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Bukele refuses U.S. request to return alleged MS-13 member



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El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele firmly rejected the return of Kilmar Abrego Garcia to the

United States, despite a U.S. Supreme Court ruling directing the Trump administration to facilitate the process.

Speaking alongside former President Donald Trump at the White House, Bukele dismissed the request as “preposterous,” asserting that he lacked the authority to return Garcia, who is currently detained in a high-security Salvadoran prison.

“How can I smuggle a terrorist into the United States?” Bukele said, emphasizing that his country had transformed from being the murder capital of the world to the safest in the Western Hemisphere. “You want us to go back to releasing criminals so we can become that again? That’s not going to happen.”

Trump, after brushing off the CNN reporter who raised the question, deferred to Attorney General Pam Bondi. Bondi noted that Garcia, although never convicted in the U.S., had been deemed a member of the MS-13 gang and was in the country illegally. She clarified that the Supreme Court’s order only required the U.S. to “facilitate” his return if El Salvador chose to proceed—such as providing transportation—but not to force it.

The federal judge overseeing Garcia’s removal challenge has indicated there is no substantial evidence linking him to gang activity.

Top White House advisor Stephen Miller also weighed in, emphasizing Garcia’s citizenship. “He’s

a citizen of El Salvador,” Miller said. “It’s arrogant for American media to suggest we dictate how another country should handle its own citizens.”

The issue has highlighted tensions between sovereign authority and international legal cooperation, with Bukele standing firm on national security and the autonomy of El Salvador’s justice system.