

# Pope Francis wants peace, NATO not yet

It is a proxy war between world powers, the Pope seems to want to emphasize



Photo M. Marks/Missio

*Pope Francis has made some statements in relation to Ukraine that have been received with mixed feelings in the Western world. Among other things, he called on journalists "to continue to research and study what is happening in the world, to continue to tell it like it is. It is your service to the country, and I will be eternally grateful for everything you do" (Corriere Della Sera, 3 May 2022). The media did not elaborate on what the Pope meant by this. Now that heavier and more far-reaching war material is being transported to Ukraine, Mirjam Ateş-Snijdewind is looking for an answer.*

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The Pope made more statements that raised questions. For example, on 3 May 2022, in the same interview with Luciano Fontano in the *Corriere Della Sera*<sup>1</sup>, the Pope said: "Perhaps it was 'NATO's barking at Russia's gate' that prompted Putin to launch the invasion of Ukraine. I cannot say whether his anger was provoked, but I suspect that it may have been instigated by the attitude of the West." He repeated this in the magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica* on June 14, adding, "I do oppose the simplification of this complex issue into a struggle between good guys and bad guys, without thinking about its roots and interests." The Pope also criticised the arms trade and in particular "the escalation in the production of weapons."<sup>2</sup>

The media did not elaborate on what the Pope could have meant by this. But what is the tenor of his message? Could his message bring peace closer?<sup>3</sup>

Those who seek paths to peace must ask themselves whether enough is known about a conflict. Whether the parties involved have heard enough. Whether points can be found that can help to bring a solution closer. The Pope gave indications, with which, as a spiritual leader, he undoubtedly wanted to make us all think, so that we could then work towards a lasting peace based on justice, not power. What are the facts of NATO and Russia? Can they perhaps lead to a solution?

In 1990, President Gorbachev was assured by several Western political leaders, Baker, Bush, Genscher, Kohl, Gates, Mitterrand, Thatcher, Hurd, Major and NATO chief Woerner, that NATO would not move an inch closer to the East (the Soviet Union) after the reunification of East and West Germany. The released National Security Archives with photos attached, are silent witnesses to this.<sup>4</sup>

The atmosphere in those years was one of friends among themselves, who welcomed the "new" Russia into the House of Europe. In that atmosphere, Gorbachev, as President of the Soviet Union, together with his colleagues from Russia (Yeltsin) and Ukraine (Ivashko), decided to give the Soviet states the independence they wanted in December 1991, dissolving the Warsaw Pact, which no longer seemed necessary.<sup>5</sup>

## Past history

Would the Pope be referring to this past history? A history that cannot be seen in isolation from President Clinton's move in 1997 to expand NATO after all, even though prominent Americans strongly advised him against it and spoke of a "political mistake of historic proportions."<sup>6</sup>

In two waves (1999 and 2004), most of the western, former Soviet states then joined NATO,<sup>7 8 9</sup> much to Russia's dismay. President Putin, then still pro-Western, offered at the second wave that Russia could also become a member of NATO, something several European countries were interested in, but not the US.<sup>10</sup>

Another moment the Pope may have been thinking of when he said "NATO was barking at the gates of Russia" may have been 2008, when the NATO summit decided to also expand to include the former Soviet republics of Ukraine and Georgia, Russia's immediate neighbours. (Ukraine is a country where millions of Russians have lived in communion with Ukrainians for centuries.)<sup>11</sup>

This decision was a step too far for Putin, which he announced at the Bucharest summit. "NATO on the border with Russia will endanger the security of the country," and "One third of the population in Ukraine are ethnic Russians."<sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup> Putin's concerns were brushed aside, however.

Was the pope perhaps referring to this decision when he said he suspected "that it may have been facilitated by the attitude of the West"? Or do "the West's attitude" and "roots and interests" perhaps refer to the following?

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was a growing American economic, military and political influence on Ukraine and Georgia. At the beginning of this century, President G.W. Bush visited Tbilisi (Georgia, 2003). Vice President Biden visited Kiev very regularly in those years to conclude contracts. In Moscow in 2012, Biden encouraged students at several universities not to vote for Putin. Hillary Clinton also frequented Kiev, as did George Soros and the CIA, among others.<sup>14</sup>

In December 2013<sup>15</sup>, Russian-born President Yanukovich refused to sign the EU association agreement with a \$17 billion IMF loan, preferring the aid package, which would have been used to finance the country. He preferred Russia's \$15 billion aid package with a discount on Russian natural gas<sup>16</sup>, and refused to sign.

