

Peace: the only option

Interview with the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin
07/04/2026 by [Enzo Romeo](#)



This article was published in

At this juncture in history, diplomacy is being challenged by the logic of the strongest. Why is that?

We must not bury our heads in the sand; the logic of the strongest has always existed. However, it is true that, especially in recent years, diplomacy, diplomatic creativity and the aptitude for negotiation have gradually diminished. It is as if, little by little, we are surrendering to the logic of the strongest. I am struck by the determination – I was about to say ease – with which the option of war is presented as the solution, almost inevitable, bending international law to suit one's own purposes. Meanwhile, diplomacy appears mute, incapable of deploying alternative tools. It seems that awareness of the value of peace, awareness of the tragedy of war, and awareness of the importance of shared rules and respecting them has been lost.

Where does the crisis of multilateralism originate?

If we analyse it from the perspective of its effects, it is a crisis stemming from the use of force in place of rules and from prioritising one's own interests or the interests of the few. At the same time, as I have just said, it stems from the loss of the ability to address common issues through solutions that involve everyone. If we analyse this crisis in greater depth, we discover that it is not merely a matter of states wishing to reduce international institutions to a marginal role, but rather the emergence of a multipolarism inspired by the primacy of power.

What exactly do you mean when you speak of a 'multipolarism inspired by the primacy of power'?

I mean a multipolarism that appears to be governed by the ability to demonstrate self-sufficiency and power, by the determination to preserve state and supra-state borders on the assumption that they are impermeable. In short, by always and only pursuing the primacy and sometimes the dominance of one's own country, invoking international law only when it suits and, unfortunately, ignoring it in so many other cases. This use of double standards fails to take account of a truth already discussed by Immanuel Kant in 1795 in his *Perpetual Peace*, when he argued that 'a violation of law occurring in one part of the world is felt in every part'. To put it in concrete terms: many governments have expressed outrage at the attacks on Ukrainian civilians by Russian missiles and drones, imposing sanctions on the aggressors. It does not seem to me that the same has happened with the tragedy of the destruction of Gaza.

In the background lies the claim that peace can be secured through arms, whilst Leo XIV continually calls for a 'disarmed and disarming' peace. Is emptying the arsenals, especially the nuclear ones, a utopia?

It is rather a utopia to think that peace is guaranteed by weapons and the balances imposed by the strongest, rather than by international agreements. It is a utopia to think that peace is guaranteed by weapons, not least because it fails to take into account the enormous economic interests at stake. In June 2025, Leo XIV, speaking at the 98th Plenary Assembly of ROACO (Meeting of Aid Organisations for the Eastern Churches), said: 'How can we continue to betray the peoples' desire for peace with the false propaganda of rearmament, in the vain illusion that supremacy solves

problems rather than fuelling hatred and revenge? People are becoming increasingly aware of the vast sums of money flowing into the pockets of the merchants of death – money that could be used to build hospitals and schools; yet instead, those already built are being destroyed!’ We firmly believe that arsenals must be emptied, starting with nuclear ones.

We cannot pretend to forget that a few decades ago, extremely important agreements were signed for the progressive reduction of nuclear weapons. Agreements that have now been abandoned and are not being renewed, in order to give even more free rein to the construction of deadly instruments of death, capable of annihilating life on earth. I would like to recall in this regard that in a famous speech in Hiroshima in 2019, Pope Francis described not only the use but also the possession of nuclear weapons as immoral.

In 1989, after the fall of the walls, there was hope for a freer and more united world. John Paul II himself dreamed of a Europe that could finally breathe with both lungs, East and West. Instead, we have seen 9/11 and an endless series of wars, including the bloodiest – the Russian-Ukrainian conflict – right on the eastern borders of our continent. Were we deluding ourselves, or did something go wrong in the management of the new global order?

I do not believe we were deluding ourselves. Certainly, Saint John Paul II dreamed of a Europe united not by consumerism and globalisation but by shared values. We must acknowledge that history has taken a different course, and instead of a freer and more united world, we have seen the emergence of a more unstable one, without effective remedies being put in place for the appalling injustices that see millions of people suffering from hunger, thirst, and the deprivation of even basic healthcare and decent working conditions.

It is all too easy to say that something has gone wrong: one need only consider, speaking solely of Europe, that we have sunk into a Cold War-like climate that was unimaginable just a few decades ago. The Russian-Ukrainian war is a wound in the heart of Christian Europe and challenges us in a particular way.

