

OBJECTIVES

Ukraine: First and foremost, seek a "possible peace"

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As a proposal for an agreement to end the war in Ukraine emerges, calls for a 'just peace' are once again multiplying. However, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and other leading European figures, this concept implies continuing

the war until Russia is defeated. 'Just peace', for them, simply means restoring the borders that existed before February 2022 — or even before 2014, with the reconquest of Crimea — when Russian troops invaded Ukraine.

Although Ukrainian resistance has been much greater than the Russians, who planned to win in a few days, and leading defence experts expected, the situation on the ground still sees a Russian advance on all fronts and the risk of the Ukrainian army definitively collapsing.

As it is illusory to believe that Ukrainian forces alone can reverse the situation and regain all lost territories, the only chance of achieving this kind of 'just peace' lies in the direct involvement of Western countries. Therefore, continuing to wave this slogan means hoping for an expansion of the war, not its end.

Moreover, any war, with all its death and destruction, is bound to alter the situation; not to mention the hatred it generates. Simply restoring the previous situation is pure utopia. There is not a single example in history of a war ending in a 'just peace' as described above.

Does this mean we should resign ourselves to the law of the strongest and reward the aggressor? Certainly not. However, the concept of justice is broader than the restoration of territorial integrity. As the *Bussola* [explained](#) a few months ago, if the order destroyed by war is to be restored, it must be understood as a natural, purposeful order whose ends are and remain valid even after the conflict and can indicate certain lines of conduct. Take the principle of self-determination of peoples, for example. This principle applies to the Ukrainian people facing the Russian invasion, to those manipulated by Western powers and to the Russian-speaking populations of Donbass who have long been discriminated against by the Ukrainian people. Therefore, it is not a question of returning to the way things were before, but of asserting the lines of force of a natural order.

The first step, politically and diplomatically, is to stop the bloodshed with no prospects. The Catechism of the Catholic Church sets out two conditions for the legitimacy of armed defence against an aggressor: 'that there be well-founded prospects of success' and 'that recourse to arms does not cause grave evil or disorder greater than that which is to be avoided' (CCC no. 2309).

These conditions make it clear that the priority must be to seek 'possible peace' in the current situation by finding an agreement that does not humiliate either

side. If Ukraine must make territorial concessions, this must be balanced by a commitment not to interfere in Kiev's political choices and by security guarantees. It should also be borne in mind that, whether we like it or not, the Ukrainian question is only one aspect of a much broader game. It is no coincidence that, at the Alaska summit on 15 August, the US and Russian presidents, Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, discussed many issues relating to the relationship between the two superpowers.

The same applies to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If the 'two peoples, two states' solution was viable 78 years ago when it was approved by the UN General Assembly, today it has become **unrealistic** and merely serves as a political slogan. 'Peace is possible' must therefore find another political and legal solution while preserving the principle of coexistence.

Those scandalised by an outcome that would reward the aggressor should remember that today's world is the result of many 'unjust' peace agreements and expansions that are nevertheless recognised or tolerated, from the partition of Ireland and the division of Cyprus to the annexation of Tibet by China and the division of the Korean Peninsula. We often deal with 'frozen' situations or the absence of war, which is, however, very far from peace. Here, tensions are ready to explode at the first opportunity; the situation in the Balkans is an example of this.

Here, we realise that ending a conflict and finding the 'peace that is possible' is only the first step towards achieving true peace, as the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church clearly explains. *'The Church teaches that true peace is made possible only through forgiveness and reconciliation.'* *Forgiveness is difficult in the face of the consequences of war and conflict because violence, especially when it leads 'to the depths of inhumanity and desolation', leaves behind a heavy burden of pain. This can only be alleviated through profound, sincere and courageous reflection by those involved. This reflection must be capable of facing the difficulties of the present with an attitude purified by repentance. The weight of the past, which cannot be forgotten, can only be accepted in the presence of mutual forgiveness offered and received. This is a long and difficult journey, but not an impossible one (no. 517).*

Silencing the weapons as soon as possible is therefore essential so as not to create further difficulties on an already arduous path towards reconciliation.'