



Trump calls Zelensky a 'dictator' as rift between two leaders deepens



President Trump has spent the day attacking Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, calling him a "dictator" and deepening the rift between the two leaders

His attacks came after Zelensky, reacting to US-Russia talks in Saudi Arabia from which Kyiv was excluded, said the US president was "living in a disinformation space" governed by Moscow. Speaking at a Saudi-backed investment meeting in Florida, Trump said the only thing Zelensky "was really good at was playing Joe Biden like a fiddle".

The "dictator" slur quickly prompted criticism from European leaders including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who said "it is simply wrong and dangerous to deny President Zelensky his democratic legitimacy". Getty Images Donald Trump gestures as he departs Air Force One at Miami ramp arriving in Miami on Air Force One. UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer made it clear he backed Zelensky in a phone call to the Ukrainian president. A Downing Street spokesperson said Sir Keir "expressed his support for President Zelensky as Ukraine's democratically elected leader".

It was "perfectly reasonable to suspend elections during war time as the UK did during World War Two," the spokesperson added. Zelensky's five-year term of office was due to come to an end in May 2024. However, Ukraine has been under martial law since Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022 and elections are suspended. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson also criticised Trump's use of the word "dictator" while German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock called the comments "absurd".

"If you look at the real world instead of just firing off a tweet, then you know who in Europe has to live in the conditions of a dictatorship: people in Russia, people in Belarus," she told broadcaster ZDF. His address echoed his wording of the Truth Social post where Trump said Zelensky "has done a terrible job, his country is shattered, and MILLIONS have unnecessarily died." In the meantime, the US was "successfully negotiating an end to the war with Russia," he said.

A White House official said Trump's post was in direct response to Zelensky's "disinformation" comments. On Tuesday US and Russian officials held their first high-level, face-to-face talks since Russia's full-scale invasion