kyiv blind on the battlefield. “I don’t have deadlines,” Trump said Sunday.

Over the course of Trump’s first year in office, Zelensky and other European leaders have repeatedly worked to convince Trump that Russia’s President Putin is, in fact, an aggressor opposed to peace, responsible for an unprovoked invasion that launched the deadliest conflict in Europe since the Second World War.

Each time, Trump has come around, even going as far over the summer as to

[See [Ukraine](#), A7]



Photographs by KAYLA BARTKOWSKI Los Angeles Times

A SAUDI firm grows alfalfa, top, on thousands of acres of Arizona desert farmland. Structures containing drying alfalfa, above, are at the farm near Vicksburg.

In Arizona, an alarming drain on a vital resource

Groundwater pumping by a Saudi dairy company is contributing to a growing crisis in farm country

By Ian James | REPORTING FROM VICKSBURG, ARIZ.

Lush green fields of alfalfa spread across thousands of acres in a desert valley in western Arizona, where a dairy company from Saudi Arabia grows the thirsty crop by pulling up groundwater from dozens of wells.

The company, Fondomonte, is the largest water user in the Ranegas Plain groundwater basin, shipping hay overseas to feed its cows in the Middle East. Like other landowners in the area, it has been allowed to pump unlimited amounts from the aquifer, even as water levels have declined.

That soon could change, as Arizona officials are considering a plan to start regulating groundwater pumping in the rural area 100 miles west of Phoenix.

At a meeting in mid-December, more than 150 residents of La Paz County sat listening in folding chairs as state officials

underlined the severity of the declines in groundwater levels by showing graphs with lines sloping steeply downward.

“This is where the heaviest pumping is. This is where we’re seeing the most decline,” said Ryan Mitchell, chief hydrologist for the Arizona Department of Water Resources, as he showed charts of the plummeting aquifer levels.

The data from wells told the story: In one, water levels dropped a staggering 242 feet since the early 1980s. Another declined 136 feet.

Mitchell said current pumping in the Ranegas basin isn’t sustainable, and that in places it’s causing the land surface to sink as much as 2 inches per year.

“That is a trend that is alarming,” he said.

[See [Arizona](#), A8]

ICE officer’s shooting video raises doubts

A judge throws out charges against a TikTok streamer injured in South L.A.

By BRITNY MEJIA

For more than two months, federal authorities have maintained that immigration officers opened fire on a TikTok streamer in South Los Angeles out of fear for their safety and that of the public.

Department of Homeland Security officials accused Carlitos Ricardo Parias of weaponizing his car and ramming a law enforcement vehicle in an attempt to flee an immigration operation in October. Officers “followed their training and fired defensive shots,” a Homeland Security spokesperson said shortly afterward.

But newly released body camera footage from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer who fired his gun raises questions about the seconds leading up to the shooting, which wounded Parias and a deputy U.S. marshal hit by a ricochet bullet.

The video obtained by The Times captures the officer holding a gun in one hand and using the other to break open the passenger window of Parias’ car. As the officer shouts at Parias to turn off the car, Parias raises his hands in the air and asks why he is being detained. The officer repeatedly tries to open the passenger side door, before moving the gun to his left hand — right before firing.

At the time, Parias’ car did not appear to be moving and other agents were positioned beside the driver’s side door. After the gunfire, an agent next to Parias leaps to the side.

“Oh,” the officer who opened fire said, sounding surprised. “F—.”

“Who shot?” an agent asked.

“I shot, I shot,” the officer responded.

After the Oct. 21 shooting, prosecutors charged Parias, who authorities say is living in the country illegally, with assault on a federal officer. On Saturday, U.S. District Judge Fernando M. Olguin dismissed the case against Parias, finding that he had been denied access to counsel while in immigration custody.

[See [Shooting](#), A7]



MYUNG J. CHUN Los Angeles Times

PRIME’S data center in Vernon uses enough electricity to power more than 26,400 homes for a year.

An unlikely SoCal AI data center hub

Vernon has become an essential location, with few residents to issue any complaints.

