

Liquid Insight

Watching, waiting, not commiserating

Key takeaways

- In the March FOMC, the Fed will most likely stay on hold, emphasizing patience over panic. QT will likely be paused.
- Markets could interpret the Fed's message as hawkish. In our view, the "Powell put" is not forthcoming.
- The SEP forecasts are likely to reflect stagflation. The dot plot should still show two cuts in '25 and '26.

By: Mark Cabana, Aditya Bhawe & Alex Cohen

Exhibit 1: The Fed's latest projections are likely to show a small nod to stagflation

Our projections for the Fed's Summary of Economic Projections

	2025	2026	2027	Longer Run
Change in real GDP (% 4Q/4Q)				
March (p)	1.8	2.0	1.9	1.8
December	2.1	2.0	1.9	1.8
Unemployment rate (%)				
March (p)	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.2
December	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.2
PCE inflation (% 4Q/4Q)				
March (p)	2.7	2.1	2.0	2.0
December	2.5	2.1	2.0	2.0
Core PCE inflation (% 4Q/4Q)				
March (p)	2.7	2.2	2.0	
December	2.5	2.2	2.0	
Federal funds target rate (midpoint)				
March (p)	3.875	3.375	3.375	3.250
December	3.875	3.375	3.125	3.000

Source: Federal Reserve Board, BofA Global Research

Note: (p) = BofA US Economics projections

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March FOMC: watching, waiting, not commiserating

The March FOMC meeting will likely be all about policy uncertainty. We think the Fed will almost certainly stay on hold, emphasizing patience over panic. The Fed's message could be interpreted as hawkish, but in our view, the "Powell put" is not forthcoming. The SEP forecasts and distribution of risks are likely to reflect stagflation: weaker growth and higher inflation. The dot plot should continue to show two cuts in '25 and '26.

US rates may react to Fed communications with a curve flattening, reflecting the challenges of navigating sticky inflation & on hold policy stance. We would encourage clients to fade any curve flattening with the expectation that further declines in risk assets could push the market to price more Fed cuts. If the suite of Fed communications places greater emphasis in the data under its feet, the market should interpret this as hawkish, likely prompting a reflexive relief-rally in the USD, in our view.

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US econ: watching, waiting, not commiserating

Say it ain't so, I will not cut

Today the economy is faced with uncertainty around demand and supply. Federal spending cuts and the downside to capex and hiring due to tariff uncertainty pose risks to demand. But the actual implementation of tariffs and immigration restrictions are negative supply shocks. Markets are pricing around 70bp of cuts this year as of this writing. This indicates that they are assuming that i) the demand shocks will outweigh the supply shocks, and/or ii) the labor market will be more impacted than inflation by tariffs and immigration restrictions (or that the Fed will look through the inflation impact as a one-off).

Initial conditions matter

We think it is too early to draw this conclusion. The economy entered this period of policy uncertainty with equities at all-time highs, above-trend growth, a labor market that is stable around full employment and above-target inflation. This leaves substantial buffer in terms of financial conditions and economic activity, but no buffer on inflation. It does not seem prudent for the Fed to assume, so early in the stage, that the impact of tariffs will be transitory. Especially given the increase in some (but admittedly not all) measures of inflation expectations, and the fact that “team transitory” suffered a resounding defeat in 2021-22. Cuts seem firmly off the table in the near term, in our view.

Turn the lights out on the Powell put

The press conference is likely to revolve around the Fed’s response to policy uncertainty. We think Powell is likely to keep his cards close to his chest, stating that monetary policy is well positioned to deal with risks in either direction. Powell will probably argue that the Fed will wait for a clear signal from the hard data, instead of responding to potentially noisy soft data, before making its next move. The bigger risk is for a hawkish surprise, with Powell declining to provide any indication of the Fed put that markets seem to be expecting.

Statement to follow the path of least resistance

We don’t expect major changes in the FOMC statement’s assessment of current conditions or risks. The FOMC might downgrade its description of economic activity from “solid” to something like “moderate”, to reflect the potential slowdown in 1Q GDP growth due to soft January consumer spending.

SEP: a small nod to stagflation

The combination of the signal from the latest data and policies enacted to date should result in the Fed downgrading growth and upgrading inflation this year, a small nod to stagflation. The u-rate should be unchanged this year. The median fed funds projection meanwhile is likely to not change in 2025 and 2026 (i.e., 50bp of cuts in each year). We think it will show no additional cuts in 2027 and a higher long-run rate. The FOMC is likely to provide a more candid assessment of the administration’s policy stance in the distribution of risks at the back of the SEP. We expect this section to show much higher uncertainty around all relevant macro variables than in December.

US rates: FOMC ya later

March FOMC meeting next week will have 2 areas of focus: (1) policy decision, SEP, and Powell presser (2) QT policy where we expect pause announced and April implementation.

Policy decision: hold & wait, focus on “signal from noise”

Our economists and we think the market as well expect the Fed on hold. The SEP will likely show economic revisions reflecting stagflation risks. Our economists expect SEP to show end '25 growth revised lower, inflation higher, and U3 + median dot unchanged. They also expect the longer run dot to be revised higher from 3 to 3.25%, consistent



with recent trends. SEP should keep greater concerns of higher inflation vs lower growth / employment.

