

FEBRERO 2023

One year on...

Lila Roldán Vázquez

Abstract: This article seeks to reflect on the consequences of Russian's nine-long war on Ukraine, particularly after its overall invasion in February 24, 2022, and the way it has impacted the geopolitical international scenery.

Key words: War, full-fledged invasion, Western alliance, global South, sanctions, global security.

Twelve months have gone by since Russia unleashed its full invasion and its open war on Ukraine.

Though February 24th 2023 might be considered by some as the first anniversary of the war, in fact Russia is at war with Ukraine since 2014, when the illegal annexation of Crimea happened: hundreds of "little green men" took hold of the Crimean parliament on February 27 that year. Shortly after, President Putin recognized those men were in fact Russian soldiers without insignia: *"Of course, the Russian servicemen did back the Crimean self-defence forces. They acted in a civil but a decisive and professional manner..."*¹. The annexation was then consolidated on March 18th, through a sham referendum (not recognized by the international community) and the immediate incorporation of the Crimean Peninsula to the Russian Federation.

Later on, in April 2014, the action turned to the Eastern part of Ukraine, where the Russian Federation gave a continued political and military support to activists in the Donbass, who out of discontentment with the central government, were looking for enhanced local autonomy. Eventually and after Russia's full invasion in 2022, both Donbass territories –the Donetsk and Luhansk provinces–

One year on...

CONSEJO ARGENTINO
PARA LAS
RELACIONES
INTERNACIONALESUruguay 1037, piso 1°
C1016ACA
Buenos Aires
República ArgentinaTel. +5411 4811 0071
Fax +5411 4815 4742cari@cari.org.ar
cari.org.ar

Las opiniones expresadas en esta publicación son exclusiva responsabilidad de sus autores y no reflejan necesariamente el pensamiento del CARI.

were allegedly integrated into the Russian Federation, together with the Ukrainian southern provinces of Kherson and Zaporizhia, also after respective sham referenda.

This first part of the war, which lasted eight years, resulted in more than 13000 victims and a million people internally displaced. It destroyed Eastern cities' infrastructure and private homes, forcing many people to extremely poor living conditions. That is why, when Ukrainians are asked about the war, they usually answer that the full-fledged Russian invasion was not really a surprise –maybe only the extent of it and its violence were– since they had been at war with Russia for eight long years.

The Minsk agreements, fostered by France and Germany and aimed at ending the conflict –the Russian Federation was a part of the agreements negotiations in a tacit recognition of its central role in it– could not and were not complied with, due to their low degree of acceptance within the Ukrainian population. For Ukraine, the Donbass question is one of “decentralization”, not autonomy or separatism.

The full-fledged war thrown by Russia on February 24th, 2022, in violation of United Nations principles as well as bilateral and multilateral agreements, has marked last year in many ways: in the first place, it has consolidated

the Western alliance, through its common effort to support Ukraine's territorial integrity and independence, as well as to assure continental security. Furthermore, it has changed the international landscape in a meaningful and probably permanent way. It has also shown a significant decline in the effectiveness of international organisations and multilateralism. And it is taking thousands of human lives: soldiers on both sides and many Ukrainian civilians, and causing millions of internal displacements and refugees, as well as physical destruction and economic disarray.

It also reflects a broader conflict between Russia and the West and, more broadly, between liberalism and illiberalism, between liberal democracies and autocracies, in the context of a world undergoing structural changes.

The West's swift reaction... for once

In this framework, Western and industrialized countries reacted promptly to condemn the invasion and applied multiple and far-reaching sanctions to the Russian Federation, its leaders and oligarchs. In other areas of the world, however, reactions have been diverse.

The Western countries' reaction, in its broadness and depth, must have been a surprise to President Putin, used to mild responses in previous international law's breaches, like the brutal war in Chechnya, the war on Georgia in August 2008, the Crimea's illegal annexation, the military support to radical movements in the Donbass or the equally brutal intervention in Syria. Until February 24th, 2022, the West had not reacted in a united nor decisive way against those unlawful actions.

The variety of sanctions adopted against the Russian Federation go from the freezing of official and private Russian assets, to bans or restrictions to Russian exports and imports, sanctions to the main financial institutions and subsequent invalidation of Russian credit cards around the world, severed access to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication –SWIFT, a secure banking platform–, caps to oil and gas prices, or even suspension of visa facilitation agreements for Russian citizens.

