

Ukraine: Some questions and proposals (for those who want peace)

Is it time to call for negotiations? And who would call?

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Do the twelve-point “peace plan” announced by Chinese leader Xi Jinping and the statements by Brazilian President Lula on his way to Beijing, suggesting that the Ukrainians “give up” Crimea in order to negotiate, herald a “window of opportunity” for opening some form of negotiation regarding the Russian war in Ukraine and the return to peace?

Contents

- [Strengthening diplomacy, \(...\)](#)
- [Cease fire by disarming \(...\)](#)
- [Conjuring up the nuclear \(...\)](#)
- [Justice as a condition for \(...\)](#)
- [Partition, the false “solution](#)
- [More than ever, support \(...\)](#)
- [More than ever support the \(...\)](#)
- [Joint and supportive actions](#)
- [Facing the dangerous global](#)
- [Areas of work \(among others\)](#)

Gilbert Achcar considers that “China’s contribution is indispensable for a peaceful settlement of the war in Ukraine [1]”, as it has underlined its attachment to the principle of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries - in this case Ukraine... and China. [2] and that nuclear proliferation must be prevented and a nuclear crisis avoided. At the same time, Xi Jinping affirmed his deep friendship with Putin’s Russia, while Putin rejected the role of his Chinese friend as a potential mediator [3].

Although the Ukrainians have announced their willingness to discuss with the Chinese (a first direct dialogue has taken place), the twelve Chinese points do not constitute a “peace plan”, i.e. an indication of a way to end the conflict, because the Chinese position dodges the fact that there is an aggressor and an aggrieved, that the aggressor continues to say that his goal is the destruction of the Ukrainian state and does not in any way call into question the annexations of the territories that he has proclaimed. The Ukrainians rightly consider that any peace process must be based on the ten points developed by Volodymyr Zelensky at the G20 in Indonesia in November 2022 (ten points that are stages in a process) [4].

Above all, neither side intends to do anything before the offensives or counter-offensives of this spring and early summer.

Strengthening diplomacy, however?

A Chinese or Sino-Brazilian initiative, or even an Emirati-Brazilian one, or others (India, South Africa, the Vatican, etc.) may, on the other hand, lead in the medium term to the setting up of a permanent conference, probably under the aegis of the UN (which presupposes the agreement of the Security Council). At this stage, such a conference cannot quickly lead to a “peace process”, as has been the case in many similar conferences for other conflicts (see the recent failure of the Geneva conference on Syria), but simply by creating a place “where we talk”.

Negotiating an eventual end to the Russian war in Ukraine is important enough for the world powers to consider that they have a say, especially if the conditions for future security are to be created. But no negotiation can take place without the main stakeholders, the Ukrainian aggressors and the Russian aggressor. A US-Russia (or NATO-Russia, or China/US-Russia) negotiation over the Ukrainians would not, in any configuration, lead to a lasting peace.

Unfortunately, in the spring of 2022, the time is not (yet) ripe for diplomacy. Certainly, as a certain number of personalities have said (Le Monde, 20 March 2022), we must not be “naive and imprudent enough to believe that arms will be enough to bring about a solution”, but what are they asking us to do when they say “let’s strengthen diplomacy”?

Cease fire by disarming Ukraine and then negotiate?

Many so-called peace movements are now calling for a ceasefire before what they think is a “negotiation” (an international conference?). These movements have no means of achieving this since, in their vast majority, they do not put any pressure, even symbolic, on the Putin aggressor and their demand is concretely translated into a single demand: not to give the aggressed the means to defend themselves by blocking the delivery of arms and ammunition.

This is the case, for example, of the declaration “Oser la paix” (Dare to make peace) launched by the Mouvement de la paix in France, or, more importantly, of the Manifesto for Peace (*Manifest für Frieden*) [5] launched in Germany in February 2022. Similar positions can be found in Italian, Spanish, British, North American movements... Jürgen Habermas’ Plea for Peace Negotiations, even if it stresses Putin’s responsibility for the war, amounts to defending the same type of position.

To the “pacifists” who sincerely believe that the chain of non-delivery of arms/cease-fire/negotiation will alleviate the suffering of the peoples, which is very real, and will set in motion a virtuous process towards peace, we must say that, on the contrary, it is a discourse that benefits the aggressor today, and does not encourage him to negotiate.

