



Pope Francis Receives Backlash After Calling on Ukraine to Negotiate With Russia

Description

WORLD : Pope Francis is facing backlash from Kyiv for his remarks suggesting Ukraine should go to the negotiating table to work out a diplomatic settlement with Russia.

In comments made during an interview conducted last month with RSI, the Swiss broadcaster, the Catholic leader once again offered to act as a mediator between the two warring sides. The Ukrainian government has criticized the Pope and reaffirmed their refusal to negotiate with the Kremlin.

The Pope is under fire for saying Kyiv should have the “courage of the white flag,” utilizing the same phrasing prompted in a question by his interviewer as was subsequently clarified by the Vatican.

Interviewer Lorenzo Buccella put it to the Pope like this, “In Ukraine, some call for the courage of surrender, of the white flag. But others say that this would legitimize the [stronger party](#). [What](#) do you think?”

The Catholic leader responded, “It is one interpretation, that is true... I think that the strongest one is the one who looks at the situation, thinks about the people and has the courage of the white flag, and negotiates.” He continued, “When you see that you are defeated, that things are not going well, it is necessary to have the courage to negotiate.”

“Negotiations are never a surrender,” the Pope added, “It is the courage not to carry a country to suicide.” Pope Francis said “international powers” should assist these talks.

When asked if he would offer up his services as a potential mediator, the Pope answered affirmatively “I am here.” He implored, “Do not be ashamed of negotiating, before things get worse.”

Ukraine's top diplomat, Dmytro Kuleba, fired back “Our flag is a yellow and blue one. This is the flag by which we live, die, and prevail. We shall never raise any other flags.” Ukraine's foreign minister went on to thank the Pope, however, for his “constant prayers for peace” and said he hopes he will soon visit

Ukraine.

Kyiv's ambassador to the Vatican, Andrii Yurash vowed to refuse diplomacy with Russia. "[We will not be] peace talking with Hitler," he continued, "If we want to finish [the] [war, we have to do](#) everything to kill [the] dragon."

Anton Gerashchenko, formerly an adviser to Ukraine's Interior Ministry, blasted the Catholic leader, insisting "It does seem strange that the pope doesn't urge to defend Ukraine, doesn't condemn Russia as an aggressor who killed tens of thousands of people, doesn't urge Putin to stop, but calls on Ukraine to raise the white flag instead."

Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, also rebuked the Pope. During a meeting with Ukrainians in New York City, he said "Ukraine is wounded, but unconquered! Ukraine is exhausted, but it stands and will endure. Believe me, it never crosses anyone's mind to surrender."

Shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine, Derek Chollet, counselor to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, told War on the Rocks that Ukraine's potential NATO membership was never on the table during pre-war talks between the US and Russia. He said it was viewed by the administration as a "non-issue."

Since the war began, the US has consistently intervened to sabotage peace talks including those mediated in the immediate wake of the invasion by former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett as well as the Turkish government.

Talks brokered by the latter actually culminated in a draft peace treaty, which if signed would have led to Russia pulling back to lines held before the invasion and Ukraine committing to a neutral status regarding NATO and its decades-long expansion targeting Russia.

In an interview last year, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett explained that, during talks he brokered in the wake of the invasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin had agreed not to depose the Ukrainian regime and in turn Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had agreed to renounce his aims to join NATO, which the former Israeli leader described as the "reason" for Russia's invasion. The effort never bore fruit, Bennett lamented, "[Washington and London] blocked it, and I thought they were wrong."

In April 2022, former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson traveled to Kyiv to tell Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky the "collective West" was not ready to sign on to a deal ending the war even if Kyiv was willing to, effectively killing the progress made by the Istanbul negotiations.

Around that time, the Washington Post reported "Even a Ukrainian vow not to join NATO — a concession that Zelensky has floated publicly — could be a concern to some neighbors."

That leads to an awkward reality: For some in NATO, it's better for the Ukrainians to keep fighting, and dying, than to achieve a peace that comes too early or at too high a cost to Kyiv and the rest of Europe."

As a result of the Joe Biden administration's proxy war with Russia, Ukraine has lost 20% of its country and roughly half a million Ukrainian soldiers have been slaughtered or severely wounded.

After helping to provoke the war, the Pentagon seized upon the opportunity to back Kyiv with the aim

of “weakening” Russia and crippling its military. With peace talks seemingly ruled out by the West, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists warns humanity has never been closer to outright nuclear war.

Efforts to bleed Russia’s military and economic strength have failed. As EUROCOM chief General Christopher Cavoli explained to Congress last year, Russia’s navy and air force have taken negligible losses and its ground forces are “bigger today” than when the war began.

The Pentagon is exhausting its own weapons stocks to support Kyiv’s failing war effort, while Russia’s capacity to produce armor and ammo has outstripped the entire NATO alliance.

Conversely, Ukraine has depleted its air defenses, ammunition, artillery, and manpower. So many Ukrainian troops have been killed that the average age of a soldier fighting Russia is at least 43.

Last week, following a meeting with Zelensky, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan again said his government was “ready to host a peace summit that Russia will attend too.” According to media reports, the Ukrainian president balked at the proposal and declared he “does not see a place for Russia” at such a summit.

During his recent State of the Union speech, Biden compared Putin to Adolf Hitler and shouted that his message to his Russian counterpart was “we will not walk away! We will not bow down! I will not bow down!” The White House is committed to providing Kyiv with approximately \$60 billion in military aid to keep the war raging along.

Pope Francis has previously come under fire from the halls of power in Ukraine for telling young Russian Catholics they should be proud of their national heritage, as well as for his condemnation of Kyiv’s car bomb assassination outside Moscow which killed journalist Darya Dugina.

by Connor Freeman

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