

ONE YEAR AFTER THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

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One year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the estimates on casualties -an important variable to assess the progress of the war- are different and contradictory. On November 10, the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, said that both sides had had 100,000 casualties including the dead, the wounded and the deserters, and that this showed the failure to reach a definition on the ground and the convenience of speeding up the peace negotiations. In late December, British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace, who has served under the last three prime ministers, gave the same figure for Russian casualties, but did not mention Ukrainian casualties. On January 21 - the day after the NATO "contact group" meeting in Brussels - the Norwegian General Staff claimed that Russian casualties reached 188,000, almost double those reported in November by Milley and at the end of December by Wallace. On January 22, American intelligence sources, hiding behind anonymity, agreed that Russian casualties had reached 180,000. In the days that followed, Norwegian observers reported 180,000 Russian and 100,000 Ukrainian casualties. At the beginning of February, without specifying its origin, the US media spoke of 150,000 casualties for each party. In turn, in those days, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense said that the Russian deaths exceeded 135,000, which would mean a sharp increase compared to previous estimates, which included the wounded and the deserters. On February 17, coinciding with the Munich security conference, the British Defense Secretariat reported that Russia had had 200,000 casualties - almost double the number reported at the end of December - and among them, deaths could be around 40,000 and 60,000. At the same conference, the US Secretary of State confirmed the 200,000 Russian casualties. But the key fact is that the Russian population is three and a half times the Ukrainian population and the losses, beyond their notorious differences, must be projected on that data.

The other relevant figure on the conflict is the economic damage suffered by the parties. In January, the estimate for the fall in Russian GDP during 2022 was 2.9%, a figure that, when revised at the beginning of February, was reduced to 2.1%. In other words, the economic damage suffered by Russia is relatively low

for a war of this magnitude, and having suffered unprecedented economic isolation and technological disconnection is not going to prevent it from continuing the war. As for Ukraine, the figures from international financial organizations estimate the drop in its GDP in 2022, is between 30 and 35%, that is, a third of its economy. This is explained in a context in which most of the country's infrastructure has been destroyed by constant Russian bombing and that economic production has been reduced, as well as its exports. In addition, of the 44 million inhabitants that it had at the beginning of the conflict, 8 million have left the country. They have also left their homes without leaving Ukrainian territory, approximately 6. Add to this the growing recruitment required by the war effort, the Ukrainian labor force has been severely depleted. The reconstruction of Ukraine has been launched by the countries of the European Union and NATO, which has generated a great mobilization of companies from these countries to participate in it. But with the war far from over, the situation is vague and uncertain. On the one hand, there are more than 300 billion dollars seized from Russia by Western banks, adding also the properties of the so-called "Russian oligarchs". This money could go to finance the Ukrainian reconstruction. However, there are significant legal objections to doing so. Between the delivery of weapons, humanitarian assistance and economic-financial support, Ukraine would have received 150 billion dollars, most of it as loans from the United States, and the rest in donations.

But the conflict is closer to escalating than to becoming a chronic war, while the possibilities of negotiation recede. Such is the case of the one presented by Henry Kissinger in an article in the American "The Spectator" on December 21, in which he proposes a diplomatic road map to try to carry out a negotiation. But this type of initiative is impossible as long as NATO delegates, as up to now, on the Ukrainian government to decide how and when to negotiate. In January clear signs of escalation were given. On the 20th of that month, the meeting of the NATO "contact group" held in Brussels showed disagreement about delivering modern tanks to Ukraine. Before the end of the month, political leaders made the decision to do so, although the decision will take months to implement. Immediately, the Ukrainian president requested in his tour of Berlin, Paris and Brussels, the delivery of multipurpose fighters. The main NATO countries stated that they were going to do it, but not in the short term, seeking to moderate the escalation. But President Biden's visit to Kiev and Warsaw one year after the invasion, and his meeting with the so-called Bucharest Group

(made up of the three Baltic countries, the four from Central Europe and the two from Eastern Europe, the toughest against Russia from the European Union with the exception of Hungary), ratified support for Ukraine until Russia's defeat. Putin's response was forceful: he abandoned the bilateral treaty with the United States "New Start" or "Start III", which establishes the search for an equivalence of nuclear weapons between the two powers, and ratified the escalation of the conflict and the risk of its extension and breadth.

But at the same time, the first anniversary of the conflict comes at a time when tensions between China and the United States are escalating over the war in Ukraine. At the Munich conference, which since 1963 has brought together the West's top security officials and experts, China rejected proposals to put pressure on Russia to cease hostilities and back down its territorial claims. The diplomatic representative of the Chinese Communist Party rejected NATO's request and maintained that China was going to keep, in accordance with its interests, the relationship with Russia, and that its territorial claims should be considered. It was Ukrainian President Volodimir Zelensky who said on February 21 that there was no peace initiative from Beijing, as Western sources had made clear. The diplomatic representative of the Chinese Communist Party visited Moscow, Berlin and Paris, ratifying this position. At the same time, North Korea's intercontinental-capable missile launches have accelerated US military rapprochement with Japan and South Korea. Tensions around Taiwan are also on the rise, increasing the military risk around the island. The expansion of US military ties with countries in conflict with China in its South Sea, as is the case with the Philippines, has increased tension and the possibility of escalation between Washington and Beijing, during 2023, which has not reached two months. .

In conclusion: the figures on Russian casualties show significant differences and contradictions, but hide the most important thing: that the Russian population is 3.5 times that of Ukraine. In the economic field, the information is more transparent and shows a great difference, since Russia's GDP has fallen by 2.1% in 2022 and that of Ukraine has dropped by between 30 and 35%. The war between Russia and Ukraine escalates and in less than a month it went from the delivery of modern tanks to Ukraine, to the Russian decision to abandon the bilateral agreement with the US to contain nuclear weapons. Lastly, this occurs as the conflict between Washington and Beijing over Ukraine escalates, and the

North Korean launches, the tension around Taiwan and the agreement with the Philippines increase the risks.