
Politi (NATO): "Zelensky is attempting a 'grand slam'. It would be best to aim at stopping the war"

When playing poker, not even the most experienced player is entirely in control of the game. In fact, he is influenced by his rival and by his emotional reactions. Even spectators watching the game are unable to predict the exact outcome or the next move. Similarly, those fighting the war in Ukraine or watching it from the sidelines are looking forward to total victory, but nobody knows what will happen next. In the meantime, the involved players are hooked on gambling, and so is hatred. With regard to the prospect of achieving peace in Ukraine, there are those who recall the Munich Agreement of 1938: prelude to World War II, and those who, like Pope Francis, call for the recognition of equal human dignity. Interviewed by SIR, **Alessandro Politi**, director of [NATO Defence College Foundation](#), outlines potential tracks of interim peace for two adversaries sorely tried by the war

Director, does only Pope Francis speak of peace with regard to the war in Ukraine? Unlike those who embrace the 'rogue state' notion, the Pope treats Ukrainians and Russians with equal human dignity. This does not stop him from condemning Putin or Patriarch Kirill. Let us remember that with *Laudato si'* Francis provided a strategic framework for the future of the world, with a strong focus on environmental issues; only he produced a serious policy document on the future of our planet. He is a head of state with moral responsibility for a population of 1.4 billion people. **Are we anywhere near the end of the conflict?** There is always a culminating moment in every war that is expected to change everything. The problem is that recognising that moment is not a simple task. Not even its key players understand it, nor do the other warring parties involved in political or logistical operations. The Ukrainians want a victory for understandable reasons, first and foremost because they were invaded and wish to recapture the occupied territories. On top of this rational motivation comes the openly declared hatred displayed by certain Ukrainian leaders. But hatred breeds lack of clarity, it warps the ability to reason. There is also the hatred of those who are not involved in the fighting but have strong memories of the long period of Soviet rule. **A deceiving downward spiral.** Carl Von Clausewitz theorised the notion of absolute war, encompassing a culminating point where one realises that the war has reached an impasse. The Ukrainians are counting on a crushing defeat of the Russians that will force them to wear sackcloth and ashes. But Ukrainian lives are not infinite, nor are those of the Russians. However, these facts tend to be forgotten by the warring parties. **Are they both playing a game of chance?** War is waged by those who defend themselves, von Clausewitz observed. Putin would have and could have conquered Ukraine unscathed if the Ukrainians had stayed put; but they resisted even in Russian-speaking regions. Zelensky is now attempting a grand slam. It would be best to aim at stopping the war, to regain vital territory for Ukraine in return for specific Russian requests, all of which have to be concretely defined and negotiated carefully. Peace is not impossible and it will not be another Munich Conference. I must point out that our reunification, recovering all the territory under foreign domination, took us Italians a hundred years. **So which peace can be achieved?** It would be unwise to delude ourselves into believing that Ukraine will manage to win it all back, straight away. The country is facing a demographic disaster. There is a risk of reaching a stalemate, asking Putin for the coastal strip, from Donbass to Crimea, which is vital for Ukrainians. Thereafter, we can reasonably expect a ten-year period of reconstruction of the country, its logistics and the Ukrainian armed forces, if it wishes to have any bearing on future regional balances. Moreover, should the war continue, the Russians will be unable to politically oust Putin, in keeping with the country's long-standing tradition. **We have seen that a part of the population is not entirely aligned with Mr Putin.** Assuming that all Russians support Putin serves to demonise the opponent, an age-old tactic. The idea is effective for propaganda purposes because it motivates people to go to war or support it on social media, but it serves to fuel hatred, not to promote cold-minded political reasoning. Had some governments - blinded by hate - not unilaterally suspended tourist visas for Russians with dubious justifications,

many more people would have fled from the Russian Federation. When people say that Ukraine is the first line of defence of European freedom, they are resorting to a powerful emotional argument, but one that is unfortunately disconnected from reality: the first line of defence of the Euro-Atlantic community is NATO with Article 5 of its Treaty. **Is it wrong to say that a European outpost was attacked?** If that were the case, Finland and Sweden's desire to join NATO would be beyond comprehension: there already exists an outpost that defends them. This tragic year will not usher in a new Munich. However, just as then, it takes time to re-arm with much more complex and slow-construction weapons. We supplied unprecedented amounts of weapons and ammunition, but, as our friends in Washington have effectively confirmed, a limit must be drawn: appropriate conventional and nuclear deterrence for thirty Member States must always be ensured, especially to prevent Putin from making any further rash moves in the future; which the Baltic nations are extremely worried about. **There is widespread talk of an impending World War III.** It could break out, but in the Pacific region. The fact that Biden and Xi Jinping met in Bali is a blessing in disguise, for it gave us two more years for prevention in that area. But we can't let this war in Ukraine continue. It could trigger unforeseeable dynamics. The idea that the Chinese want to invade Taiwan in 2027 is speculation. One thing is certain, however: China is ageing and it will be unable to surpass the U.S. Admittedly, China has a very strong claim on national unity, but it realises that it might be best to be reunified in a different way. This is a possibility because Xi Jinping is not eternal and we don't know who will be his successor. **Russian Security Council deputy chairman Dimitri Medvedev referred to Italian Defence Minister Guido Crosetto as a "rare fool".** I'd rather focus on Putin's silence than Medvedev's irrelevant remarks. **Is his silence a strategy?** It is a clear sign that he has serious problems to solve. Putin wants a dialogue with the US and NATO - with which intentions and under what conditions remains to be seen. It's time for him to show his cards.

Elisabetta Gramolini