While most of the punitive measures are oriented to affect the Kremlin capacity of financing the war and replenishing its military resources, some of them have a direct influence on Russians' every day life and, considering that dissent is not allowed in their country, many

Russian citizens have decided to emigrate, either because they don't agree with the war, they are looking for better conditions abroad or they just try to escape mobilization.

Nevertheless, support to the Kremlin and its war of choice seem to still be high among the population. The Russians' projection of their country as a main global power, with an imperialistic ideal behind it, as well as a generalized, historic vision of Ukraine as “a minor partner” or “a little brother” surely contribute to this acceptance of the war. For them, Ukraine has to go back to “Mother Russia”, as it has always been claimed.

Hans Boland, a Dutch translator and lover of Russian culture, said in 2014, the first year of the war: *“It was Russia that was born out of Ukraine, and not the other way around”*.

Commenting on the poor knowledge and false assumptions of Ukraine in Western countries, he said: *“...one has to look for the causes in the notorious Russian messianism, the desire to rule the world and lead the mankind. Sometimes this desire rises to the level of psychic disorder. In Ukraine, it led to the oppression, often quite violent, of all things Ukrainian: the language and literature, the religion, the traditions... But Volodymyr the Great, Baptist of Rus', Volodymyr Monomakh,*

and many other 'founders of the Russian nation and culture' were of Ukrainian, not Russian origin! And what about 'the mother of all Russian cities'?

These circumstances had two fatal effects: the unbearable arrogance of the 'great brother/foe' and the inferiority complex in the oppressed Ukrainian people”.

These comments lead us once more to the origin and also one of the main causes of the war: Russian legendary imperial desire to get hold of Ukraine. This objective grew ever more acute in President Putin since his access to power, and was reinforced in face of the increasing westernization and democratization of Ukraine. Two “color revolutions” in Ukraine: the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Dignity, or Maydan, Revolution in 2014, showed the Kremlin that both countries’ paths were irreversibly diverting and, even more dangerously, that Ukraine’s democracy was a pole of infection coming from a close neighbor, which could eventually “contaminate” Russia. Something “needed” to be done³.

Coming back to the West’s reaction and the swift adoption of harsh punitive measures, we should not neglect the costs of those sanctions for the very countries that apply them: the United States, the European Union, NATO

countries, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Japan, South Korea: high inflation, gas shortages, higher energy bills⁴.

The agreements on the type and scope of the sanctions have also revealed ideological and practical discordances in the coalition: see Hungary’s reluctance to apply some measures, or the difficulties to convince some NATO members to provide military assistance to Ukraine; but the alliance has not been broken and the objective of supporting Ukraine “as long as it takes” –as President Joe Biden said in his State of the Union Address to Congress on February 7, 2023⁵, and reiterated during his surprise visit to Kyiv on February 20– seem to be still inspiring it.

Biden’s visit to Kyiv, the first of an American president since 2008, also chosen to coincide with the anniversary of Maidan’s Hundred Celestial Heros in Ukraine, is the reaffirmation of the US leading role in the Western alliance, closing a cycle of “aloofness” and occasional mistrust. The trans-atlantic defensive alliance and the relations between the United States and the European countries were significantly strengthened, after a period of “indifference, at best” during the Trump Administration.

Consequences of the war were not only of a military or humanitarian kind: both Western

main organizations, the EU and NATO, were directly impacted by the biggest war on European soil since WWII.

Security concerns in neighboring States and the generalized fear of upcoming Russian actions which could spread the war into other territories, accelerated decisions in the EU, which granted “candidate status” to Ukraine and Moldova, while Georgia is pressing to obtain it. Finland and Sweden, traditional neutral States, asked to join NATO, though Sweden has yet to overcome Türkiye’s opposition due to political, not security, reasons.

Germany is a case of its own: after WWII, this country had maintained a military budget inferior to the parameters fixed by NATO and had a national policy of not giving any military aid to other countries. However, in the first months of Russia’s full invasion, the German government decided to increase its military budget to the 2 % required by NATO, began considering sending military aid to Ukraine (which now it provides) and suspended the already completed North Stream II gas-pipeline (in association with the Russian Federation). It has not been easy for the German authorities to adopt such measures, and there has been lengthy discussions between the political forces in the Bundestag before each new step was taken.

