



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 1, 2023

## Zelensky Aide Rejects Peace Talks With Russia, Slams Pope for Touting “Russian Propaganda”

On August 30, Mykhailo Mykhailovych Podolyak, top aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, ruled out the possibility of peace talks with Russia as “out of the question” unless the battlefield situation changes.

In an interview with Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, Podolyak declared that Moscow “continues to delude” itself that it will be able to keep the territories it captured from Kyiv.

Russia must “suffer significant tactical defeats on the front line” to adopt “a more realistic assessment of the situation,” he asserted, and only after that could peace discussions start.

Ukraine’s much-expected counteroffensive, which was launched almost three months ago to destroy Russia’s land bridge to Crimea, has been unsuccessful in defeating Russia significantly so far, at least according to pro-Russian media such as Russia Today.

Russia estimated Kyiv has lost more than 43,000 troops and nearly 5,000 pieces of heavy equipment as of early August.

Podolyak was questioned if he was ready to tackle the issue of Crimea, which has been claimed by Russia since 2014 when the peninsula conducted a referendum on splitting from Ukraine after a U.S.-backed coup in Kyiv.

The presidential aide replied by alluding to previous remarks by Zelensky, who posited that Russian officials should be placed in a situation in which they would have to “choose between losing everything or abandoning Crimea.” Such an outcome could only be attained if Ukrainian troops arrive at Crimea’s borders and get rid of the weapons that permit Moscow to keep Crimea under its control, he said.

Despite rejecting peace talks with Moscow, Podolyak maintained that Russian President Vladimir Putin regarded “our willingness for dialogue as a weakness that should be exploited to his advantage.”

Apart from his usual criticisms of Russia, Podolyak also slammed Pope Francis for supposedly being an “instrument of Russian propaganda” after the pontiff praised Russia’s rich historical legacy during a video conference he had with Russian Catholics in St. Petersburg.

Pope Francis told his audience that they were all “heirs of the great Russia ... of saints, of kings, [the] Russia of Peter the Great and Catherine II, of the great Russian Empire, of so much culture and humanity.”

Pope Francis is involved in “a destructive discourse for contemporary humanism,” Podolyak alleged, before claiming that Moscow leverages the legacies of Peter I (1672-1725) and Catherine the Great



AP Images  
Mykhailo Podolyak



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(1729-1796) to motivate its soldiers to fight in Ukraine. “The Pope exalts them and [Putin] uses them to eliminate our identity,” the Ukrainian aide alleged.

“If we evaluate the Pope’s phrases with an open mind, we’ll see that they are an unconditional encouragement of aggressive imperialism, a praise for the bloody idea of the ‘Russian world,’ which implies brutal destruction of freedoms and the lifestyles of others,” Podolyak continued, before concluding that “it seems that the Pontiff, once again, has served as an instrument of Russian propaganda.”

Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko also lampooned Pope Francis’ words, posting on social media that “it’s very unfortunate that Russian grand-state ideas, which are the cause of Russia’s chronic aggression, knowingly or unknowingly come from the Pope’s mouth.”

The Vatican reacted to the outcry by singling out that in his comments, Pope Francis was emphasizing Russia’s “great culture and humanity” instead of its past expansionism.

During Zelensky’s visit to the Vatican in May, Pope Francis volunteered his assistance for peace negotiations. Nonetheless, the globalist Ukrainian leader rejected the Pope’s idea, stating that “we don’t need mediators, we need a just peace.”

Notwithstanding Zelensky’s dismissal of peace talks, the Pontiff persisted in attempting to address the Russo-Ukrainian crisis, with his peace envoy Cardinal Matteo Zuppi heading to Moscow, Kyiv, and Washington to do so.

For its part, Russia has expressed willingness to engage in negotiations with Ukraine, but not threats from the West, according to comments made by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in South Africa in August.

After the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, Lavrov was asked what had to take place for Western countries to amend their policies away from conflict.

“We see no glimmers of common sense” when dealing with Western diplomats, Lavrov replied.

“We are always open to discussions, but we are not going to answer calls for discussions which involve boorish ultimatums, extortion, and threats against us,” the Russian foreign minister added, pointing out that the West has ditched meaningful negotiations and adopted combative attitudes instead.

“The Westerners themselves say that they must ‘defeat’ Russia on the battlefield and ‘inflict a strategic defeat’ on us. That’s what they have now, instead of common sense. In that case, we shall work not in the field of international law or diplomacy, but on the battlefield,” Lavrov said.

Moreover, Lavrov lambasted Western countries, including some in the EU, for functioning as “obedient agents of Washington” on the global stage, at the expense of their own citizens and economies.

Furthermore, Lavrov dismissed French President Emmanuel Macron’s desire to participate in the BRICS Summit, as the French leader was also weaponizing Ukraine and volunteering himself as a mediator in the conflict.

“I presume that if someone wants to contribute to the search for a settlement, this is done not through a microphone, but through the appropriate channels. Everyone knows this,” Lavrov remarked.

Previously, France was a mediator in Ukraine, Lavrov indicated, singling out Paris’ role in the 2014-15 Minsk peace accords that were supported by the UN Security Council. The Russian minister also highlighted former socialist French President François Hollande’s acknowledgement last year that



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these aforementioned actions were merely meant to buy time to weaponize Ukraine against Russia.

Besides, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova expressed her views pertaining to some peace initiatives by some BRICS members, in an interview with the Brazilian outlet Brasil de Fato earlier this week.

“Unlike the Kyiv regime, which broke off and then banned talks with Russia, we have always been open to a diplomatic solution to the crisis and are ready to respond to proposals that are actually serious,” Zakharova contended.

Although Moscow has articulated its agreement with parts of the peace proposals suggested by China, South Africa, and Brazil, Kyiv has demanded its own “peace formula,” which Russia has dismissed.

Many Western countries have openly backed Kyiv in its conflict with Moscow, enforcing widespread sanctions against Russia and providing Ukraine with heavy arms such as tanks, missiles, and artillery.



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