



### [Trump Meets with El Salvador's President Bukele Amid Ongoing Deportation Controversy](#)

This week, U.S. President Donald Trump met with his counterpart from El Salvador Nayib Bukele on Monday at the White House. The visit from Bukele comes at a particularly notable time amid the ongoing controversy surrounding the wrongful deportation of Maryland resident Kilmar Abrego Garcia to a prison in the Central American country as a part of the Trump administration's mass expulsion of migrants in recent weeks. The Salvadoran president has long proclaimed himself "the world's coolest dictator" and has become a key ally in Trump's migrant crackdown, opening the channels for those deported from the U.S. to be held in El Salvador's harsh maximum-security prison CECOT. In doing so, Bukele has paved the way for Trump to try and sidestep the Supreme Court's order for his administration to take the necessary measures to facilitate Abrego Garcia's return to the United States. In the midst of the meeting, Bukele dismissed the idea of doing so himself after Trump officials attempted to deflect the onus of returning Abrego Garcia onto El Salvador, while Trump raised eyebrows by discussing the prospect of sending American citizens to jails there.

One of the main takeaways from the meeting that analysts picked up on was the Trump administration's clear effort to place the burden of Abrego Garcia's status into the hands of Bukele and Salvadoran officials. For many, this was a calculated and intentional course of action that was taken in light of the Supreme Court's unanimous 9-0 ruling demanding that the U.S. government facilitate Abrego Garcia's return because it gives Trump the opportunity to try and claim that he is powerless to implement the directive. The rhetoric from both Trump and Bukele on the matter is aimed at creating a "catch-22" scenario whereby the two governments contend that they lack the authority as they seek to offer up an excuse for failing to comply with the judicial order – even as the Trump administration itself has readily admitted the deportation of Abrego Garcia was an error. Abrego Garcia's lawyers have rejected the idea that the United States is powerless to retrieve him, noting that the U.S. is paying El Salvador to hold prisoners and that it can therefore exercise those same contractual rights to request their release. The defiance of the court ruling has prompted a federal judge to call for the sworn testimony of several Trump administration officials to determine if they complied with the orders to facilitate the return of Abrego Garcia. What makes his wrongful deportation even more troubling is the fact that it was carried out despite a U.S. immigration judge shielding him from expulsion to El Salvador back in 2019 due to the likely persecution that he would face there from local gangs that had terrorized his family.

Another noteworthy element to come out of the Trump-Bukele meeting was the American president's floating of the idea of sending U.S. citizens to prisons in El Salvador. President Trump relayed his openness to this, and stated that the administration was currently "studying the laws to see if that is possible." At one point during their conversation, Trump even encouraged Bukele to build more mega-prisons. Legal scholars and experts have pointed out that the notion of sending American citizens to prisons abroad brings up serious constitutional questions. In a 1936 case, the Supreme Court determined that a president cannot extradite a U.S. citizen except by an act of Congress. On top of this, the suggestion of the United States aligning itself with Bukele on this issue – whose aggressive and controversial crackdown in El Salvador over recent years has led to a drop in the country's crime rate but raised an array of human rights concerns – is problematic too. Bukele's CECOT prison has been widely criticized for human rights abuses and a lack of legal protections for inmates. Furthermore, rights groups

have documented how tens of thousands remain imprisoned in the facility without sufficient evidence against them and deprived of due process.

Protests have emerged in Maryland and elsewhere across the country demanding Abrego Garcia's return, while U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) traveled to El Salvador this week to press government officials there to release him from prison. Van Hollen visited with the Central American nation's vice president, with the latter initially rejecting the former's request for a virtual or in-person meeting with Abrego Garcia on Wednesday. However, ultimately, on Thursday evening, Van Hollen did meet with Abrego Garcia. Senator Van Hollen has also insisted that additional members of Congress are planning to make the trip to El Salvador regarding the salient issue as well. Abrego Garcia's wife, Jennifer Vasquez Sura, summed up the current state of affairs potently when she remarked that the "Trump and Bukele administrations continue to play political games with his life."