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Sergio Rodriguez Gelfenstein
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Ukraine: counter-offensive for victory... or for an honorable negotiation?



A deathly silence covered the room where four-star General [Christopher G. Cavoli](#), commanding general of the US Army in Europe and Africa, denied Representative Joe Courtney, in his appearance before the Armed Services Committee of Congress.

At that meeting, Cavoli stated that: "... much of the Russian military has not been adversely affected by this [Ukraine] conflict. One of those forces is submarines. It is very difficult to speak in public, as you know sir, about submarine warfare and our efforts in this regard. But I can say that the Russians are more active than we have seen in years and their patrols throughout the Atlantic are at a high level most of the time. And this is, as you have pointed out despite all the efforts they are carrying out inside Ukraine."



Christopher-G.-Cavoli and Joe Courtney.

Cavoli let these war enthusiasts know that despite being involved in the war war, Russian submarines carrying hypersonic missiles are prowling the coasts of the United States *"at a higher level than we have seen in years."*

Commenting on the incident, journalists from the far-right website Trunews were surprised that the media was claiming that Ukraine was winning the war and that the Russian army was going to collapse. *"It's all a lie,"* said one of them, saying that such an assertion was mere propaganda because in reality *"the Russians are winning and [...] the only reason Ukrainians are still there is because Western nations have collectively spent billions of dollars to promote a corrupt government led by Zelenskiy who is stealing unknown amounts of money and if we don't support them, the Russians would have swept him away a year ago."*

That is the crude situation exposed by military and journalists far from sympathizing with Russia and it is the reality that the West tries to hide. It is also the objective framework on which a conflict develops in which a space for negotiation seemed to be opening. It would also be the reason for the much "vaunted" Ukrainian counteroffensive that Kiev seems to be preparing, more for the need to broaden its list for eventual negotiations, than for the assumption that it can obtain a military triumph that today seems distant.

No one like U.S. Secretary of State [Anthony Blinken](#) could have said it so clearly. In an interview with Fox News, when asked about Ukraine's prospects in the conflict, he said: *"In the end, its success on the battlefield is the best and perhaps the fastest path to negotiations that will bring a just and sustainable peace."*



Antony Blinken

The problem is that almost no one in their right mind believes that Ukraine can successfully develop a counteroffensive. The London newspaper The Times owned by tycoon Rupert Murdoch, citing British intelligence sources, said Ukraine was not prepared for the counteroffensive. Likewise, according to US intelligence sources also cited by the news outlet, Ukraine "*no longer has a choice*" even knowing that they are unlikely to achieve [anything] more than "*modest territorial gains*".

The Times argues that the Ukrainian armed forces lack adequate air defense to carry out an offensive campaign, which would make them easy prey for Russian aviation. Nor does it seem likely that they can overcome the solid Russian engineering system of trenches and fortifications built over a year, which seems impregnable to the eyes of satellites.

For his part, Czech President [Petr Pavel](#), who before entering politics served as Chief of the General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces from 2012 to 2015 and as Chairman of the NATO Military Committee from 2015 to 2018, said that the Ukrainian Armed Forces do not have the capacity to confront Russia effectively due to the "*critical shortage*". of ammunition, which is why Ukraine really needs ammunition to structure a successful defense because such a "*critical shortage*" [...] *limits its ability to carry out a successful counteroffensive*.

In this context, initiatives to seek a negotiated solution are multiplying. President Xi Jinping's phone call to his Ukrainian counterpart on April 26 sent a strong signal in that regard, especially after Beijing's success in achieving rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia with the innumerable repercussions that this agreement has had for all of West Asia and North Africa.



Although it was already difficult to suppose that this initiative could have prospered since Moscow was not going to cede the territories that decided to join its sovereignty, yesterday's drone attack on the Kremlin, removed any possibility in that regard.

China had stated that the only way out was dialogue and negotiation, but its plan was based on the existence of conditions that are not observed in the scenario of a conflict that, on the contrary, goes in the opposite direction. The United States and NATO assumed that they could win a military, political and economic victory that would destroy Russia forever and that this could be achieved at the cost of the loss of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians who were to sacrifice themselves to sustain the values and dominance of the West.



