

Bewilderment and Uncertainty: The Buzzwords of the Moment

Pope Leo XIV offered to mediate. This almost-headline has made the rounds globally in recent days as the first major move by the new pontiff, who seems intent on having his church play a key role in conflict resolution. It's a political decision, driven by the ambitions of the new leader of the Catholic Church, but also likely by a hard-to-fill void in the world: there are few legitimate leaders able to manage the level of uncertainty and bewilderment that afflicts us in these times.

The "leader" of the free Western world, Donald Trump, has failed to fulfill his most difficult campaign promises—and probably the ones that generated the greatest global expectations: ending the war in



"No more war": Pope Leo XIV gives his first Sunday blessing from St. Peter's Basilica. Source: www.instagram.com/papaleone14official/



Ukraine "in 24 hours," as he claimed, and resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

So far, he has failed spectacularly. And it's not for lack of effort—despite his controversial and bombastic style.

Russia continues to batter Ukraine, and Ukraine continues to defend itself. In recent hours, Russia launched the largest drone strike in the past three years of this conquest war, and U.S. mediation efforts have yet to show any positive results.

There are no real truces, no pauses. Europe keeps increasing sanctions on Russia, which turns a deaf ear thanks to continued oil sales to buyers like China and India—sales that fund its war.



Russian bombing in Ukraine, 2025. Source: www.pexels.com

[Bewilderment and Uncertainty: The Buzzwords of the Moment]



Gaza, 2025. - Source: Wikimedia Commons

Germany has stationed its first permanent military contingent in Lithuania since World War II. The country is rearming, boosting its defense spending. Clearly, times have changed.

In the Middle East, the situation goes from bad to worse.

The death toll in Gaza exceeds 53,000, according to figures acknowledged by the United Nations. UN Secretary-General António Guterres is horrified almost daily by Gaza's humanitarian crisis, but his organization can do little to ease the suffering. This unfolds amid an Israeli blockade that prevents aid from reaching a population literally trapped within the enclave's 365 km², trying to survive pre-announced bombings, aware that many more will still die.



Building in Gaza after an Israeli strike, 2024. - Source: Wikimedia Commons

Hamas has been decimated but not destroyed, contrary to the Israeli government's promise after the October 7, 2023, terrorist attacks that killed more than 1,200 Israelis and resulted in over 250 hostages, of whom around 17 are believed to still be alive in Gaza.

Hamas gave the more radical elements within the Israeli government the perfect excuse to launch what has become the most destructive offensive in the history of this prolonged conflict. The group has now accepted a ceasefire proposal that would release, gradually, some of the remaining hostages—perhaps even return the bodies of some deceased. Israel rejected the offer.



Benjamin Netanyahu. - Source: Rawpixel

Meanwhile, Gaza's civilian population pays the price day after day in a war whose objectives, according to Prime Minister Netanyahu, have shifted. At first, it was about "eliminating" Hamas; now, occupying and "conquering" northern Gaza is at the top of his agenda.

Propped up by the far-right factions of Israeli politics, Netanyahu sees the war as a tool for political survival. If he stops, he could lose the support of the most radical members of his cabinet and see his government collapse. He would most likely lose power and have to face justice over a high-profile bribery and fraud case. He is in an endless forward escape.



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President Donald Trump receives Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House, February 2025. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Families of the hostages—both living and dead—are pleading with him to stop, fearing for the lives of those still in captivity, either due to bombings or retaliatory actions by Hamas.

Warnings of famine in Gaza multiply by the day. But humanitarian aid, which requires Israeli authorization to enter, does not arrive.

Trump, consumed by his world of threats and economic blackmail as a means to achieve goals, seems unable to rein in the leaders of America's main ally, while public opinion in Europe grows increasingly agitated at the endless stream of images of wounded or malnourished children.



Protest against the war in Gaza, Berlin, 2025. - Source: Wikimedia Commons

The announcement of 22 new Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank will not only further strain Israel's relationship with the West—it also signals clearly that the so-called “two-state solution” is close to expiring.

So, what could the new pope do?

For starters, occupy the vacant role of a legitimate mediator—as a man of peace. It's true that, being an American pope during a controversial U.S. administration, Leo XIV won't have an easy time positioning himself as a unifier in any context. His proposal, in fact, was quite generic: “Help enemies speak face to face.” And he meant all enemies.

The first to accept Leo XIV's offer was Colombian President Gustavo Petro, who has failed to bring peace to his country as he intended when he took office. New negotiations with the ELN mediated by the church? That remains to be seen, but the possibility was opened by the president himself, amid growing disappointment surrounding a government that pinned much of its success on a peace process that has not materialized.



