

THE NATO SUMMIT IN MADRID

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On June 29 and 30, the NATO Summit will take place in Spain. It brings together the Heads of Government of the 30 countries of the Alliance. It will be the most important since 1949, as it takes place in the context of the war between Russia and Ukraine, which began on February 24 with the invasion of Russian forces in that country. The 2020 Summit -in the midst of the pandemic- was held virtually. The then President Donald Trump issued a strong criticism against the organization and reiterated the demand that its members spend 2% of their GDP on Defense, agreed during the Obama Presidency and not fulfilled by the majority of NATO. Then, only the United States, the United Kingdom, Poland and Greece met this percentage, which is now also met by the three Baltic republics. Germany has promised to reach it in the next five years, which implies doubling the current one, which is slightly below 1%. The reconstruction of Germany's military power is a fact of geopolitical relevance for Europe. Two years ago, French President Emmanuel Macron criticized NATO, saying it was "brain dead," and advocated building a "European defense system" independent of the Western military alliance. At last year's Summit, President Biden spoke of "revitalizing" NATO, as part of the higher priority he sought to give Europe for the United States. It was a change from the Trump Administration, which deprioritized the Western military alliance, prioritizing the threat from China. It should be noted that, according to NATO itself, US military spending is 811 billion dollars, which, added to the other 29 members, exceeds 1.1 billion dollars. This figure is 18 times higher than Russia's military spending.

This is how in the war in Ukraine, it faces an asymmetric war, given the strong military superiority of Russia. But between it and NATO the opposite happens. On April 26, the Ramstein Summit (Germany) took place. It was at the level of ministers, to coordinate actions to continue and intensify military support for Ukraine. This meeting will be held monthly to "monitor" the efforts. Thirteen non-NATO countries were part: America's four military allies in the Indo-Pacific, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand; also the two European countries that would formalize in the coming days the request to join NATO,

Sweden and Finland; also Israel, an ally of Washington in the Middle East; from the Arab world only two, Jordan and Qatar; and from Africa, four: Morocco, Tunisia, Kenya and Nigeria.

The Western Alliance has had the category of “extra-NATO ally” since the early 1990s, but it has meant more of a distinction than a concrete or operational relationship. From Latin America, Brazil, Colombia and Argentina have this condition. NATO also has liaison offices. Moscow is particularly concerned about those it maintains in Ukraine, Georgia and the countries of Central Asia, all former members of the USSR. Extra-jurisdictional operational activity (in territorial terms) has been expanding since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. First it was in Serbia in the nineties due to the conflict in Kosovo; later in Afghanistan in the first two decades of the 21st century, in the framework of the war against terrorism led by the United States; and intervened in the last years of the Libyan conflict that ended with the death of Gaddafi. It also has an advisory role in the Western military mission in the Sahel, on the African continent. The key to NATO is article 5 of its founding Treaty, which establishes the obligation of members to defend each other militarily if one of them is attacked.

This has been key in the conduct of the organization's members in the Ukraine conflict. The policy of not intervening militarily in this country has been established. This has led to denying the Ukrainian government the no-fly zone that was used in Serbia, Afghanistan and Libya. The war in Ukraine has been for NATO both a failure and an opportunity. A failure because its indisputable success until now was to have generated the longest period of peace on the European continent in several centuries, but an opportunity because it resolved the reason for its existence, which was under debate until the beginning of this year. The central theme will be the request for incorporation of Sweden and Finland. The former has not gone to war since the Napoleonic conflicts and had effective neutrality in both World Wars. In the case of Finland, which for long periods was under Russian rule, after the Second World War it assumed a strict neutrality that allowed it not to be the 16th member of the USSR. This shows that Putin is a greater threat to these countries than the Soviet Union was after World War II.

The incorporation of Sweden and Finland implies increasing the border that the Russian Federation currently has with NATO by 1,900 kilometres. In other words, the extension of the border with the Western Alliance is doubled, which increases the risk of direct conflict. An issue that will now be discussed in Spain will be whether or not the requirement of unanimity for decisions is modified. NATO's role will expand as a result of the war in Ukraine and this will be a medium and long-term trend. Unanimity can become a risky decision-making mechanism in the military field, and for this reason it is logical to review it. But it won't be easy. Regarding future incorporations, the country that has the most advanced process is Bosnia and Herzegovina, although its inclusion has no date. Membership also requires unanimity.

In conclusion: at the end of June the NATO Summit will take place in Madrid, in a context dominated by the war between Russia and Ukraine. In fact, the incorporation of Sweden and Finland will be the most important decision, since it implies the most relevant challenge to Moscow's objective of preventing the Alliance from reaching its borders. NATO has had the category of "Extra-NATO Ally", which has been a symbolic distinction, to which adds that of "NATO Global Partner", used to operate in Afghanistan. Finally, the NATO conflict with Russia is for her a failure for not having been able to prevent the war in Europe, but also an opportunity, because it allows it to rethink itself as the axis of global security.