

FEATURE

Pope Francis: Russian war in Ukraine was ‘perhaps provoked’

Pontiff echoes his previous controversial remarks about NATO expansion facilitating the Kremlin’s invasion.



The pope's comments come a month after he said that NATO may have "perhaps facilitated" the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine by "barking" at Russia's door. | Tiziana Fabi/AFP via Getty Images

BY [LUANNA MUNIZ](#)

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<https://www.politico.eu/article/pope-francis-says-war-in-ukraine-perhaps-provoked-or-unprevented/>

In an interview published Tuesday, Pope Francis said Russia’s war in Ukraine was “perhaps somehow either provoked or not prevented” — controversial remarks that will raise eyebrows internationally.

He made the remarks [during an interview](#) with Jesuit magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica* conducted in mid-May but published Tuesday.

“Someone may say to me at this point: but you are pro-Putin! No, I am not,” Francis said. “It would be simplistic and wrong to say such a

thing. I am simply against reducing complexity to the distinction between good guys and bad guys, without reasoning about roots and interests, which are very complex.”

The pope also recalled a conversation he had before the war with an unnamed head of state — a “wise man” — who told Francis he was concerned about NATO and Russia.

“He said, ‘They are barking at the gates of Russia. The situation could lead to war,’” the pope said. “That head of state was able to read the signs of what was happening.”

The remarks will likely spark criticism as they echo Russia’s narrative that NATO expansion into former Soviet Union territory forced Moscow to invade Ukraine. Russia’s all-out assault, which began in late February, was launched unilaterally, leaving thousands dead.

In the interview, the pontiff did criticize Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, pointing to the “brutality and ferocity” of the Russian troops, and emphasizing “the heroism of the Ukrainian people.”

The pope’s new comments come a month after he said himself [in an interview](#) that NATO may have “perhaps facilitated” the Kremlin’s invasion of Ukraine by “barking” at Russia’s door.

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Pope Francis

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Pope Francis ([Latin](#): Franciscus; [Italian](#): Francesco; [Spanish](#): Francisco; born Jorge Mario Bergoglio in [Buenos Aires](#), Argentina, 17 December 1936) is the [Bishop of Rome](#) and hence head of the [Catholic Church](#) and sovereign of the [Vatican City State](#) since 2013.

Francis is the first [pope](#) to be a member of the [Society of Jesus](#), the first from the [Americas](#), the first from the [Southern Hemisphere](#), and the first pope from outside Europe since [Gregory III](#), a Syrian who reigned in the 8th century.