I have the impression that the devastation this war has caused in Ukraine, the enormous toll in human lives, and the destruction of cities and infrastructure are not sufficiently felt. What is needed is a surge of humanity and responsibility on everyone’s part. Instead, it is painful to note that in many cases the only response is rearmament.

Speaking to the apostolic nuncios, you said that we must take into account the concrete situation before us. Does this mean that, even in the diplomatic sphere, we must move beyond nostalgia for a past that no longer exists?

Diplomacy is the art of the possible and can never operate according to pre-established schemes imposed from above, or on the basis of abstract doctrines. We must always start from the reality before us, even if we do not like it, even if it does not meet our expectations, even if – at times – it is frightening.

As for the ‘past that no longer exists’, I would say that not only the diplomats of the Holy See, but all of us, can never build anything positive out of nostalgia for the past: we are called to live the present, our present, as it is, doing our best to change it, to transform it, without ever giving up.

Also in the speech he gave at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, he called on those working in diplomacy to show foresight and sound realism. How can these values be put into practice?

Foresight means being able to look beyond one’s own nose, taking into account the consequences that our decisions today will have for future generations. It means, for example, in politics, seeking solutions that look to the common good and are not aimed solely at winning the next election. In diplomacy, it means pursuing – or at least trying to pursue – solutions that lead to lasting peace, respectful of the rights and well-being of all. Sound realism means acting with an eye to reality as it stands, rather than on the basis of impractical ideas. It means taking into account what is achievable and striving to achieve it step by step.

A united Europe is under threat today, both from within by so-called ‘sovereignist’ parties, and from without, through the verbal (and other) attacks of Putin and Trump. Must the European Union be reformed to prevent its collapse? And how?

Europe is not an entity defined by geographical borders, but a reality that has shared and continues to share common values. We must rediscover what unites us. We must revive what has made us who we are. I am convinced that the European Union needs reform to avoid decline, falling victim not only to external attacks but also to internal power struggles. In international crises, including those which have unfortunately occurred on our borders, Europe has sometimes failed to speak with one voice. We need to rekindle a sense of European belonging among our peoples and, among our leaders, an awareness of the need for joint action, without ever compromising the principles that underpin the European Union itself.

A similar argument can be made regarding the United Nations. The system of vetoes has historically limited its capacity to act, but there are now those who consider this institution to be useless or even counterproductive. What is your view on this? And how do you view the creation of alternative mechanisms such as the *Board of Peace*?

The Holy See continues to believe in the importance of the United Nations and supports it, holding that international organisations are fundamental to curbing the logic of the strongest. It is true, unfortunately, that there is mistrust and that vetoes have limited the UN’s capacity to intervene in conflict situations, but we cannot give up and move from the rule of law to the law of force! As for *the Board of Peace*, as is well known, the Holy See was invited to participate as a member, but, after examining the proposal, decided not to join. We have in fact considered that the Holy See’s unique international status does not permit such formal participation. Nevertheless, the Holy See maintains an open dialogue with the countries that have joined the *Board of Peace*, as it is willing to do everything possible to promote peace and reconstruction, in close collaboration with the Catholic Church in the Holy Land. In order for this objective to be achieved, I consider the participation of international bodies and of the Palestinians themselves to be necessary, for it is not possible to decide the future of the Gaza Strip whilst ignoring its legitimate inhabitants, who are citizens of the State of Palestine, an entity to be safeguarded against any attempt at annexation, which is contrary to United Nations resolutions and the basic principles of justice. The Holy See will therefore follow the developments of this initiative closely, in the hope that it will truly achieve the objective of a just and lasting peace in the region. I fear, however, that the current situation, which has seen the Middle East dragged into a very serious spiral of violence, will also have a heavy impact on what happens in the near future in Palestine. At the same time, let me say that the *Board of Peace*, with all its limitations, is at least an attempt to do something following the massacre of civilians we witnessed in Gaza. One might ask what other initiatives there have been and what other attempts have been made.

The European unification process was led in the post-war period mainly by Catholic-inspired leaders (De Gasperi, Schuman, Adenauer), but in more recent years the reference to Christian roots was rejected by the European Union. And today? What contribution can the Christian believer make to Europe?

Indeed, the reference to Europe’s Christian roots, so strongly advocated in his time by John Paul II, has been rejected by the European Union. What concerns me most, beyond the mention on paper, is how much these roots are alive and active today. That is to say, how concrete and present the contribution of Christians to the common European project is.