The riots, which had been going on since November 2013, intensified after this decision. It was during this time that the later leaked telephone conversation took place between the US Deputy Secretary for Political Affairs of Europe, Victoria Nuland, and the US Ambassador to Kiev, Jeffrey Pyatt, in which they discussed the US strategy for a political transition in Ukraine and who should and should not come to power...<sup>17</sup>

That early spring, several American, Dutch, and other European politicians were also in Kiev. Some of them spoke to attendees at the "Euro Maidan," as it was called.<sup>18</sup>

In February 2014, the riots culminated in the "Maidan Revolution", the Maidan Massacre, due to the many hundreds of deaths and injuries among Yanukovich's supporters.<sup>19</sup> By his own account, Vice President Biden, who was in Kiev at the time, advised Yanukovich to "walk away from Ukraine."<sup>20</sup> An American-backed interim government emerged (see Nuland-Pyatt interview), which then accepted the multi-million dollar IMF package in May 2014, not long before the American-backed oligarch Poroshenko came to power.

In addition, 2014 was also the year of the Odessa massacre of the Russian-speaking population,<sup>21</sup> with neo-Nazis playing an important role in both outbreaks of violence. Poroshenko not only banned Russian as formal language, but he made it clear on Ukrainian television that Russian-speaking residents "...would no longer have jobs, pensions, schools and nurseries, and that their children would be living in shelters, unable to do anything." (See video excerpt of speech by President Poroshenko.<sup>22</sup>) Water and electricity were also no longer taken for granted. When residents revolted against this, Poroshenko had the army throw cluster bombs on his own citizens in Donetsk and Lugansk. It was the start of a war, which is still going on today, and where many fascist and neo-Nazi groups, such as Azov, are active.<sup>23</sup>

Putin has repeatedly drawn attention to this and called on both the Ukrainian government and international leaders to (help) stop this violence.<sup>24</sup> And to ensure that the Minsk Accords of 2014 and 2015, which stipulated some degree of self-determination, were respected. He spoke against deaf ears.

Right-wing extremist children's camps are organized in Ukraine where, during shooting exercises, the instruction states: 'Never aim at people. But we don't consider separatists as people. So, you should aim at them.'<sup>25</sup>

Since 2014, according to the UN, some 14,000 people have already been killed in that region<sup>26</sup>, including some 9,000 civilians<sup>27</sup> (Eastern Ukrainians and Ukrainian Russians). Insiders speak of genocide.<sup>28</sup> In 2017, around 2.5 million East Ukrainians fled to Russia. 'Demilitarisation and denazification' were Putin's goals when he sent his troops to the People's Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk - proclaimed by the population in 2014 - on 24 February. This message, too, was swept off the table by the West.

A final comment the pope may have had in mind when making his statement about NATO is that made by NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg in 2016 at the NATO summit in Warsaw: "The best defence of the NATO alliance is by permanently threatening Russia with nuclear war, by ensuring that any local conflict involving Russia in Eastern Europe is immediately transformed into a comprehensive conflict between Russia and the whole of NATO."

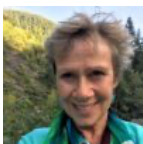
Speaking on Russian television, the then 85-year-old Gorbachev let his reaction be heard: "NATO leaders only talk about defence, about defence, but actually they are preparing offensive operations. All that rhetoric in Warsaw has no other purpose than to declare war on Russia."<sup>29</sup>

The situation is extremely complex. "We do not see the whole drama unfolding behind this war," the Pope added, stressing the suffering of the people. It is a proxy war between world powers, from which a 'winner' can never emerge. Any party that thinks that more violence will lead to victory is a loser because it has learned nothing from the two world wars of last century. Surely we are losers if we believe in 'the power of the strongest'?

The pursuit of such a 'victory', which, moreover, can be life-threatening for the world because of nuclear weapons, denies our values, our humanity and causes nothing but deep suffering, hatred and bitterness, in addition to all the destruction. Let us look from our values for solutions, for peace. Values such as equality, justice, respect, trustworthiness, honesty, security, love, compassion, solidarity...