By NILESH CHRISTOPHER

Five miles south of downtown Los Angeles, a single industrial block in Vernon is drawing as much electricity as a small town.

Inside a three-story, 242,000-square-foot building known as LAX01, rows of advanced artificial intelligence chips hum across six data buildings, consuming enough electricity to power more than 26,400 homes for a year. The processors are part of a fast-growing network of data centers reshaping this rusty industrial corner of L.A. County.

Vernon has just 222 residents and a long, colorful history arising from its industrial roots. Over the years it has grappled with corruption scandals and environmental pollution

charges.

It was once on the verge of being unincorporated amid accusations that it had been controlled for decades by a small cadre of families and their associates. Its history helped inspire a season of the HBO crime drama “True Detective.”

Today, Vernon is becoming an unlikely hub for Southern California’s AI infrastructure.

“The race toward superintelligence is reshaping infrastructure requirements across every industry,” said Michael Wall, executive vice president at Prime Data Centers, which built the Vernon facility. “We’re working to give businesses the foundation they need to build and deploy the next generation of AI models — faster, more efficiently and at massive scale.”

Prime and other developers, including Goodman Group, CoreSite and Digital Realty, are planning hundreds of megawatts of new data center capacity in Vernon.

[See [Vernon](#), A12]

Gaza militias key to Israel’s security plans

But some factions’ previous ties to Islamic State are raising alarm bells

By NABIH BULOS

AMMAN, Jordan — When Israel and Hamas signed a ceasefire this year, it brought into question the fate of militias Israel cultivated during the devastating two-year war as an alternative ruling force in Gaza. Many expected that Hamas — still the dominant force in the Strip — would hunt them down.

Instead, Israel has shifted the militias to the half of Gaza from which it has yet to withdraw, east of the so-called Yellow Line, the military boundary that



JEHAD ALSHRAFI Associated Press

PALESTINIANS survey a camp for the displaced in Gaza City. One militia called itself “a peace partner.”

divides Gaza in two. In the Israeli-controlled half, five factions, still supported by Israel with arms and aid, have established what are essentially tiny fiefdoms, even as they continue to wage a harassment campaign across the Yellow Line to stop Hamas from reasserting its rule.

For its part, Israel wants to use the factions as local proxies to secure parts of the enclave under its control, ensure they’re free of any hostile groups, then set up humanitarian distribution points to keep residents there.

[See [Gaza](#), A4]

TRUMP WARNS IRAN: President promises more U.S. airstrikes if nuclear program is rebuilt. **WORLD, A4**

Medi-Cal to end coverage for weight-loss drugs

By DON THOMPSON

SACRAMENTO — Many low-income Californians prescribed wildly popular weight-loss drugs will lose their coverage for the medications in the new year.

Health officials are recommending diet and exer-

cise as alternatives to heavily advertised weight-loss drugs like Wegovy and Zepbound, advice that experts say is unrealistic.

“Of course he tried eating well and everything, but now with the medications, it’s better — a 100% change,” said Wilmer Cardenas of Santa Clara, who said his

husband lost about 100 pounds over two years using GLP-1s covered by Medi-Cal, California’s version of Medicaid.

California is joining several other states in restricting an option they say is no longer affordable as they confront soaring pharmaceutical costs and steep

Medicaid cuts under the Trump administration, among other financial pressures. Despite negotiated price reductions announced in November that the White House said would “dramatically lower cost to taxpayers” for the drugs and enable Medicaid to cover

[See [Weight](#), A6]

Trump pledges \$2 billion for U.N. aid

The amount is a fraction of the foreign assistance the U.S. has contributed in the past. **WORLD, A3**

L.A. Zoo’s ‘great ape’ baby boom

Years of planning culminate in five primate births in four months. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Weather
Mostly sunny.
L.A. Basin: 72/57. **B6**

Markets **A12**
Opinion Voices **A13**

USC’s defensive coach is leaving

Trojans coordinator Lynn heading to Penn State after Tuesday’s bowl game. **SPORTS, B10**

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