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Italian PM Giorgia Meloni meets Trump amid diplomatic tensions



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Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni made an unannounced visit to Mar-a-Lago on Saturday for a private dinner with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, signaling efforts to strengthen transatlantic ties ahead of Trump's inauguration on January 20.

During the event, Trump praised Meloni as a "fantastic woman" and a "strong European leader."

Though Meloni made no public comments, her visit reflects her alignment with Trump, whom she

openly admired during his first term. Marco Rubio, Trump's nominee for secretary of state, called Meloni a "great ally."

The meeting comes at a politically sensitive time for Meloni, as she faces diplomatic pressure over the arrest of Italian journalist Cecilia Sala in Iran. Sala's detention, allegedly linked to Italy's arrest of Iranian engineer Mohammad Abedini, has sparked outrage. Tehran demands Abedini's release, warning Rome of strained relations if he is extradited to the U.S.

Abedini, accused of exporting drone technology used in a U.S. soldier attack, is held in Milan pending a January 15 court hearing. The U.S. has cautioned Italy against granting him house arrest, citing previous escapes.

Beyond the Sala case, Meloni faces challenges with Washington over defense spending and potential tariffs on Italian imports, which Trump has threatened to impose.

Meloni's visit underscores her ambition to cement Italy's role as a key European partner for Trump's administration.