



The Pentagon Threatened Pope Leo XIV's Ambassador With the Avignon Papacy

The Free Press has documented a closed-door Pentagon meeting in which a senior Trump official lectured Pope Leo XIV's ambassador on American military supremacy.

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[UPDATE at 4:33 PM EDT: Letters from Leo can now independently confirm The Free Press report that the meeting took place — and that some Vatican officials were so alarmed by the Pentagon's tactics that they shelved plans for Pope Leo XIV to visit the United States later this year.

Other officials in the Vatican saw the Pentagon's reference to an Avignon papacy as a threat to use military force against the Holy See.]

In January, behind closed doors at the Pentagon, Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby summoned Cardinal Christophe Pierre — Pope Leo XIV's then-ambassador to the United States — and delivered a lecture.

America, Colby and his colleagues told the cardinal, has the military power to do whatever it wants in the world. The Catholic Church had better take its side.

As tempers rose, one U.S. official reached for a fourteenth-century weapon and invoked the Avignon Papacy, the period when the French Crown used military force to bend the bishop of Rome to its will.



Shortly after Pope Leo XIV's State of the World speech, Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby summoned the Holy See's then-ambassador to the U.S., Cardinal Christophe Pierre, to the Pentagon.

That scene, broken this week by Mattia Ferraresi in an extraordinary piece of journalism for The Free Press, may be the most remarkable moment in the long and knotted history of the American republic's relationship with the Catholic Church.

There is no public record of any Vatican official ever taking a meeting at the Pentagon, and certainly none of a senior U.S. official threatening the Vicar of Christ on Earth with the prospect of an American Babylonian Captivity.

The reporting also confirms — with fresh sources and new color — what I first reported in February: that the Vatican declined the Trump-Vance White House's invitation to host Pope Leo XIV for America's 250th anniversary in 2026.

Ferraresi obtained accounts from Vatican and U.S. officials briefed on the Pentagon meeting. According to his sources, Colby's team picked apart the pope's January state-of-the-world address line by line and read it as a hostile message aimed directly at the administration.

What enraged them most was Leo's declaration that "a diplomacy that promotes dialogue and seeks consensus among all parties is being replaced by a diplomacy based on force."



The Pentagon read that sentence as a frontal challenge to the so-called "Donroe Doctrine" — Trump's update of Monroe, asserting unchallenged American dominion over the Western Hemisphere.

The cardinal sat through the lecture in silence. The Holy See has not, since that day, given an inch.

Ferraresi's reporting also adds vital color to the collapse of the 250th anniversary visit. JD Vance personally extended the invitation in May 2025, just two weeks after Leo's election in the conclave.

According to a senior Vatican official quoted in the piece, the Holy See initially considered the request, then postponed it indefinitely because of foreign policy disagreements, the rising opposition of American bishops to the Trump-Vance mass deportation regime, and a refusal to become a partisan trophy in the 2026 midterms.

"The administration tried every possible way to have the Pope in the U.S. in 2026," one Vatican official told The Free Press.

Instead, on July 4, 2026, the first American pope will travel to Lampedusa, the Italian island where North African migrants wash ashore by the thousands. Robert Francis Prevost is too deliberate a man to have chosen that date by accident.

The Pentagon meeting also clarifies the moral intensity of Leo's public posture over the last six weeks.

After Colby's lecture, the pope did not retreat into Vatican diplomacy. He pressed harder.

Here's the full backstory.



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