Conjuring up the nuclear threat at all costs?

Since February 2022, the Russian leadership has been waving the threat of nuclear strikes. This rhetoric on the nuclear threat is mainly aimed at public opinion in Western Europe, North America and Japan. The aim is not to prepare for a possible nuclear attack, let alone to strengthen the global movement for nuclear disarmament, but to intensify mobilisations against the supply of weapons to Ukraine in the countries that supply these weapons, since, in the Putin narrative, arming Ukraine means maintaining the escalation that will inevitably lead to nuclear war tomorrow (the “anti-war” demonstrators seem to be unaware of the fact that this threat is made only by Putin). A nuclear threat, not to scare NATO but to push the movements in the West that oppose the arming of

Ukraine!

And by the way, all the “anti-war” demonstrations - in practice against the arming of Ukraine - are presented by the official Russian media as support for the peace movement in their “just struggle”.

Does this mean that questions of “escalation”, “escalation”, militarisation do not arise? We will come back to this...

Justice as a condition for lasting peace

This is the seventh point of the ten-point Ukrainian peace plan. The need, for a lasting peace, for crimes to be established and judged. Firstly, the crime of aggression, a violation of the UN Charter, but also of the OSCE Charter [6] and of the treaties signed by the Russian Federation guaranteeing Ukraine’s borders [7]. Secondly, the prosecution of the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Ukraine is asking for the constitution of a “special tribunal” on this subject, while allowing the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has assumed jurisdiction, to investigate on its territory. Ukraine, a signatory to the Rome Statute of the ICC, has not ratified it, but the ICC has issued an arrest warrant for Putin...

A “special court” rather than the ICC? It is likely that the non-ratification is the result of pressure (notably from the Americans, who have not ratified either, and are seeking to sabotage the Court) [8]. The Rome Statute is a major advance in international law, Ukraine should ratify it and the ICC should function [9].

Justice must take its course, regardless of possible military and political negotiations. The International Court of Justice in The Hague, the UN’s judicial body that judges states, has ordered Russia to “immediately cease its military operations in Ukraine” (decision of 16 March 2022), but in the absence of Security Council agreement, it has no means of enforcing this decision. The ICC, which has been in operation since 2002, tries individuals and therefore does not have these blockages.

Partition, the false “solution”, neither just nor sustainable

There is a widespread idea, both in the movements and in the chancelleries, that once the spring-summer 2023 offensives are over, the armed conflict will stabilise with a de facto partition, with part of the territory internationally recognised as Ukrainian remaining under Russian control: a “frozen conflict” that is better than a war with the risk of extension, and which could one day lead to a new situation. “Freezing the conflict (in the Donbass alone) and starting a de-escalation process was the aim of the Minsk 2 agreement in 2015, which led to nothing and was definitively thrown away by Vladimir Putin even before his offensive in February 2022. To ratify a de facto partition is to create an “Alsace-Lorraine [10]” for Ukraine, with millions of refugees from the lost regions (including Crimea) and no Ukrainian government able to accept this partition de jure: in short, more than a “Korean situation [11]”, an interlude before a new hot war in the near future...

The questions of the conditions for the return of refugees, consultation of the populations and the status of the territories can be the subject of negotiation but presuppose the departure of the Russian occupation troops and the cancellation of the annexation procedures of the Russian Federation.

- Do not underestimate the problem of militarisation and securitisation policies

- While the demand of the “pacifists” to disarm Ukraine and/or give in to Putin’s nuclear blackmail is eminently dangerous, the issue of militarisation is not at all trivial.

The revival of the arms race began long before the current Russian aggression, even before the war in Donbass and the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. It is fuelled by two distinct phenomena.

1) A widespread perception of a multi-form rise in threats, at least since the global financial crisis of 2008-2009:

- ‘terrorist’ insecurity, (which has affected the West but especially Muslim countries on a massive scale);
- social and political insecurity, due to the neoliberal management of the world, a factor in growing inequalities, and the resulting socio-political dislocations
- climatic and more generally environmental insecurity, a factor of instability, potentially the main belligerent factor on a global scale, identified as such by the United States Department of Defense in 2007 [12].

