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Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, meets Volodymyr Zelenskyy, president of Ukraine, during his visit to Ukraine July 23. (CNS/Volodymyr Zelenskyy via X)

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The situation in Ukraine is very "worrisome" and could spiral out of control, said Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has threatened that the conflict could spread after Ukraine fired U.S.-supplied longer-range missiles Nov. 19 and U.K.-supplied cruise missiles Nov. 20 into Russian territory.

"These developments are very, very worrisome, because we don't know where they could lead," the cardinal told reporters when asked at a book presentation in Rome Nov. 22 about the latest developments, adding that his words also reflected the pope's concern and position. Vatican News published his comments the same day.

When asked about the International Criminal Court at The Hague issuing arrest warrants against three leaders, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the cardinal said the Holy See has "taken note of what has happened" and underlined that what "concerns and interests us is that the war be ended soon."

Judges at the court issued arrest warrants Nov. 21 for Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, Israel's former defence minister, and Mohammed Deif, military commander of Hamas, saying there were "reasonable grounds" the men were criminally responsible for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity during the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas.

Israel has rejected the claims and Netanyahu condemned the court's decision as "antisemitic." Hamas has rejected the claims against Deif, yet praised the warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant as an "important historical precedent."

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When asked about claims of antisemitism, the cardinal said the Holy See's position on the phenomenon was clear: "We have always condemned it, and we will continue

to condemn it" and seek to create conditions necessary for "a serious condemnation and a serious fight against this phenomenon."

Speaking about the escalation of the war in Ukraine, the cardinal said, "Let's stop now while there is time, because there is no way to know where this escalation will lead!"

"At some point we will no longer know how to control any possible developments" in this conflict, he said, appealing to those in positions of authority "to stop before it becomes irreparable."

The cardinal said the Vatican is continuing its efforts on prisoner exchanges and returning children to Ukraine who had been kidnapped and taken to Russia.

These efforts are also useful "to prepare the ground a little bit toward negotiations," he added.

This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. View the full series.