It is almost inevitable that Pope Francis referred to this in his statements and appeals. While searching for more information and studying it, I noticed that there is still a lot that we do not know and that is important to take into account when weighing up the situation in order to form a balanced opinion. That is why I have named the above facts. So that we can work towards a just and thus lasting peace.

How? In any case, listening to all parties involved is necessary. And daring to open our hearts - also to those we think we should hate. It is not about good guys and bad guys. The good and the bad are in the bud in each one of us. The question is: Are we prepared to bring out the good in ourselves and in each other? We may have different opinions but let us try to live up to the Pope's important call: "Have the courage to make peace."



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> [Corriere Della Sera 03.05.2022](#) (English available); [Washington Post 20.05.2022](#); [Vatican News 14.06.2022](#); [NRC-blog 14.06.2022](#); [Trouw 15.06.2022](#).

<sup>2</sup> [Corriere Della Sera 03.05.2022](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Dom Radio](#).

<sup>4</sup> <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early>

<sup>5</sup> [The previous Warschaupact](#).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997-06/arms-control-today/opposition-nato-expansion>.

<sup>7</sup> [Video with map NATO-countries, with expansions](#).

<sup>8</sup> [BBC map with NATO-situation anno 2022](#).

<sup>9</sup> [Map with Military Bases of US around Russia](#).

<sup>10</sup> Marie-Thérèse ter Haar: [‘Rusland en het Westen: Zijn zij nou gek of zijn wij het?’](#) (Russia and the West: Are they mad or are we?)

<sup>11</sup> [Peace-action 03.04.2008](#).

<sup>12</sup> Marie-Thérèse ter Haar: [‘Rusland en het Westen: Zijn zij nou gek of zijn wij het?’](#)

<sup>13</sup> [NATO-Top in Boekarest: part of speech president Putin](#);

