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How Brazil wants to end the war in Ukraine

In a world with growing 'peace fatigue', Lula's peace initiative shows strong frustration with the West and lengthy confrontations full of suffering

Since his inauguration last January, President Lula da Silva has made the defence of a peaceful solution to Ukraine one of the frontlines of his foreign policy. The urge for a negotiated settlement between all sides in the conflict is now a steady flag waved by Lula within his narrative 'Brazil is Back'. In his third term, the Brazilian president quickly reinstalled Brazil's diplomatic activism to vindicate an inclusive multipolar world committed to a reinvigorated, just and secure international multilateral system. Lula had firstly – and unsuccessfully – tried to win Joe Biden's support for his pro-peace push during his visit to Washington. Following that trip, Lula used his state visit to China to parallel his diplomatic effort with the Beijing 12-point peace initiative for the war in Ukraine.

Lula's peace proposal is an un-detailed proposition, based on the premise that a collective and wide-ranging effort by a group of pro-peace nations can contribute to ending hostilities in Ukraine. In a nutshell, it stands for an immediate cease-fire and the compromise that all parties involved work on a peace plan that is fair and durable. For Brazil, the main concern has become the apprehension that the Ukraine war will metastasise into a major, uncontrolled confrontation, imperilling global prosperity and sustainable development. This has been the central message taken by Lula's international advisor to Kyiv, Celso Amorim, when meeting with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy in April.

Support and condemnation

Brazil's view on the war in Ukraine finds an echo in the Global South and is shared by other peace promoters in different latitudes, including the Vatican. The Brazilian peace initiative reflects a profound sense of frustration and fatigue in the developing world with a protracted confrontation that is generating massive humanitarian suffering, material costs and diplomatic uncertainty. Accordingly, Russia bears sole

responsibility for initiating the war in Ukraine, but by now, the United States and Europe's response has become equally blameable for sponsoring a *sine die* proxy war. The Pentagon 'Discard' leaks show that NATO is devoted to a prolonged conflict inside Ukraine with the aim of winning the war. The leaks also indicate that several key countries in the Global South do not share the Western perspective and purpose. It is important to recall that the US-led Ukraine Defense Contact Group that was established to provide security assistance to Kyiv is made up of 26 per cent of the total members of the United Nations. Among key emerging powers, a subtler divide has been taking place. Those that express their wariness vis-à-vis the war have chosen a pragmatic/hedging approach as a damage control strategy. This would be the case for Pakistan and South Africa. While others opt to strengthen the chances that a diplomatic negotiation will prevail. This is clearly the case for Brazil and India.

It could be worthwhile for Washington to take Brazil's viewpoints seriously, especially concerning its constructive diplomatic assets as a democratic middle power.

The Brazilian government's view on the war in Ukraine coincide with stances manifested by other Latin American governments. A consensus has prevailed in the region in the form of a refusal to join the United States and Europe in sending military supplies to Kyiv and the lack of support for Western-led unilateral sanctions against Russia. Historically, Latin America has rejected the use of unilateral coercive methods to handle international conflicts. Such contestations have not contaminated Brazilian efforts to defend a balanced narrative. Brazil's voting record at the United Nations, including the Security Council and the General Assembly, has been unequivocal. It condemned Russia's invasion, upheld the principle of sovereignty and advocated for compliance with international law. Moreover, last February, Lula's Brazil, alongside Western powers, supported the UN resolution A/ES-11/L.1 deploring 'in the strongest terms' Russia's aggression against Ukraine and demanding its immediate military withdrawal. This has been an unambiguous signal of Brazilian diplomacy that apparently has not been understood in Washington and European capitals.

Instead, the Brazilian approach to the Ukrainian war is perceived as unwelcoming and counterproductive by most Western observers.

