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NUCLEAR PEACE IN UKRAINE: A ROADMAP

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ABSTRACT

Situation. The war in Ukraine in 2022 has again risen concerns about the possible use of Nuclear Weapons: in the conflict itself, or in some fringe malevolent scenarios too. Let us examine three recent events, in chronological order, that had the “tag” of nuclear weapons use, related to Ukraine war: The U.K. then-secretary of foreign affairs and now Prime Minister, stated to be ready to use nuclear weapons against Russia [1] as a retaliation for Ukraine invasion and, more in general, as an answer to Russian nuclear threats to Europe. The Russian President, blaming western countries for helping out Ukraine with plenty of modern weapons, stated that “Russia has those modern weapons too” and that if the security of the Russian Federation (RF) would be in danger, they are ready to fight and defend it, without excluding any option” [2]. However less explicit, this statement has been interpreted with attention, if we consider that Russia’s doctrine for nuclear weapons excludes a first strike, but admits a nuclear strike in case of enemy nuclear attack, and/or - beware! - if the “existence of the RF is in danger”. The passage from “existence of RF” to “security of RF” is a *diminutio* that sounded an alarm bell to the analysts. The Ukrainian President, probably unaware of the actual consequences, asked to NATO a “preventive nuclear attack to Russia” [3]. Having Russia nearly 6370 nuclear weapons, either in underground bunkers or in submarines, any “preventive attack” would bring to an immediate full-scale nuclear war. Luckily, the request by Zelensky has not found any credit with his allies, which also convinced him to “clarify” (in practice, retreat) his statement. Mrs. Truss also, once in office, did not repeat her bold nuclear weapons statements anymore. Finally, there is luckily no actual threat to RF existence that could imply the use of nuclear weapons: actually, the threat would be the almost certain (however mutual) assured destruction if RF would use nuclear weapons. The three above statements could then be interpreted just as peculiar but minor misunderstandings. However, the escalation to nuclear war could be paved by misunderstandings like these ones, or by an increasing employment of non nuclear weapons, as it is happening now in Ukraine [4]. The world public opinion must not only repudiate nuclear war, but also the escalation to nuclear war itself. This is a possibility that us, as humanity in its whole, would simply repudiate and make it impossible even to conceive, or put in any political agenda or statement. There must be never any justification ever for even thinking to the use of nuclear weapons. Full stop. Furthermore, many strategic scenarios that have been studied, in the past, about an initially limited use of “strategic” low-yield nuclear weapons in a local war; global thermonuclear war and the end of the world is the most probable outcome of any of those scenarios. [5]

Keywords: risk of nuclear war, nuclear peace, Ukraine.

DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

How to dismantle any risk of nuclear war in 2022 in two (uneasy) steps.

Given the above-described situation, two goals have to be obtained in order to reduce to “practically zero” the risk of a nuclear war now in 2022 (zero risk does not exist until there will be a nuclear weapon on Earth, of course). The first one is of immediate effect, while the second one ensures more durable effects at the medium term.

A) The end of the war in Ukraine, starting with a ceasefire and through negotiations.

B) A generalized moratorium on the use of nuclear weapons: this goal too to be obtained with negotiations.

The first goal seems more difficult to reach every day we keep waiting. Western powers are effectively helping Ukraine with full military support, and the war does not seem close to an end. Russia, after more than six months of an allegedly “limited” war, called “special operation”, has recently decided to quadruple the troops committed to the war. Ukrainian President has signed a decree that prohibits by law any negotiation with Russia to his government. Russia has just ratified the annexation of four Russian-speaking Ukrainian territories to the RF: the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), that have been fighting Ukrainian government forces since 2014, plus the regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia (the latter having the nuclear power plant in its territory).

The EU Parliament has just approved a statement that calls for enhanced military support to Ukraine: in that statement, an amendment that mentioned “keep pursuing all possible ways to find peaceful solutions of the conflict” was proposed, but it has been rejected. [6]

The second goal, set today, simply seems a non realistic one, pure utopia. In fact, in July 2017, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted by the UN with 122 countries signing. This is a treaty banning nuclear weapons. On 10th December 2017 ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. ICAN had also worked to secure the Treaty in the United Nations. [7]. Naturally, none of the TNP “haves” (Nations with nuclear weapons) has signed the Treaty until now, and almost all their militarily-involved allies have declined to sign as well. However, like during a war the peace process begins with a ceasefire, similarly a first step towards the abolition of nuclear weapons could be a temporary agreement - limited in time - for a moratorium on the use of nuclear weapons. This approach worked very well, in the past, for the final abolition of nuclear weapons tests, firstly in the atmosphere, and finally underground too. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) bans all nuclear explosions, whether for military or peaceful purposes and – however open for signature since 1996 and not yet in force – has caused a de facto moratorium for all nuclear tests, with the exception of a few ones carried out by DPRK,

Nuclear peace in Ukraine: a roadmap.

