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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, right, listens to British Prime Minister Keir Starmer as he speaks during a summit on Ukraine at Lancaster House in London March 2, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Christophe Ena)



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Ukrainian bishops spoke up as international reaction continued over U.S. President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance's Feb. 28 televised White House clash with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

In a message issued March 2, the primate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Halych, said the previous week had witnessed continued frontline fighting and "daily attacks from the sky" on Ukrainians cities, and would also "probably go down in history as a period of international diplomatic upheaval."

"Despite various signals from Western capitals, for Ukraine to win, we must have a cool mind, hot heart and steely will," Shevchuk said.

"We testify to the whole world that a peace treaty cannot be signed without truth and justice. Many today are talking about territories in Ukraine, but our Church and our state protect people, their right to exist, their freedom," he said.

The Vatican's nuncio to Kyiv, Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, told Italy's Servizio Informazione Religiosa on March 3 that the Feb. 28 White House encounter had been a "pseudo-dialogue."

"It seems to me that what was missing in Washington the other day was listening," he said. "As often happens at a political level, we witnessed a pseudo-dialogue with great difficulty in truly listening to the other, instead imposing one's own will and vision on the other. And instead, a lot of mercy is needed on the part of Ukraine and on the part of the partners towards Ukraine."

Catholic church leaders in Ukraine have warned against possible shift of the new U.S. administration toward Russia and pledged support for their country's continuing freedom struggle against the invader ruled by President Vladimir Putin.

"All healthy forces should be uniting against this evildoer, who remains unpunished after killing, destroying and inflicting poverty on our people," Bishop Stanislav Szyrokoradiuk of Odesa-Simferopol said.

"That America, dear God, the world's hearth of democracy, should be moving closer to this malefactor, this new Hitler of our times, is unimaginable."

In a March 3 interview with OSV News, he said the Oval Office spectacle had been "unpleasant and worrying" for all Ukrainians, at a time when people were dying in a war launched by Russia.

Meanwhile, a Catholic bishop ministering close to Ukraine's eastern front line told OSV News that Ukrainians were divided over the incident, with some accusing Zelenskyy of "reacting unwisely" to U.S criticisms, and others praising him for defending his country's interests and "not giving in to Russian and American demands."

He added that many believed the United States had "already deceived us," by failing to honor security assurances when Ukraine surrendered Soviet-era nuclear weapons to Russia in 1994, known as the Budapest Memorandum.

"Many think President Trump's policy is harmful to Ukraine — when I talk to soldiers and their commanders, they're adamant we cannot surrender," Auxiliary Bishop Jan Sobilo of Kharkiv-Zaporizhzhia said.

"If the Americans force us to hand over territories, even temporarily, everyone knows the Russians will then go further,' he said. No peace established on such terms will be lasting "either for Ukraine or for Europe," Sobilo said.

The exchanges took place as Zelenskyy returned to Kyiv after being received by Britain's King Charles III following an emergency March 2 London summit of European heads of government.

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The summit came two days after the Ukrainian leader was ordered out of the White House without signing a planned deal facilitating U.S. access to Ukrainian rare-earth minerals, and as Russian drones and missiles struck a hospital and residential areas

in the northeastern city of Kharkiv.

On March 2 the Ukrainian president said in London that he’s willing to meet Trump if the U.S. president invites him again "to solve real problems."

"I am convinced that the situation will pass and more important things are ahead," Zelenskyy said. If the U.S. president invites him "for a constructive dialog," and "for serious issues and real, decisive actions and answers — I will arrive," he said, as cited by Bloomberg.

Szyrokoradiuk said the London summit had provided new confidence that "there are still countries united in helping Ukraine endure this terrible war."

He added that Catholic clergy in his Black Sea diocese were counseling residents "not to lose hope and strength," while continuing to trust "God will uphold justice and lead us to goodness and better times."

He added that "The Ukrainian nation has also shown it can fight and has been doing so for years. We've paid heavily for our determination to remain independent and free, and we'll continue fighting to stay alive, since we have no other choice."

Addressing Russia's Federal Security Service on Feb. 27 as U.S. and Russian diplomats met for second-round talks in Istanbul, Russian President Putin praised the Trump Administration's "pragmatism and realistic view," in contrast to the "stereotypes and messianic ideological cliches" of previous U.S. officials.

On March 3 Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov suggested that "someone must force Zelensky to change his position," adding, "someone must make Zelenskyy want peace."

Meanwhile, in a March 3 national address, Zelenskyy said his war-torn government understood "the importance of America," and was grateful for "all the support we have received from the United States," but reiterated that security guarantees would be key to any lasting peace.

In his interview, Szyrokoradiuk said the recent incidents had "united most Ukrainians around their president."

Expressing his disappointment over the exchange, he also placed hope in Western Catholics supporting Ukraine. "We depend on continued spiritual solidarity and

material support from Western Catholics and church leaders, as well as on political support to ensure progressive, democratic nations and their politicians stand on the side of justice, defending the victims and not the aggressor," the Odesa-Simferopol diocesan bishop told OSV News.

Sobilo, who is Polish, told OSV News he feared similarities with 1939, when Western countries had "verbally opposed" but failed to act against Adolf Hitler's invasion of Poland.

"Peace at any price is never the right solution — if our territories are handed to Putin, leaving us out in the old, cheated and deceived by the West, we'll all have to leave since nothing good will await us under Russian rule," Sobilo said.

"I urge bishops and clergy in the West to help drive home the message that we have to stop Russia if we're to prevent a great world tragedy. Knowing politicians are not dependable and can betray, I'm certain God has a plan for the good of Ukraine — a plan which cannot be seen today by Putin, Trump or even Zelenskyy."

For his part the papal nuncio in Ukraine added that for Ukrainians, "every additional day of war means destruction, hundreds and hundreds of deaths, not to mention the many other very negative consequences on the population."

He told SIR agency that his "great hope" is that "when we see that absolutely nothing seems to lead to peace, this will push the people who have the tools in their hands to do something, to understand that it cannot work like this."

This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. View the full series.