It is an open question. As for the contribution that believers can make today, I believe it is fundamental: let us think first and foremost of the value of life and human dignity, of religious freedom, of proposing corrective measures to the current economic and financial system in accordance with the principles of the Church’s Social Teaching, and of the protection of creation. Above all, let us think today of the value of peace, so insistently emphasised by the most recent successors of Peter. I was struck by the fact that Pope Leo asked the Italian bishops to work in this

regard, involving all Christian communities. Indeed, we need more voices for peace, more voices against the folly of the arms race, more voices speaking out in favour of our poorest brothers and sisters, more voices and more proposals – I am thinking, for example, of the world of Catholic universities – for new economic models based on justice and care for the weakest rather than the idolatry of money.

At the start of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Putin rejected the mediation offered by Pope Francis, and Trump’s positions today are very far removed from those of his compatriot Prevoist. Are we to conclude that no one listens to the words of the popes?

We cannot hide behind a finger: the voice of the popes is prophetic and marked by that realism I spoke of earlier. The Bishop of Rome is a moral authority whose importance grew when he lost his temporal power.

But it is a voice crying in the wilderness if it is not upheld and given concrete support. One need only think of John Paul II’s efforts for freedom in the Eastern European countries behind the Iron Curtain: his voice was upheld and supported because those efforts were in the interests of Western nations.

But when, after the fall of those regimes—miraculously almost bloodless—the same pontiff pleaded not to embark on the first and then the second war in Iraq, he was left alone by those very same people who, until shortly before, had been hailing him.

It is therefore no surprise that there are ‘very divergent’ positions. On the other hand, it is important to emphasise that this divergence must never prevent us from maintaining an open dialogue with everyone.

Looking at the White House, we see that the Trump administration places great emphasis on Christian religious values. Vice-President Vance is a convert to the Catholic Church and describes himself as a devout practising Catholic. But how can this be reconciled with domestic policy choices (a ruthless crackdown on immigration) and international policy choices (the use of force, territorial claims, tariff policies, etc.)?

It is a question that should be put to those concerned. I do not mind when I hear politicians referring to Christian values and pointing to them as the guiding light of their actions. I am speaking in general terms and for everyone: the point is that the Christian faith, with its implications, is not a display counter of various products where the choice is left in the hands of the buyer. We cannot claim to love and defend life whilst concerning ourselves only with that of the unborn, without considering that life is also that of the migrants who die at sea, of the women and children who have nothing to eat, of the peoples devastated by the weapons we produce and sell, and of those who claim the right to freely choose their own faith. As Pope Leo said: ‘Anyone who claims to be against abortion but in favour of the death penalty is not truly pro-life. Anyone who claims to be against abortion but agrees with the inhumane treatment of immigrants, I do not know if they are truly pro-life.’ At the same time, those who are concerned with saving whales but justify the silent killing of a huge number of human beings in the womb fall into the same contradiction.

Speaking of the United States, the raid that led to the capture of Venezuelan President Maduro caused quite a stir. The Holy See had also proposed mediation in this case, which was not accepted. In light of what has happened, you, who were nuncio in Venezuela, what consequences do you foresee for this country and, more generally, for US-Latin American relations?

Regardless of what happened and how it happened, we continue to support a peaceful solution, calling for respect for the country’s self-determination and the welfare of the Venezuelan people. As I have already said, it is true that we had attempted to find a solution that would avoid any bloodshed, by reaching an agreement with Maduro and other members of the Venezuelan government, but this proved impossible.

You were recently in Denmark for the 12th centenary of the evangelisation by Saint Oscar (Ansgarius). What was the mood like there following the shock caused by President Trump's threat to annex Greenland to the United States?

During the meeting I had in Copenhagen with the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs on 26 January, as part of my visit to Denmark as papal legate for this important centenary, we naturally also discussed the issue of Greenland. I certainly sensed concern over the threat of a possible annexation, but I also noted the joint efforts of the Danish Government and the autonomous Government of Greenland to reach an agreement with the United States. It seems to me that, at present, the issue is no longer on the agenda, and this gives us cause for joy. I would say that this whole affair has prompted both Greenland and Denmark to reconsider the strategic importance of their relations and, above all, has led the Greenlandic people to a renewed awareness of their own identity. During her recent visit to the Vatican on 4 March, the Greenlandic Minister for Foreign Affairs reiterated her people's desire for self-determination, in accordance with international law, and their commitment to pursuing diplomatic channels with the US administration to ensure mutual security.