2) A ‘geopolitical’ crisis marked by the decline of the hegemony of US-dominated Western imperialism, the rise of China, and the empowerment of regional actors and middle powers, which leads to reactions and confrontations.

In this situation, all states respond with policies of “securitisation”, which consist in considering that the various problems must first be addressed with “security” responses (regulatory, police, military). The Russian war in Ukraine only amplifies the phenomenon, particularly in its military dimension, as does the Sino-American antagonism.

Supporting the armed and unarmed resistance of the Ukrainian people against Russian aggression does not mean that we should ipso facto support the securitisation and militarisation policies of every country, starting with our own.

Which defence logic with which military means and for which objectives? This is an urgent debate at a time when the 2024-2030 military programming law is about to be adopted in France. And what is to be done at the European level, that of the EU - and what proposals will the elections to the European Parliament in 2024 make -, that of the Atlantic Alliance and its operational arm NATO, what assessment should be made of the last twenty years, the last few months, the new proposals since the Madrid summit in 2022, and of course the global dimension (African, Mediterranean, Indo-Pacific)? Before considering a new political and institutional architecture for security in Europe (without NATO?) tomorrow. So many questions that go beyond the RESU but concern us in all our organisations.

More than ever, support the Ukrainian progressives

Of course, Ukraine is not, and has never been since 1991 or 2014, a “Nazi state” as the Putinists and their friends say, and the far right itself is, electorally speaking, only a marginal quantity, unlike in Russia where it is in power. However, the neoliberal and/or conservative right is politically and culturally dominant. The Russian aggression has, since 2014 and even more so since February 2022, provoked an understandable wave of Ukrainian patriotism, including among the majority of the Russian-speaking Ukrainian population, and certain properly anti-Russian (and not simply anti-Putin) chauvinist tendencies are manifesting themselves even institutionally (law of censorship of research).

The right-wing parliamentary majority was able to pass anti-social laws in the Ukrainian Parliament. The strategic choices announced for the economy and for reconstruction are worrying, as they are inspired by neo-liberal and anti-ecological models. But even if, given the state of war, freedoms are limited, Ukraine remains fundamentally democratic - especially compared to neighbouring Russia; however, certain measures are open to criticism, for example, the suspension of the law on conscientious objection [13].

The Ukrainian progressive movements are diverse but all of them are involved in the armed and unarmed resistance of the Ukrainian people against the aggression, and all of them criticize at the same time some or all of the above-mentioned regressive projects and measures. They all have a handicap, the weakness, or even absence, of support from their counterparts in Europe and the world (which in some cases goes as far as rejection) that allows Ukrainian rightists to explain that the “lefts” as a whole are anti-Ukrainian in nature, especially since notions such as “left”, “socialism”, “Marxism”, etc. are often identified with the former Soviet regime or with the supposedly pro-Russian fractions in Ukraine in the early years of its independence.

What we call Ukrainian progressives are political groups, claiming to be socialist or anarchist, including our comrades in Sotsialnyi Rukh, trade unionists in the UPF and especially the KVPU, feminists, anti-fascists, LGBTQ+ movements, ecologists, civil and social rights activists including the Nobel Prize-winning Civil Liberties Centre or Vostok SOS, cultural and artistic groups, media, magazines, publishers. To this must be added a number of self-managed local initiatives for humanitarian solidarity and local life, control of aid allocation, etc.

More than ever support the Russian anti-war movement

The evolution of the situation depends very much on what happens, and will happen, in Russia. When Vladimir Putin launched his “special operation”, he insisted on the urgent need to “denazify Ukraine” and “save the Russian speakers threatened with genocide”. The failure of his offensive and the prolonged war led him to modify the reasons given for waging war by insisting more and more on the need to “save Russia” from the greedy and incidentally “Satanist” West.

The relatively numerous protests that existed in Russia on the theme of Niet Voyné (“No to war”) were rather quickly suppressed, they were mainly made by the urban middle strata of the big cities, the intellectual and technical elites and part of the youth. The first wave of partial conscription in September 2022 provoked a wave of avoidance. All this led to the departure of hundreds of thousands of people from the country.

