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A man wearing a bishop's cassock stands next to another man wearing a suit and tie. A Vatic

Archbishop Paul R. Gallagher, Vatican foreign minister, and Mikhail Mishustin, Russian prime minister, attend a meeting in Moscow in this Nov. 9, 2021, file photo. Archbishop Gallagher read a message from Pope Francis in Vienna June 21 at the first Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The pope wrote that nuclear weapons are a "risk multiplier," not a deterrent to war. (CNS photo/Sputnik/Alexander Astafyev/Pool via Reuters)



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Russia's suspension of a nuclear arms treaty with the United States weakens structures promoting global security in the nuclear age, a senior Vatican official said.

"Sadly, I think this is a move in the wrong direction in terms of peace and the security of the world," Archbishop Paul R. Gallagher, Vatican foreign minister, told Catholic News Service in a phone interview Feb. 22.

"The Holy See has been working on nuclear issues for many years now, and we regret the dismantlement of the nuclear architecture built in terms of containment of nuclear arms and testing, and this is just another step," the archbishop said.

At the end of his state of the nation address Feb. 21, just three days before the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia would suspend its participation in the New START treaty with the United States.

The treaty, signed in 2010, restricted the world's two largest nuclear-armed superpowers to a maximum of 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads -- still more than enough to destroy all of Earth's major cities -- and provided for a series of mutual onsite inspections.

And as the anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine approached, Gallagher told CNS that despite numerous invitations from church leaders and civil authorities, the Holy See is not currently discussing a papal trip to Ukraine.

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A delegation of Ukrainian parliamentarians asked for Pope Francis to visit Ukraine when they met with Gallagher Feb. 21, the day before they attended the pope's general audience and greeted him privately.

The pope believes that "the conditions have to be right" for a trip to Ukraine to take place, Gallagher said. "He doesn't want to go somewhere where there will be a truce for a number of hours" only for violence and death to continue upon his departure.

The pope's "ideal concept of a trip would be to bring the same message of peace to both Kyiv and to Moscow," the archbishop said. He recognized that the pope's desire to travel to Russia is difficult for Ukrainians to understand but said that the pope

must adhere to his vision of achieving peace.

In the trips Francis has chosen to make in the 10 years since he became pope, "most of his intention has been to bring peace," he said, adding that a trip to Ukraine would have a prospect of bringing about "some very positive result."

In the meantime, the archbishop said, the Holy See continues to provide political support and humanitarian aid through the local churches. He recalled his own visit to Lviv and Kyiv in May 2022 when he met with bishops from the Latin- and Eastern-rite Catholic churches as well as with local and national government officials.