The Powell presser will likely reiterate key themes from last Friday's speech: "focused on separating the signal from the noise", "well positioned to wait for greater clarity", "no need to hurry". Powell will likely acknowledge recent sentiment shift and market drop but signal Fed unlikely to over-react. We worry risk assets may hear a Fed insufficiently attentive to downside growth worries that triggers further financial condition tightening.

US rates may react to Fed communications with a curve flattening, reflecting the challenges of navigating sticky inflation and on hold policy stance. We would encourage clients to fade any curve flattening with the expectation that further declines in risk assets could push the market to price more Fed cuts. In essence, the market may believe that fewer cuts today might mean more cuts tomorrow.

Balance sheet: QT pause & MBS reinvestments across UST curve

The Fed should announce a QT pause at the March FOMC that will be implemented starting in April, see note [QT pause](#). We suspect the QT pause will evolve into QT cessation to be announced in late '25. Fed should pause QT due to concerns about over-draining liquidity from the banking system. The over-drain could take place as money market signals key to informing reserve demand are muted amidst debt limit distortions.

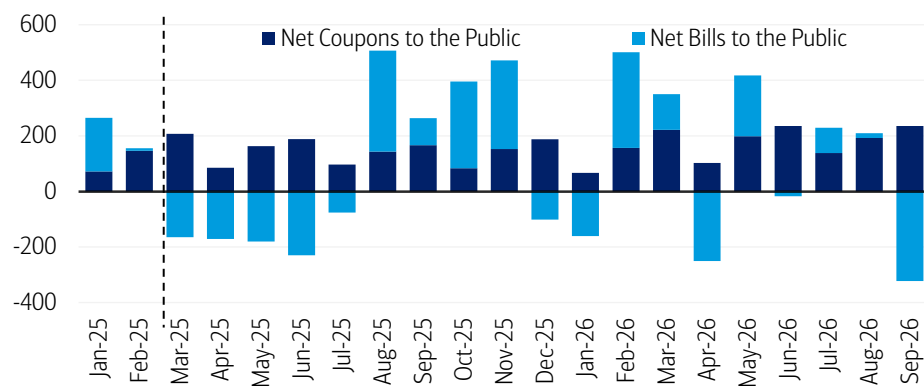
If QT pause, market will care about Fed reinvestment decisions of repaying securities. We expect: (1) all maturing USTs rolled over as auction add-ons in line with new UST issue sizes (2) MBS repayments into USTs and reinvested across UST curve. Clients agree with us on USTs and suggest we are out of consensus on MBS reinvestments.

The market impact of QT pause in March will be a modest spread positive across the curve. Pausing QT will allow lower net UST supply of \$150b vs our prior QT end date in Sept '25. This means lower monthly net supply, including net negative UST settlements in Apr – Jun that should finally help bring UST repo lower (Exhibit 2). Lower UST repo should be supportive of widening front end spreads. Our out-of-consensus view on QT pause + MBS repayments across UST curve should also be modestly supportive of back end spread widening (kneejerk of ~1-2bps).

For more detail see: [QT review: pause + MBS to UST WAM](#).

Exhibit 2: Monthly net UST supply to the public (\$bn)

We expect bill paydowns to offset growth in UST coupon issuance near-term



Source: BofA Global Research, US Treasury

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FX: The next USD catalyst

The simultaneous USD depreciation along with declining risk sentiment has been an interesting sub-plot amidst this burgeoning period of policy-induced "detox". As we



approach Wednesday's FOMC, a key question for the dollar will be how the Fed incorporates what appears to be rapidly rising stagflation risks into their policy outlook.

If the suite of Fed communications places greater emphasis in the data under its feet (sticky inflation, nascent upside risks to inflation expectations, still solid labor market and other "hard data" readings), the market should interpret this as hawkish, likely prompting a reflexive relief-rally in the USD. However, we would suspect such a move would be temporary. Risk assets would be vulnerable in this scenario, as markets are discernably more concerned with forward looking growth uncertainties. Hawkishness today raises the specter for dovishness tomorrow.

On the other hand, should the Fed reveal renewed growth concerns— most likely in the SEP—we would expect another leg lower in the USD selloff. As evidenced in our recent FX & Rates Sentiment Survey (see note [FX and Rates Sentiment Survey: We love EUR 14 March 2025](#)), investors are increasingly concerned with these stagflationary risks, and associate them with a more bearish USD outlook.



Notable Rates and FX Research

- **Global Macro Year Ahead 2025** – [Stretching the rubber band](#), 24 November 2024
- **Global Rates Year Ahead 2025** – [Continental Drift](#), 24 November 2024
- **G10 FX Year Ahead 2025** – [Policy Uncertainty](#), 26 November 2024
- [Ample space for fresh EUR longs](#), **Liquid Cross Border Flows**, 03 March 2025

Rates, FX & EM trades for 2025

For a complete list of our open trade recommendations as well as our trade recommendations closed over the past 12 months, see the reports below:

[Global FX weekly: Peak US exceptionalism and EU reforms 14 March 2025](#)

Global Rates Weekly: Everything happens for a Riesling 14 March 2025

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