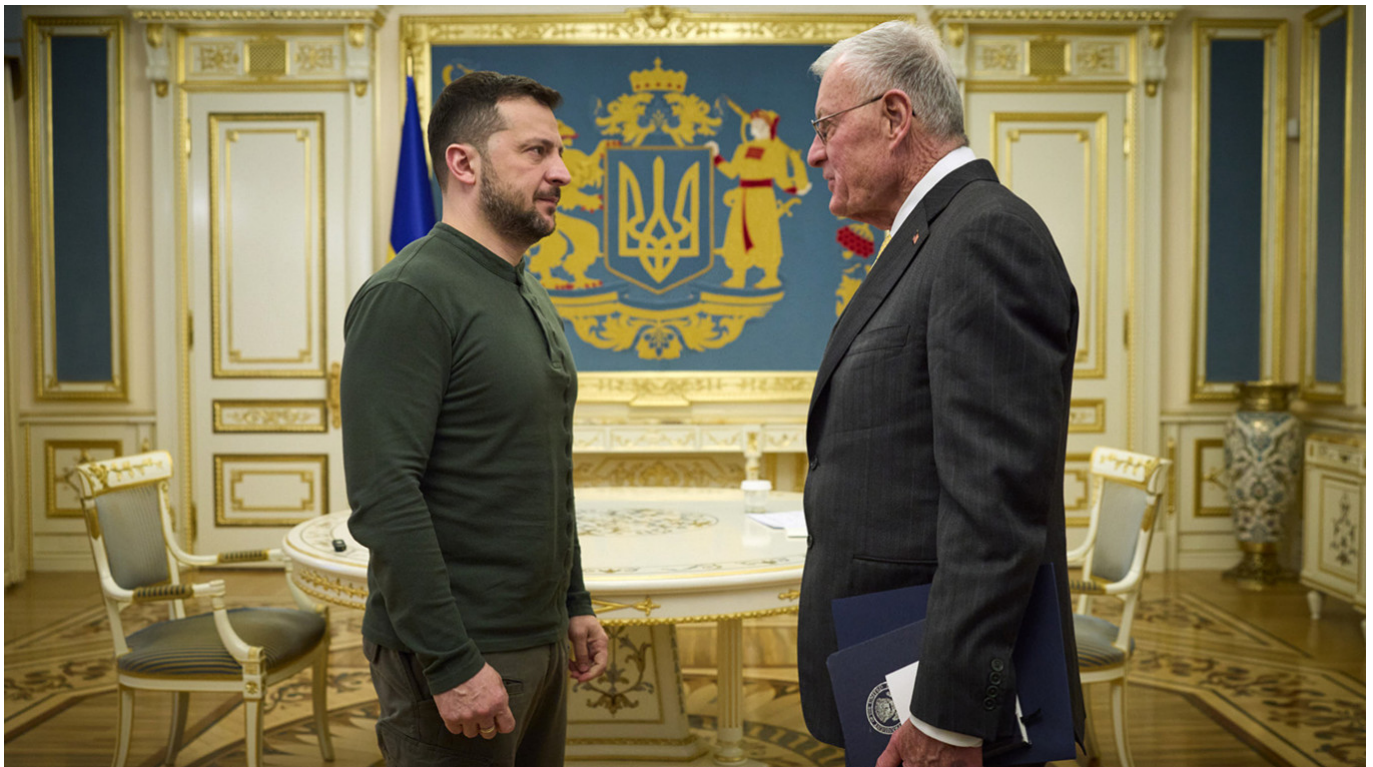


Zelensky Calls For Strong U.S. Ties After Trump Brands Him a 'Dictator'

By [Daria Andriievska for AFP](#)

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Volodymyr Zelensky and Keith Kellogg in Kyiv. [president.gov.ua](https://www.president.gov.ua)

Volodymyr Zelensky called for "strong" ties with Washington on Thursday, as he met US envoy Keith Kellogg in Kyiv a day after Donald Trump branded the Ukrainian leader a "dictator."

Tensions between Zelensky and Trump over the U.S. President's outreach to Moscow have exploded this week in a series of escalating barbs traded in press conferences and on social media.

The United States is Ukraine's most important financial and military backer, but the U.S. President has rattled Kyiv and its European backers by opening talks with Moscow they fear could end the war on terms that reward Vladimir Putin.

The spat has turned personal with Trump falsely stating Zelensky is hugely unpopular among

his own people and the Ukrainian leader in turn saying Trump had succumbed to Russian "disinformation".

Amid the war of words, Zelensky said Thursday he had held a "productive meeting" with Kellogg.

"We had a detailed conversation about the battlefield situation, how to return our prisoners of war, and effective security guarantees," Zelensky said on social media after the meeting.

"Strong Ukraine-U.S. relations benefit the entire world," he added.

However, there was no joint press conference or statements after the discussions, as would typically be expected for a visiting foreign envoy.

Related article: [Trump Official Tells Ukraine to 'Tone Down' Criticism](#)

'Unacceptable'

In the United States, some of Trump's team doubled down on their attacks on Zelensky.

In a post on his X social media site, Elon Musk said Zelensky was "despised by the people of Ukraine."

Trump's National Security Advisor Mike Waltz told Fox News that Kyiv's criticism of the US president was "unacceptable" and urged Zelensky to sign a deal giving preferential access to Ukraine's critical minerals and natural resources.

"We're getting all this pushback... they need to tone it down and take a hard look and sign that deal," he said.

Trump is calling for Kyiv to hand over access to its mineral wealth as compensation for tens of billions of dollars in U.S. aid delivered under his predecessor Joe Biden.

Zelensky rejected a deal proposed by Trump as it did not include "security guarantees" – Kyiv's key demand from its Western backers in any agreement with Russia to halt the fighting.

The feud marks a dramatic reversal from U.S. policy under Biden, who lauded Zelensky as a hero, shipped vast supplies of arms to Kyiv and hammered Moscow with sanctions.

Trump has instead criticised Zelensky and blamed him for starting the war that began with Russia's full-scale invasion three years ago.

"A Dictator without Elections, Zelensky better move fast or he is not going to have a Country left," he wrote on his Truth Social platform on Wednesday.

Zelensky was elected in 2019 for a five-year term and has remained leader in line with Ukrainian rules under martial law, imposed as his country fights for its survival.

While Zelensky's popularity has fallen, the percentage of Ukrainians who trust him has never

dipped below 50% since the conflict started, according to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS).

Related article: [U.S. Opposes Calling Russia 'Aggressor' in G7 Statement on Ukraine War Anniversary – FT](#)

Shock at Trump attack

Trump's invective drew shock reactions from Europe.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said it was "wrong and dangerous" to call Zelensky a dictator.

The White House said France's Emmanuel Macron and Britain's Keir Starmer will visit Trump next week after European leaders held emergency summits in recent days over how to deal with Trump's threats to overhaul decades of transatlantic security ties.

The Kremlin, buoyed by its rapprochement with Washington, has hailed Trump's comments.

Russia, which for years has railed against the US military presence in Europe, wants a reorganisation of the continent's security framework as part of any deal to end the Ukraine fighting.

Putin said Wednesday that US allies "only have themselves to blame for what's happening," suggesting they were paying the price for opposing Trump's return to the White House.

Neither Kyiv nor Europe were invited to high-level talks between Russia and US's top diplomats in Saudi Arabia earlier this week, deepening fears they are being sidelined.

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