Political blowback in Washington and Brussels to Lula's remarks pointing to US and European responsibilities has affected the impetus of Brazil's policy. Lula's critical statements have created a sense of unease in the United States and Europe. There, it seems, people fear that the Brazilian positions will find more resonance with China and Russia. Western fears were further heightened when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stopped in Brasilia during a Latin American trip. It should be pointed out, however, that the visit also triggered much criticism within Brazilian politics. While a victory for Russian diplomacy and a setback for Brazilian diplomacy, official reactions from the United States did reach an unappropriated tone. It could be worthwhile for Washington to take Brazil's concerns and viewpoints seriously, especially in regards to its constructive diplomatic assets as a democratic middle power.

Different post-Cold War experiences

After 15 months of violent conflict, the war in Ukraine is a source of international divide that deepens disputed narratives and postpones alternative solutions. Most governments in the Global South do not feel compelled to engage in an unresolved post-Cold War geopolitical conflict with no winners outside the arms industry. In most cases, voting behaviour within the UN is due to individual, reactive foreign policy, which on the one hand denounce the use of sanctions measures by the old colonial powers and on the other warn of a decline in the world economy with dramatic effects on societies (in North and South). While some analysts in the South have vindicated a Non-Alignment revival, Brazilian diplomacy has pursued its own way, driven by its traditional quest for autonomy and sustainable development within a peaceful framework.

It must be remembered that the period after the end of the Cold War was by no means a time of peace. Western narratives did tend to focus on the emergence of a peaceful, rule-based and increasingly democratic world order after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But for countries like Brazil, this perspective is quite different. Repeated conflicts and perpetual wars are the true characteristic of the post-Cold War world order. From the Iraq War in 1990/91 to the intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and the globally waged 'war on terror' beginning in 2001, the West has always sought to mobilise the Global South in its efforts to wage war rather than build peace. The two-decades-long war in Afghanistan, the Georgia-Russia war of 2008, the conflicts in Syria and Yemen, the Azerbaijan-Armenia war amidst the Covid19 pandemic and Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine are all examples of the intensification of such a trend. In a world where there seems to be a growing 'peace fatigue', Lula has been

categorical: 'the world requires tranquillity.' Notwithstanding, the war dynamics and Western preference for a protracted conflict in Ukraine seem to persist and even escalate. In this context, preventive actions and peace initiatives look unlikely.

Western misperceptions of President Lula's pro-peace activism will only lead to a vicious circle that incites further misconceptions.

At this point, China has emerged as the only great power to show interest in the promotion of peaceful conflict settlements. Besides its peace plan for Ukraine, Beijing is attempting to bring a détente in hotspots such as the Middle East. This has become an area where the West has been accustomed to administering chaos as a normal fact of life. China, of course, does not carry the traditional 'Wilsonian' credentials to step up as a new peace paladin. It is regrettable that these credentials in the United States have become neglected and weakened by its own domestic politics. US-led peacebuilding could still be well received today inside and outside the West - and well received at home. Showing such an example would for sure help depolarise conviviality in the democratic world.

Brazil does believe that it has a say and a contribution in a 21st-century world that needs to find more tranquillity: an indispensable condition for prosperity for all. Western misperceptions of President Lula's pro-peace activism will only lead to a vicious circle that incites further misconceptions. These were made particularly visible at the G7 Summit in Hiroshima. Once again, the Brazilian president reinforced that his peace diplomacy was anchored upon non-renounceable autonomous guidelines. Lula underscored that the urgency for a peaceful settlement in Ukraine must not overshadow other conflicts, such as between Palestinians and Israelis, Armenians and Azeris, Kosovars and Serbs, besides the dramatic situation in Yemen, Sudan, Syria and Haiti. Once again, he underlined that his foreign policy is fully committed to the democratic values that are shared by the West. Such commonalities should be accepted as accredited qualifications for working together to reach enduring, just and real peace in Ukraine. In the end, Lula's message is not to 'give (more) war a chance'; peace is crucial because the world may be moving to the brink of a real catastrophe.



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