In the alliance’s energy field, traditionally highly dependent on Russian gas and oil exports, decisions have also been swiftly adopted. Western states have drastically reduced the amount of imports and some of them –United States and United Kingdom– have stopped them altogether. Germany, again a key protagonist in the field, shortly after the invasion decided not to go ahead with the authorization for the North Stream II gas pipeline to become operational.

All these measures, which obviously mean an economic impact on the countries’ populations, have been possible due to a massive popular support to Ukrainians’ resistance to the invasion, and even today, one year later, polls show that support has not declined. In many countries, the Russian aggression has caused a significant shift in public opinion, particularly in countries neighboring Russia.

What about the global South?

Unlike in the Western alliance, the reaction throughout the world has many *nuances*: while most of the countries –with very few exceptions– have not publicly endorsed Russia’s war, the global South has not reacted in a definite and concerted way either. This is

easily understandable, since the “global South” is indeed global, but not homogeneous. Nations in Africa, Asia, Latin America or the Arabic world have different interests and needs that influence their choice ...or the lack of one. Several factors can take a part in this constellation: food security, energy or economic constraints, security and military dependence, common membership in multilateral organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union or specific concertation mechanisms like BRICS. Or even just political reasons, based on ideological coincidences, on sympathetic authoritarian regimes or on a common interest in defying the West, particularly the United States’ predominance.

However, even when countries in the global South have generally abstained from applying sanctions to the Russian Federation or its leaders, there is a generalized rejection to the invasion and many of them advocate for negotiations and for the end of the war.

In the very special case of China, there have been many speculations and mistrust towards the Chinese regime on its approach to the war and eventual support of Putin’s aggression, due to the strategic alliance it maintains with the Russian Federation, apparently reinforced lately,

as was clearly depicted in the two Governments’ Joint Statement of February 4, 2022⁶.

As a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council, China has abstained in all resolutions condemning Russia’s invasion and in accordance to a traditional Chinese position, it has defended the principle of territorial integrity, though addressing, at the same time, the need to respect “reasonable security concerns of all States”. In a clear reference to one of the reasons invoked by Russia to justify its actions⁷.

President Xi Jinping, under the pression of his Western partners and probably worried by the “Taiwan question”, has called for an end to the war through peaceful negotiations: “*China supports the EU’s efforts toward a political settlement of the Ukraine issue and has been encouraging peace talks in its own way*”⁸ and has also ruled out the use of nuclear weapons: “*...nuclear weapons cannot be used and nuclear wars cannot be fought*”⁹.

Nevertheless, China has continued and somehow intensified its relations with the Russian Federation, increasing its imports of Russian oil and gas and helping the Kremlin to contour Western sanctions. In the last days, the U.S. Government has openly accused

China of providing inputs for the Russian military industry, a presumption that have strained China's relations with the West even further, at the same time that apparently a visit by Xi Jinping to Moscow is being prepared.

The Indian government, linked to Russia by many economic and military cooperation ties, has also discarded war as a means of solving international differences, but it has refused to apply sanctions to the Russian Federation while upgrading Russian oil imports in disregard of Western sanctions (from 36.255 barrels per day of crude oil in December 2021 to 1,19 million bpd in December 2022).

In the United Nations Security Council, India's Foreign Minister, Mr. Jaishankar, stated that India calls for an immediate cessation of all hostilities and a return to dialogue and diplomacy, recalling that Prime Minister Modi emphasized that: *"...this cannot be an era of war"*. He added that the global order is based on international law and respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of all States. *"Those principles must also be upheld without exception"*¹⁰.

South Africa, a Russian partner in BRICS, as well as China and India, has not responded to Western demands of applying sanctions to Russia or sending military aid to Ukraine. Also,

the South African government has abstained in UN resolutions condemning Russian invasion, invoking its neutrality and the conviction that long-term peace will only be achieved through dialogue and negotiations.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has offered himself as a mediator in the conflict, while blaming NATO for its east-ward expansion which –in his words– *"...would lead to greater, not less, instability in the region"*. He has also said that UN members should settle their differences by peaceful means and refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial and political independence of other States. *"...We cannot condone the use of force and violation of international law"*¹¹.