At the same time, the regime constantly reinforced its repressive means and propaganda, while another fraction of the urban middle strata adhered to the nationalist and warlike discourse (and certain groups or clans went into war overdrive). The war of aggression was not popular for a majority of Russians, but a large part of them is now worried about the catastrophe that a Russian defeat could bring.

How, in these conditions, that of increasingly violent repression and a long-lasting conflict, can one oppose the regime and oppose the war? How can opponents forced into exile organise themselves and maintain relations with the interior? All this in a climate of division, confusion and uncertainty.

The fact is that international support for anti-war opponents in Russia, both from within and without, is quite limited, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

We must take into account the diversity of anti-war Russians, denounce the repression against all

citizens of the Russian Federation who oppose Putin and the war, regardless of their ideological and political positions, their origins and nationalities.

But we have a particular duty to show active solidarity with those we consider to be progressive, while taking into account their diversity, generational and social, their division, their evolutions - recent and ongoing, we must get to know them better, share their experiences. Whether they are groups that call themselves socialist or anarchist leftists, defenders of civil and human rights, liberal democrats, cultural circles, national minorities, etc.

Joint and supportive actions

After more than a year of existence, the French RESU Committee and the RESU/ENSU on a European and now extra-European scale, the Americas, East Asia and the Pacific, certain African and Arab countries (we must therefore speak of INSU) are, despite their limitations, successes.

In France, the committee has shown a certain efficiency, succeeded in some symbolic actions, an articulation (and contribution) to sectoral solidarity actions with Ukrainians, sometimes Russians and Belarusians (trade unions, in particular, but also feminists, but not enough for ecologists, students...).

Internationally, the network has built a strong relationship with Sotsialnyi Rukh - and also a bit with other Ukrainians. Initially born in a few European countries, with the important contribution of the Polish comrades of Razem, it has since developed and continues to do so.

In building a broad front of solidarity with the resistance of the Ukrainian people and with anti-war Russians, the French Committee of RESU has managed to forge links of trust with organisations representing Ukrainians in France (Union of Ukrainians in France) and anti-Putin Russians (Russia-Libertés). Our links with Ukrainian progressives are established, even if they are few in number in France, our links with the various more or less progressive Russian groups under construction - these groups are largely so themselves.

Trade union recognition (and some mobilisation) is real. On the other hand, we have made little progress on the side of the French (and a fortiori international) lefts and the associative movements and NGOs. The reasons for this are the "campist" positions (although less strong in France than in other European countries), "abstract pacifism" and perhaps even more so the attitudes of "avoiders" (all those institutions, organisations and movements that "avoid" making a clear statement and, even more so, taking action, apart from the sole dimension of welcoming refugees).

Facing the dangerous global divide

Russia and China, each in their own way, have scored points in terms of diplomacy and influence in the world. The arrogance of the West and the persistence of the double standards they, and not only the Americans, practice, explain in large part the reactions of many countries in the South. As social democrat and former British minister David Milliband points out, the reasons that lead Southern countries not to follow the West in its support for Ukraine include resentment of past, recent or even ongoing Western aggression (Palestine). "But the mistrust of supporting Ukraine should not obscure a bigger problem, Milliband adds, since the 2008 financial crisis, the West has failed to show that it is willing or able to advance a fairer and more sustainable global economic market or to develop the appropriate political institutions to manage a multipolar world. This failure is now coming home to roost [14]. The presentation of a conflict that would pit "democracies against autocracies" is seen by

many peoples of the world as a hypocritical "narrative".

Added to this is the "campism" of the majority of lefts, in Africa, the Arab world, Asia, North and South America and even in Europe, even if the situation is not exactly similar in various regions, the widespread ignorance of the real situation in Ukraine, and the total ignorance of the Ukrainian left.

French progressives, including members of RESU-France, have the possibility to get in touch with some progressive and alterglobalist currents through their historical and political links, through the presence here of organisations linked to various countries. ENSU has started to organise debates with activists from Latin America, East Asia, the Pacific... We can help to do the same with Africans and Arabs, in particular.

Areas of work (among others)

We must continue our efforts in three directions.