The authors live in the material world and do not indulge in dreams. Actually, they do indulge, but their dreams are not the basis for the following practical proposal for a so-called “Nuclear peace” roadmap in for Ukraine, that will be outlined in this section.

We have briefly discussed above the two goals that, if obtained, would allow the end of the current war in Ukraine and the reduction to almost zero of the risk of a nuclear war in the near future.

None of the two goals seems likely to be obtained if we consider them separately. They also seem two quite different questions: the first one dealing with the end of a - for now - localized war that is killing human beings, destroying a nation, jeopardizing its present and its future, and putting the relationships among the main military powers of the world at their minimum level since the end of WW2; the second one deals with the sabotage of the perverted most probable mechanism that could bring the world to a nuclear war.

However, we think that the two goals are more likely to be obtained if they are pursued together, in a single initiative that puts on the table both of them as an output of a negotiation. Let us call it NPU, Nuclear Peace in Ukraine. The proposed roadmap includes the following steps:

a) A permanent conference for the discussion and implementation of NPU, let's call it NPU Conference. The conference will be hosted by IAEA and held in the premises of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Please note that IAEA has succeeded, one month ago, in the only act of actual negotiation with success in the Ukrainian war, when IAEA inspectors were allowed access to the plant and verify that, however damaged, it is completely safe. The delegation, unlike it was initially thought, is still there, and the sole presence of the inspectors has caused the stop of any act of war in its premises.

b) To guarantee the security of the delegates of the NPU Conference, the Zaporizhzhia Region (Oblast) must be temporarily declared under the authority of the United Nations. Nor Ukraine nor Russia are in the conditions to guarantee the security of a Peace Conference there: Ukraine claims it as a continuing part of its territory as it has been since 1991, Russia now claims it is part of the RF, but no international consensus has been obtained on that claim by the other nations. Therefore, without any implication on the sovereignty of the region, it must be put under control of the UN, with UN troops being the only allowed military forces there.

c) To guarantee the security of the NPU Conference, an immediate interim ceasefire must be proclaimed in all the War zones in Ukraine, with the temporary suspension of all military operations. This will be a bilateral contemporary sudden ceasefire, guaranteed by Ukraine in all the territories under their present control, and by Russia in all the territories under their present control: this doesn't mean any recognition of the Status Quo, but just a practical implementation of the ceasefire, that would not be prolonged after the end of the Conference.

d) Delegates from the following countries will take part to the NPU Conference: the five “haves” according to the NPT (US, Russia, China, UK, France), Ukraine (nation where the local conflict is taking place), Europe (continent where the war takes place, with delegates designated by the Council of Europe, not the EU, to actually involve all European countries), and Australia, that will act as a chair.

Why Australia? Because the Labor party of that Nation adopted a resolution in 2018, committing it to sign and ratify the TPNW, if they would be in government. The resolution was moved by Anthony Albanese, who now serves as prime minister and has been a supporter of the TPNW [8]. The question whether Australia would eventually sign the TBNW, is not relevant to our discussion. Anyway, Mr Anthony Albanese should be the chairman of the NPU Conference.

e) Our only suggestion for the NPU Conference agenda is that the two goals (A and B) would be discussed together: actually, how to maintain the temporary ceasefire and evolve it in a permanent peace treaty ending the war, and at the same time how to implement a temporary moratorium on the use of nuclear weapons, and for how long (say, one year, with annual conferences for extension, see hereunder)?

Concerning the first question, it goes far beyond our skills to find a solution, but we are sure that – once they are allowed to gather around a table – diplomats will have plenty of proposals. We think – but it is just an example - to a demilitarization of Crimea under Russian sovereignty, we think to a new vote in the two Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, deciding - without the threat of an ongoing war and with international survey on the vote - if they wish to: stay as independent republics under the formal sovereignty of Ukraine, either become independent republics allied to RF: in

both cases, their status will be recognized by the UN. The NPP of Zaporizhzhia could stay under UN mandate as an in-vivo experiment of technical collaboration between the two states: it would be repaired and run by technicians of both nations, to give electricity to both nations; all expenses will be paid by European Union, using a small part of the funds used for sending weapons in the war.

The Nuclear Weapons moratorium extension Conferences will take place in Kherson each year, where security will be guaranteed by a joint Ukraine-Russia Committee.

Concerning the second question, a step-by-step moratorium could be discussed, starting with the so-called temporary ban of “tactical” nuclear weapons that, however the least powerful, are those ones posing the highest threats to peace. Another question to assess would deal with a nuclear-free zone for Eastern Europe, including the Nations of the former Eastern block. In those Nations, whatever the military alliance they belong to, it should be prohibited the presence of nuclear military bases.

CONCLUSIONS

The Ukraine war has brought the world closer to a Nuclear War. Let us capitalize the concern that this has caused to all humanity in such a way to end the conflict, and reduce to almost zero the risk of future nuclear wars.

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