Presidents Volodymyr Zelensky and Donald Trump, February 2025. - Source: flickr.com

Ukraine-Russia: things are even more complicated here. Russia is not yet ready to negotiate peace and, unlike Ukraine, rejects even a temporary ceasefire as a step toward talks. In fact, Vladimir Putin doesn't need one: his troops, after tens of thousands of deaths, are making real territorial gains. He is in a position of strength and wants Ukraine's capitulation.



[Bewilderment and Uncertainty: The Buzzwords of the Moment]



Presidents Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. - Source: flickr.com

Kyiv stays afloat thanks to U.S. military and financial support, which Trump repeatedly threatens to withdraw. The cost of such a move would now be even higher than it was in January, when the Republican tycoon took office, especially given the favorable deal his administration struck with Zelensky's government, allowing American companies to exploit rare earth minerals in Ukraine—"repayment," so to speak, for the aid previously granted by the Biden administration.

Russia has yet to publicly present its conditions for a ceasefire. They will not, without a doubt, be the ones the U.S. would dictate. But Trump, more eager to end the war than to secure a just peace, will be ready to listen.

Ukraine rejects any territorial concessions that would deepen what already occurred with Crimea, making any agreement unlikely. Realistically, this conflict could last even longer than these unexpected three years—unless the U.S. decides to fully sacrifice Ukraine and, with it, much of its ties with the European Union.

These are unresolved conflicts, with no clear exits.

Trump is also pushing forward on another difficult and potentially destabilizing front: Iran. The U.S. president wants the Iranian nuclear program to be monitored to prevent the regime—backer of armed groups like Hamas and Hezbollah that seek Israel's destruc-



Arak Nuclear Plant in Arak, Iran. - Source: Wikimedia Commons

tion—from acquiring a nuclear bomb, a scenario that would be deeply destabilizing.

Iran wants a deal that lifts the economic sanctions choking its oil industry, but refuses to halt uranium enrichment as Washington demands.



Ayatollah Khamenei, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2024. - Source: Wikimedia Commons



[Bewilderment and Uncertainty: The Buzzwords of the Moment]



Trump had already withdrawn the U.S. from the previous verification framework during his first term. Now he's pressuring Tehran to eliminate a highly disruptive factor in an already explosive region. In the process, he'd also curtail the power of Iran, rival of America's ally Saudi Arabia.

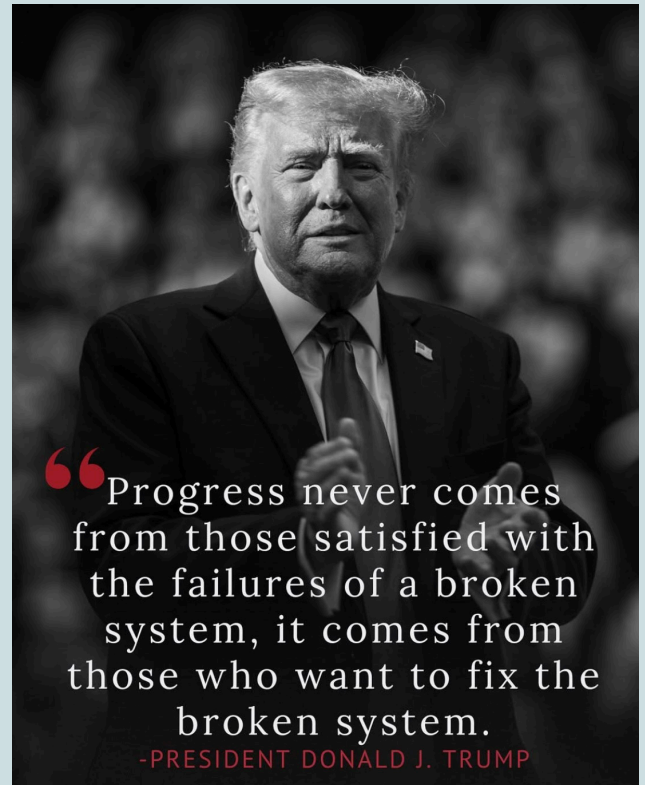
If he fails, three of his key foreign policy promises will remain unfulfilled, and the U.S.'s role as a global stabilizer could fade.

This second Trump term has been a storm of contradictions on every front.

His disruptive agenda frequently clashes with the judiciary at home and with on-the-ground realities abroad, where countries have their own plans. His popularity is declining amid mass layoffs in the federal government and immigration decisions that surprise—even disappoint—his own voters.

The Republican president still promises tax cuts, an idea that will likely increase U.S. debt, given how little spending reduction is expected. He will thus disappoint the fiscal conservatives within his party.

There is less talk now of a potential recession caused by the new tariff policy. The U.S. economy's resilience is legendary.



Source: www.instagram.com/realdonaldtrump/

But ready to burn all bridges in what is likely his last term, the old businessman-turned-Republican-supreme-leader is set to accelerate decision-making ahead of the 2026 midterms—elections that could determine his historical legacy, in light of his—so far—few successes and many failures. ●

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