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Takeaways from Trump's meeting with Zelensky in Florida

5 HR AGO

By  Kevin Liptak

US President Donald Trump welcomes Ukranian President Volodymyr Zelensky at his ...



West Palm Beach, Florida — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky traded freezing, missile-tormented Kyiv on Sunday for the frescoed dining room at Mar-a-

Lago, where he hoped to gain President Donald Trump's sign-off on a revised 20-



Sign in

Emerging after more than three hours of talks, neither man announced any major breakthrough in the grinding effort to end the conflict started by Russia in 2022. Both emphasized the process was complicated and would take more time. And Trump, who spoke by phone earlier in the day with Russian President Vladimir Putin, still offered a relatively sympathetic view of Moscow's positions.

Yet unlike some previous meetings, Trump praised Zelensky and remained confident that peace was near.

"I do think we're getting a lot closer, maybe very close," the US president said.

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US, Ukrainian and European teams will continue meeting over the coming weeks, potentially in Washington, Trump said. He's also expected to speak again with Putin, who would need to sign on to the terms of any potential peace deal.

Here are the takeaways from Sunday's meeting:

The war either ends, or goes on indefinitely

Trump, after he shook Zelensky's hand on the Mar-a-Lago steps, insisted he had no deadline in mind for ending the Ukraine war.

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Yet he also seemed to suggest that now — with intensive talks underway led by his envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner — was the ripest to finally end the nearly four-year war.

“I think we’re in the very final stages of talking, and we’re going to see,” Trump said, adding, “It’ll either end or it’s going to go on for a long time, and millions of additional people are going to be killed.”

Trump has been frustrated with the pace of peace talks and alternates between blaming Zelensky and Putin for the inability to end the conflict. After declaring during the 2024 campaign he’d be able to resolve the war within a day of taking office, he now says it’s harder than he imagined — in part because he hasn’t been able to leverage a warm personal relationship with Putin.

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Sunday’s meeting, which ended without any major announcement, seemed to underscore the difficulties.

“There are one or two very thorny issues, very tough issues, but I think we’re doing very well,” Trump said after the meeting. “We’ve made a lot of progress today, but really we’ve made it over the last month. This is not a one-day process deal, this [is] very complicated stuff.”

He offered a familiar timeline for when clarity might emerge on whether peace is possible.

“It’s possible it doesn’t happen,” Trump said of a peace agreement. “In a few weeks, we’ll know one way or another.”



President Donald Trump, accompanied by officials and allies, meets with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, on December 28, 2025. (Alex Brandon/AP)

Putin was absent, but not forgotten

Putin did not leave Russia for a meeting in Palm Beach; outside of his trip to Alaska to meet Trump in August, he hasn’t been to the United States in years.

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Yet his physical absence from Sunday's talks did not mean his presence wasn't felt. Trump spoke to the Russian leader for more than an hour before the talks with Zelensky began, in a phone call the Kremlin said the US president requested. Trump also said he would speak with Putin again after his meeting with Zelensky.

It's a pattern that has disturbed Ukraine's supporters in the past: Ahead of meeting Zelensky, Trump hears Putin's point of view, and the subsequent meeting goes south. That sequence played out in October, when — after a call with Putin — Trump **declined to provide Ukraine** new long-range missiles after previously sounding open to the idea.

This time, Trump's talk with Putin didn't preclude a positive meeting with Zelensky. But Trump still lauded Putin in one area: how he's handled the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, a key sticking point in the negotiations.

“President Putin is actually working with Ukraine on getting it open,” Trump said. “It's a big step, when he's not bombing that plant.”

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Trump said he still thought Putin was serious about peace.

“He wants to see it happen. He wants to see it,” he said. “He told me very strongly, I believe him.”

The last 10%

Heading into the meeting, Zelensky said 90% of the terms of the peace plan had been agreed to, echoing a figure US officials have used. Afterward, Zelensky used the same figure, though Trump said he didn't like using percentages.

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Still, it is the remaining 10% that have proved so difficult to resolve, a fact Zelensky seemed to allude to. The main sticking points include the fate of the nuclear plant, and the questions of land concession.

Trump suggested it was better to make the land concessions now, before Russia invades further.

“Some of that land has been taken. Some of that land is maybe up for grabs, but it may be taken over the next period of a number of months,” he said. “And are you better off making a deal now?”

Heading into the meeting, Zelensky had demonstrated new flexibility, saying he's willing to put any peace agreement up for a referendum (Ukraine's constitution

requires any changes to its national boundaries be put up for a vote). But he said a ceasefire would be necessary to hold it.

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Russia, which launched a **fresh barrage** of missile and drone attacks on Ukraine ahead of Sunday's talks, has refused any talk of ceasefire.

And during Trump's call with Putin, the two leaders expressed that they "generally share similar views" that a temporary truce will only prolong the conflict in Ukraine, according to Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov.

He added that "given the situation on the front lines," Ukraine should soon decide on what to do with the **eastern Donbas region**, the key territory sought by Putin.

Trump said after his meeting with Zelensky that "we're getting closer to an agreement" on the region's fate, which he called "one of the big issues."

A complicated relationship

Since their first, **disastrous meeting** in February, each meeting between Trump and Zelensky during Trump's second term has been closely watched for its tone and tenor. None of their subsequent talks has devolved into such acrimony, though some have been **described as difficult** behind closed doors.

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Upon greeting Zelensky at his Palm Beach estate, Trump offered praise.

“This gentleman has worked very hard, and is very brave, and his people are very brave,” Trump said.

Zelensky began and concluded his remarks by saying thank you to Trump, notable given that the **US president and Vice President JD Vance berated him** in February for not being thankful to the American leaders for their role in the mediation.

Trump has used Mar-a-Lago in the past to cultivate more personal relationships with his global counterparts, including Chinese leader Xi Jinping and the late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

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While that did not appear to be the express purpose of Sunday's meeting — Zelensky came to Palm Beach because Trump is spending the holidays here — the setting still provided a less formal backdrop than the White House's Oval Office or Cabinet Room.

“He walked in, he said, ‘This place is gorgeous,’” Trump said of Zelensky as the meeting ended. “I don’t think he wants to go to the White House anymore.”



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