On the one hand, try to structure RESU groups or this type of alliance beyond the few cities where they exist, given the reality of a certain support for Ukrainians in many French regions (even if this solidarity is less often and less explicitly expressed than what happened during the war in Bosnia, or more recently during the Chilean committees)

On the other hand, to deepen the debate with left-wing activists, rebels, communists, Greens and others, who share all or part of our analyses, and think, like Clémentine Autain, that "Putin must abandon his war in Ukraine [15]".

Finally, to debate with associative circles that too often remain "evasive" (including associations that had co-founded the Ukraine Solidarity Collective CSU, members of the CRID like the League of Human Rights or the CCFD Terre solidaire), with cultural groups and movements already mobilised in their particular field, and certain currents claiming to be non-violent and peaceful, or to support the refractory and objectors (Russians in priority) and which do not confuse aggressors and aggressed and are not satisfied with abstract pacifist declarations (from this point of view, we must underline the work done by the Barcelona non-violent centre Novact).

Finally, we need to make the most of the tools we already have, starting with the considerable editorial work done by Syllepse and its Editorial Solidarity Brigades, and also by others, both in terms of publications and cultural actions.

Bernard Dréano, 1er mai 2023

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P.S.

Entre les lignes entre les mots

<https://entreleslignesentrelesmots.wordpress.com/2023/05/02/les-cahiers-de-lantidote-soutien-a-lukr>

Footnotes

[1] In the progressive American magazine The Nation, reprinted in Contretemps on 20 March 2023.

[2] In saying this, China is obviously also thinking of Taiwan, which is considered part of China, and of course its colonised provinces of Xinjiang and Tibet.

[3] Putin, if he ever decides to “negotiate”, wants it to be with the Americans, since he explains that he is in conflict with them and NATO and that Ukraine “should not exist”.

[4] The ten points: 1° nuclear security, 2° food security, 3° energy security, 4° prisoners and deportees, 5° territorial integrity, 6° withdrawal of Russian troops and end of hostilities, 7° justice, 8° environmental protection, 9° prevention of escalation, 10° confirmation of the end of the war.

[5] This manifesto was launched by Sahra Wagenknecht, a member of parliament of the Die Linke party (she is at odds with the majority of the party), who is adept at taking a national-populist stance, particularly with regard to immigrants, and Alice Schwarzer, founder of the feminist magazine Emma, who is the “godmother” of a certain feminism.

[6] Charter of Paris for a New Europe (1990) supplemented by the Charter for European Security of 1999.

[7] Budapest Memorandum on nuclear weapons (1994) and agreements on the stationing of the Russian Black Sea fleet (1997 and 2010).

[8] The Americans want to avoid at all costs that American political or military leaders can be brought before the ICC and therefore limit its scope of action or mechanisms. It should be remembered that while 123 countries are parties to the Rome Statute, including those of the European Union, as well as many Latin American countries, this is not the case for the Arab countries (except Palestine), and most African countries, that the United States, Russia, Iran, Syria, Israel, etc. have signed but not ratified, and that China, India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, etc. have not signed.

[9] While the Rome Statute is a real achievement of international law, in particular because of its precise characterisation of the crimes to be dealt with by the ICC, the practice of the ICC is not without its problems: not only are the procedures both confusing and complex, but it has often been criticised for indicting mainly individuals (mostly Africans) not supported by the West, and never Westerners or their allies. The ICC indictment against Vladimir Putin is seen by some as part of this ‘one-eyed’ attitude (while, for example, Israeli leaders are never indicted).

[10] When Thiers’ France accepted the annexation of Alsace and half of Lorraine (two largely German-speaking regions in the countryside), it did so de jure, by the Treaty of Frankfurt of May 1871, after a lost war and during the crushing of the Commune. Thereafter, ‘revenge’ dominated French politics for a generation.

[11] North and South Korea are still legally in a state of war since the Panmunjeon Armistice of 1953.

[12] *The Age of Consequences ? The Foreign Policy and National Security Implication of Global Climate change*, CSIS, 2007

[13] This law “suspended for war reasons” only accepted conscientious objection for followers of certain religions. The Russian law on objection of 2004 is theoretically still in force, but it has been totally flouted. It should be remembered that the right to object is guaranteed by European texts, and that the first country to have legalised objection did so during the war (the United Kingdom in 1916).

[14] www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/world-beyond-ukraine-russia-west

[15] Tribune in the Journal du Dimanche, 24 February 2023.