Mikhail Podolyak

The Ukrainian response to the Chinese initiative was immediate. Although Kiev initially issued lukewarm opinions in favor of the proposal, Mikhail Podolyak, an adviser to the head of Zelenskiy's office, said Beijing would have to distance itself from the Russian Federation to remain an economically and politically strong player. Podolyak, a man very close to Zelenskiy, doubted the Chinese position. He stated that:

"For a year, China could not decide on a position and now it has to make a decision: either it works within the framework defined by international law and then replaces Russia in the full sense of the word, or it steps aside and then gradually loses its influence,

including economic." I don't know if it was, but it looked a lot like the death certificate in the Chinese proposal.

More actors for negotiation

Other lesser-known initiatives are those of Pope Francis who during the return flight after his visit to Hungary announced that the Vatican was involved in an "ongoing mission" to end the conflict, but that it was not yet public. The problem with this offer that is supposedly being managed is that one of the parties denied knowing anything about it. This was made known by Kremlin spokesman [Dmitri Peskov](#) who succinctly said that: "*No, nothing is known*", leaving Francis in an uncomfortable situation, which should be interpreted as a new move against him of Vatican diplomacy that even today, ten years after his enthronement, he cannot control.



From another perspective, also on April 26, Turkish analyst Mehmet Perinçek in an article published on the United World portal announced that Finland was mediating in unofficial talks between Russia and Ukraine. In this regard, he reported that the Finnish foundation for peace WCC Martti Ahtisaari, an independent organization of that country, "published a document in early April 2023, [...] which implies that [Russia and Ukraine] had reached an agreement on certain points" although it warns that this agreement was "the result of unofficial talks between the representatives of the two countries."

To the chorus of the varied voices that issue opinions on possible peace negotiations in Ukraine have been joined dissimilar characters such as the US ambassador to Hungary who brazenly criticized the "cynical" positions of Budapest that called for a ceasefire in a country "invaded and partially occupied by Russia".

For his part, in a rather ambiguous position that reflects the multiparty nature of the coalition that brought him to government, Brazilian President Lula da Silva has stressed that he condemns the violation of Ukraine's human rights by Russia but that "it is useless

to say who is right" because in his opinion the most important thing now is to stop the war. "You can only discuss and talk when the war stops," he said.

In Europe, where war has begun to manifest itself in all its complexity, different and sometimes even antagonistic opinions are beginning to be observed about the search for negotiations. The French presidency welcomed the telephone exchange between the leaders of Ukraine and China and said that Paris "encourages any dialogue that can contribute" to achieving peace in accordance with "Ukraine's fundamental interests" and international law.



From another perspective, the King of Spain in his meeting with Lula has called for a peace based "on the territorial integrity" of Ukraine. Felipe VI has argued the defense of "multilateralism and international law" as a common vocation of Spain and Brazil. However, the King recalled that for peace to be lasting "it must be based on respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity". The Spanish monarch forgot that in relation to Venezuela he thinks the opposite, justifying interference, disrespect for national sovereignty and violation of international law, so his point of view seems irrelevant.

A glimpse into today's Europe

Reality has been fickle when it comes to assessing the state of Europe, particularly in economic and financial terms and also in military terms. It is this context that is motivating their desperate search for a peace favorable to Ukraine through diplomacy. It is also what explains the urgent trips to Beijing of the presidents of Spain and France, as well as the president of the European Commission and the high representative for foreign affairs and security policy of the European Union. They desperately want China to do for

them at the negotiating table what they could not achieve in the military field and in the field of economic and financial sanctions.

In fact there is a war, and wars end when one of the parties triumphs over the other, an armistice, a peace agreement or a capitulation is signed. The latter is what the United States, NATO and Europe want to avoid at all costs, given their inability to "solve" the situation created, by force.

May came, spring begins to glow, the soils dry up, according to specialists the conditions improve for the realization of the Ukrainian counteroffensive. The question is whether she will lead Kiev and its leaders to victory, to the negotiating table or to the scaffold. In this situation it is good to remember Charles III of Sweden in Poltava in 1709, Napoleon in Borodino in 1812 and Hitler in Stalingrad in 1943. Could it be that Zelensky wants to join the list representing the twenty-first century?

Sergio Rodríguez Gelfenstein for La Pluma

Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)

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