Turning to another issue, is it possible to envisage a resolution to the Iranian crisis without further bloodshed? And how can the Holy See's commitment to human rights be reconciled with interfaith dialogue between the Vatican and Shia Islam?

A new front in the war could have disastrous consequences for the Middle East and the world. It is therefore to be hoped that negotiated solutions will be found and that international law will be respected. As for interreligious dialogue, he continues, it has never ceased, and I would like to recall in this regard the historic 2021 meeting between Pope Francis and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's highest Shia authority, at his residence in Najaf.

At the same time, we hope that the concerns of the people are taken into account and that human rights are respected, patiently fostering dialogue and peace. And pursuing the common good of society as a whole.

One of your predecessors, Agostino Casaroli, spoke of the 'martyrdom of patience' when referring to the Holy See's *Ostpolitik* with the countries behind the Iron Curtain. Can this definition be applied to the current relations between the Church of Rome and the government in Beijing?

Yes, certainly, and I would add: not only with China! The dialogue continues, despite the difficulties. I would like to emphasise once again – unfortunately this is hard to grasp – that the provisional agreement signed in September 2018 is neither a concordat nor a political-diplomatic agreement, but concerns only the procedure for the appointment of bishops. For a Christian, for a Catholic, communion with the successor of Peter is essential, not optional! The fact that today in China all the bishops are in communion with the Pope is fundamental.

At the diplomatic level between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China, the sticking point remains the Vatican's recognition of Taiwan, which Beijing considers its own territory. Not to mention Hong Kong, where the national security law has curtailed freedoms, including those of Catholics. How can we square the circle, maintaining the dialogue with Beijing without compromising on fundamental principles?

Twenty years ago, the then Cardinal Secretary of State Angelo Sodano said publicly that if only the People's Republic of China were willing, the Holy See would immediately transfer its diplomatic representation from Taipei to Beijing.

This would by no means mean breaking off relations with Taiwan, but rather returning to mainland China, from which the Holy See was expelled in 1951. As for Hong Kong, the Church remains committed to dialogue with the authorities and to safeguarding religious freedom.

Throughout 2026, the central theme of ‘Dialogues’ is change: technological, human and even geopolitical. In terms of the international order, where will the rapid changes we are witnessing take us?

I believe Pope Francis was entirely correct in stating that ours is not an era of ‘ ’ changes, but rather that we are living through a change of era. Technology has made and continues to make enormous strides, and we must reject, on the one hand, prejudicial closed-mindedness and demonisation, and on the other, naive credulity. It is important to highlight the boundaries that must not be crossed, such as entrusting machines with the power to decide on people’s life and death, as is unfortunately the case with certain sophisticated weapons.

Then there is the major and highly topical issue of fake news, and of chatbots conversing on social media as if they were real people. We must defend humanity and fight against dehumanisation.

Unfortunately, these extremely powerful and sophisticated tools risk becoming instruments of powerful forces seeking to manipulate us. The human factor is, and must continue to be, decisive.

How can we explain the contradiction of this digital age, which makes us all hyper-connected and able to communicate, yet sees a growing fear of the other and the erection of new walls?

As you point out, it is a real contradiction. We are bombarded with millions of news items; we are hyper-informed, but only on the surface. We are constantly connected, without realising that this connection ends up influencing us: just look at how the younger generations have changed. The hyper-connectivity mediated by technological tools gradually causes certain reservations to fall away that we would have if we were face to face with the person in the flesh.

Thus, on social media, fear is growing, but so too is the use of hateful, contemptuous language that shows no respect for others. Every time we post a comment, perhaps criticising someone, we should always ask ourselves whether we would use the same words and tone if we were face to face with the person we are criticising. This is why the digital world can never replace the human touch, and whilst social media is important for connecting people, it is essential that we continue to meet in person, looking each other in the eye.

Unfortunately, the spread of fake news, the escalation of controversies, the simplification of thought, and the reduction of reality to slogans, all contribute to fuelling often unjustified fears and identifying non-existent ‘enemies’. This is why the erection of walls and fences goes hand in hand with the growth of fear. As Christians, we must oppose this drift through our daily witness: hatred, war and violence begin when we forget the face of the other.