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# Trump, Zelensky Meet on Sidelines of Pope's Funeral

By AFP

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Volodymyr Zelensky and Donald Trump in the Vatican **@ZelenskyyUa**

Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky met briefly in the hush of St. Peter's Basilica on the sidelines of Pope Francis' funeral on Saturday in their first encounter since a noisy White House clash, as the U.S. president pushes the Ukrainian leader to make a peace deal with Russia.

Zelensky said they discussed a possible unconditional ceasefire with Russia and was "hoping for results" from a "very symbolic meeting that has the potential to become historic."

The war cast a shadow over preparations for Francis's funeral, and even as it took place, Russia claimed its forces had "fully liberated" the border Kursk region.

Ukraine insisted however that its army was still fighting in Kursk, Russian territory which it hopes to use as a bargaining chip in any future peace talks.

The Ukrainian presidency released photos of Trump and Zelensky sitting face to face, leaning forward in deep discussion in a corner of the basilica, as the Pope's simple wooden coffin lay in front of the altar before the funeral began.

"We discussed a lot one on one. Hoping for results on everything we covered. Protecting lives of our people. Full and unconditional ceasefire. Reliable and lasting peace that will prevent another war from breaking out," Zelensky wrote on X.

An aide to Zelensky described the meeting as "constructive" and the White House called it "a very productive discussion."

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However, the U.S. President flew out of Rome as scheduled, immediately after the funeral mass and there were no further talks.

But the two leaders also briefly huddled inside the basilica with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Emmanuel Macron, the French president's hand on Zelensky's shoulder.

Macron's office described the exchanges between the four leaders as "positive" and he later met Zelensky one-on-one.

Outside in St. Peter's Square, Trump rubbed shoulders with dozens of world leaders keen to bend his ear on the tariffs he has unleashed and other subjects.

But it was the meeting with Zelensky that drew the most interest as the U.S. leader pushes for a peace deal.

Both sides had kept the prospects of a meeting vague ahead of the funeral, with Trump saying only it was "possible."

Tensions have been high since Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance berated Zelensky in the Oval Office on Feb. 28, calling him ungrateful for the billions of dollars of U.S. military assistance given since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

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### Blame game

Trump, while calling on President Vladimir Putin to stop Russia's attacks on Ukraine, has recently blamed Zelensky for the war and the continuing bloodshed.

Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, triggering a conflict not seen in Europe for decades.

Trump has pushed Zelensky to accept previously unpalatable concessions such as acknowledging that Crimea, which Moscow seized in 2014, will remain in Russian hands under any deal to stop the conflict.

Arriving in Rome late Friday, Trump said there had been progress in talks and pushed for the Russian and Ukrainian leaders to meet.

"They are very close to a deal, and the two sides should now meet, at very high levels, to 'finish it off'," he posted on his Truth Social platform.

"Most of the major points are agreed to," he said.

Putin on Friday discussed the "possibility" of direct talks with Ukraine in a meeting with U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff.

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But Zelensky again rejected suggestions that Ukraine give up Crimea.

Witkoff's meeting with Putin came just after a top Russian general was killed in a car bomb attack outside Moscow.

An increasingly frustrated Trump last week threatened to walk away from peace efforts if he does not see progress towards a ceasefire.

### Few meetings

The U.S. President, accompanied by his wife Melania, was making the first foreign trip of his second term.

It put him centre-stage for a major diplomatic gathering with some 50 heads of state, including 10 reigning monarchs and Britain's Prince William.

The trip also came after he rattled European allies by imposing sweeping tariffs, although he at least temporarily has backed down from the most severe measures.

The U.S. president shook hands with EU chief Ursula von der Leyen. The two have agreed to meet, a European Union spokesperson said.

Other leaders also swarmed Trump after he arrived.

One person he did not meet: his predecessor Joe Biden. Trump has repeatedly disparaged Biden, a devout Catholic attending independently with his wife Jill and sitting five rows behind his successor.

Previously, other presidents have taken their predecessors with them on Air Force One to papal funerals.

Official Vatican images showed Trump and Melania stopping by the closed coffin in St. Peter's

Basilica.

Trump, in a dark blue suit and tie, and Melania, wearing a black veil, then took their seats in the front row for the service.

Trump had said any meetings would be quick and added: "Frankly it's a little disrespectful to have meetings when you're at the funeral of the Pope."

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