- [article about the NATO-Top and Putin](#); and
- [Putin tells NATO: "let's be friends"](#).
- <sup>14</sup> Marie-Thérèse ter Haar: [‘Rusland en het Westen: Zijn zij nou gek of zijn wij het?’](#)
- <sup>15</sup> [Ukraine To resume talks with IMF soon, says Yanukovych, Ukraine News Agency, 10.12.2013](#)
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/walking-west-side-world-bank-and-imf-ukraine-conflict>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://www.eutimes.net/2022/03/leaked-audio-shows-obama-biden-plotting-regime-change-in-ukraine-during-2014-maidan/> and the [video with the leaked phonecall](#).
- <sup>18</sup> [NRC in retrospect 19-02-2019](#).
- <sup>19</sup> ‘Snipers at Maidan’: The untold story of a massacre in Ukraine - BBC Newsnight 12 February 2015 about what happened in Maidan 1 year earlier <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJhJ6hks0Jg>.
- <sup>20</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> article of this link, [‘Biden’s role in fuelling the revival’](#) tells how Biden later boasts that he told Yanukovych to ‘walk away of Ukraine’.
- <sup>21</sup> [Odessa massacre](#). Note that the number of ‘39’ deaths should be 41.
- <sup>22</sup> ‘Video fragment of the speech of President Poroshenko [https://youtu.be/CXo\\_34Zflxs](https://youtu.be/CXo_34Zflxs)
- <sup>23</sup> Neo-Nazi threat in new Ukraine’ BBC March 2014: <https://youtu.be/5SBo0akeDMY> ;
  - ‘Inside A White Supremacist Militia in Ukraine’, TIME 2019: <https://youtu.be/fy910FG46C4> ;
  - Neo-Nazi video of Patrick Lancaster: April 2022 Woman Found Tortured in School Basement "Military Base" in Mariupol #swastika <https://youtu.be/9EjgnCo060k>
  - ‘Banderists Indoctrinate Ukrainian Children Into Blowing up Donetsk & Torching the Kremlin’; ‘Fight, kill, fulfill the tasks of the West’ <https://www.stalkerzone.org/banderists-indoctrinate-ukrainian-children-into-blowing-up-donetsk-torching-the-kremlin/>
  - "To fight, kill, fulfill the tasks of the West" - "Bandera Readings" in Kiev, Ukraine: <https://youtu.be/03AqKuGg96I>
  - and the shocking age-restricted Azov video ‘Ukraine Crisis: Donbass - Chronicle of Genocide’ (2014) <https://youtu.be/k1DBwWHmyk4> “...there is a certain category of people who just need to be killed.”- min. 1:31:24.
  - <https://www.hetnieuwsmaardananders.nl/nl/buitenland/292463/> How the Western media have been silent for years about the war in Donbass and Neo-Nazism in Ukraine.
- <sup>24</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/664762-poetin-stop-geweld-oekraïne>;
  - <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/buitenland/artikel/5272983-poetin-oorlog-rusland-oekraïne-genocide>;
  - <https://www.ad.nl/buitenland/poetin-wil-veroordeling-van-oekraïens-geweld-aab3150b/>;
  - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59599066>
  - [Full speech Putin February 21, 2022](#) (partly history and second part recent situation).
- <sup>25</sup> ‘Nationalist camp in Ukraine trains kids to kill -AP’ <https://youtu.be/EsHBdyqKpfo> and
  - 2017 Azov children camp <https://youtu.be/jiBXmbkwiSw> ‘I want to bring up a warrior’, The Guardian.
  - [American and Canadian military officers meet uniformed member of the neo-Nazi Azov-battalion during a multinational training’s session in November 2017 in Ukraine](#).
- <sup>26</sup> UN Seventy-Fourth Session 20.2.2020: 14.000 doden <https://press.un.org/en/2020/ga12241.doc.htm>
- <sup>27</sup> About 9.000 civilian deaths <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/international/how-many-lives-has-the-war-in-donbass-taken--3724098>
- <sup>28</sup> Article: ‘The mass extermination of Donbass residents by Ukrainian Security Forces has ‘all the signs of Genocide’ FBP: <https://fondfbr.ru/en/articles/donbass-genocide-en/> and
  - <https://www.martinvrijland.nl/archief/alles/regering-kiev-voert-genocide-uit-in-oost-oekraïense-stad-donbass/>
  - <https://www.hetnieuwsmaardananders.nl/nl/buitenland/292463/>
- <sup>29</sup> Marie-Thérèse ter Haar: [‘Rusland en het Westen: Zijn zij nou gek of zijn wij het?’](#) page 8 and
  - Blog Marie-Thérèse ter Haar: <https://www.ruslandacademie.nl/blog/-GorbatsjovEinde>

## For further deepening:

- [Informative article from 2014 of John Pilger ‘In Ukraine, the US is dragging us towards war with Russia](#).
- Prof. Jeffrey Sachs economist, President UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network interviewed by Democracy Now ‘US Policy & West’s False Narrative’ <https://youtu.be/wmOePNsNFw0>
- Prof. J. Sachs: A negotiated peace is... <https://amp-cnn-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/amp.cnn.com/cnn/2022/04/20/opinions/sachs-ukraine-negotiation-op-ed/index.html>
- <https://www.thepostil.com/our-latest-interview-with-jacques-baud/> an analysis about the recent situation in Ukraine.
- Jacques Baud: The goal is not to help Ukraine but to fight Putin.
- <https://newkontinent.org/ukrainian-regime-led-by-media-darling-volodymyr-zelensky-kidnaps-student-dissidents-bans-opposition-parties-shuts-down-independent-media-commits-egregious-war-crimes-and-imposes-regressive-labor-la/>
- <https://geopolitics.wiki/wolfowitz-doctrine/> The Wolfowitz Doctrine about the leadership (the hegemony) of the USA; and the article: ‘Why the US and Russia will never see eye to eye’ <https://qrius.com/wolfowitz-doctrine-us-russia/>
- ‘Overextending and Unbalancing Russia’ 2019, Rand Corporation (Advisory Board of the Pentagon)
- <https://globalbridge.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Sovereignty-Other-Half-How-International-Law-Bears-on-Ukraine-1.pdf>; <https://globalbridge.ch/die-abspaltung-des-donbass-von-der-ukraine-war-kein-verstoess-gegen-das-voelkerrecht/> ‘Separation of Donbass from Ukraine was no violation of International Law’, by Professor Emeritus David C. Hendrickson.