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Trump Softens on Zelensky, Says Mineral Deal Coming 'Soon'

By AFP

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The White House

U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday said he doesn't hold Volodymyr Zelensky "responsible" for Russia's invasion of his country but continued to criticize the pro-Western Ukrainian leader.

Trump has repeatedly made the false claim that Ukraine started the war and this week accused Zelensky of responsibility for "millions" of deaths.

"I don't hold Zelensky responsible but I'm not exactly thrilled with the fact that that war started," Trump said at the White House alongside visiting Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

"I'm not blaming him, but what I am saying is that I wouldn't say he's done the greatest job, OK? I am not a big fan."

Zelensky earlier this week invited Trump to visit Ukraine to see war devastation for himself, in a Sunday interview with CBS that Trump responded to with threats against the TV network.

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His invitation followed a heated row at the White House in late February between the Ukrainian president, Trump and U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance, which played out in front of the press.

Meloni told reporters that "we've been defending freedom of Ukraine together, together we can build a just and lasting peace. We support your efforts."

The far-right leader has thrown Italy's weight behind European efforts to shore up Ukraine's defenses since the full-scale Russian invasion began in early 2022.

Trump added Thursday that a deal with Ukraine on extracting the war-wracked country's strategic minerals could be reached next week.

Kyiv and Washington had been close to signing a deal until a February clash between Trump and Zelensky temporarily derailed work on the agreement.

"We have a minerals deal which I guess is going to be signed on Thursday... next Thursday. Soon. And I assume they're going to live up to the deal. So we'll see. But we have a deal on that," Trump said.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told AFP that a deal is targeted for April 26.

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