On the other hand, Pretoria defends its right to participate in the ongoing joint military exercises with the Russian Federation and China (February 17th-27th), which have aroused many critics in the West, thus sustaining its special relationship with the Russian Federation. Just recently, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov visited South Africa, in the framework of an African tour.

Other countries in Africa, which have recently reinforced their relations with the Russian Federation, as well as their economic dependence on China, and which in general

are seriously affected by food insecurity, may find it difficult to openly condemn the invasion. Moreover, some of these countries, as well as some Latin American ones, condemn the United States policies of interventionism and find them responsible, in a certain way, of the present world's disruption.

Effects of the war, which most analysts predict will unfortunately linger on without a foreseeable end to it, have already reached practically every region in the world, in different ways and degrees of impact. The Latin American and Caribbean region, in spite of its geographical distance from the conflict, is not an exception.

In general terms, it is already being affected by the decrease in global growth expectations and the increase of global inflation. Many of the countries in the region rely on agricultural products exports as their main source of revenues. The fact that exports from Russia and Ukraine, two main grain exporters, have been disrupted either by the war or by the sanctions applied to the Russian Federation, could have been considered an opportunity for Latin American exports. But other factors, like the reduction in the provision of fertilizers (also coming mainly from Ukraine and Russia), higher productive costs and harsh climate conditions,

have not allowed a significant compensation.

From a political point of view, while most of the Governments in the region have condemned the aggression, some of them have abstained to do so or have even found ways to justify the invasion (Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela). The ideological polarization and the subsequent weakness of regional concertation mechanisms do not facilitate the adoption of common actions or positions¹².

Nevertheless, the Organization of American States (OAS), a bi-continental organization, adopted Resolutions and Statements condemning the Russian aggression and demanding that the Russian Federation abide by its international obligations, withdrawing all its military forces and equipment from Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. It also demanded respect for human rights and condemned the sham referenda celebrated in Russia-controlled areas of Ukraine¹³.

In April 2022, the OAS Permanent Council suspended the status of the Russian Federation as a permanent observer to the Organization, "*until the Russian Government ceases its hostilities, withdraws all its military forces and equipment from Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and returns*

to the path of dialogue and diplomacy"¹⁴.

Brazil, a BRICS member whose first commercial partner is China, has maintained a position of neutrality. During last year under Bolsonaro's presidency, though, it has increased its commercial exchanges with the Russian Federation and has refused to apply sanctions. The position has slightly changed since President Lula da Silva's accession to power on January 1, 2023: while he condemns Russia's invasion, he is not willing to send military aid to Ukraine since –he maintains– *“by doing that, Brazil would be participating in the war”*. Lula has also proposed himself as a negotiator to achieve the end of the conflict in Ukraine.

Mexican President López Obrador has maintained an ambiguous position vis-à-vis the Russian invasion. On one hand he has condemned the invasion, on the other hand he has refused to apply sanctions to a bilateral economic relationship of minor significance, in spite of requests from the United States, Mexico's main partner. In this case, ambiguity to the war could eventually harm Mexican-American relationships more than Mexican-Russian ones.

The position of the Argentine Government towards Russia's war has also been ambiguous and not always consistent with its own actions

or statements throughout last year. President Alberto Fernández made an official visit to the Russian Federation a few days before the invasion, looking to deepen bilateral ties, as Brazil's Bolsonaro also did.

On February 24, the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a statement expressing a strong rejection to the use of armed force and called on the Russian Federation to cease its military action in Ukraine. But it didn't firmly condemn the invasion; instead, it made an appeal to de-escalate directed to *all the parties involved*. Even if later the Government actually condemned the invasion, Argentina has not applied sanctions to the Russian Federation. The commercial exchange between both countries is not significant, so an eventual adhesion to sanctions wouldn't have been particularly damaging for Buenos Aires or Moscow, but decisions were probably adopted on the background of ideological reasons.

The uneven reactions from the global South probably obey, not only to economic needs or ideological coincidences, but also to the vacuum left by the United States and some European countries in both Africa and Latin America, as well as in some Asian countries. During the last two decades, at least, those

developed countries concentrated their policies and efforts in their own constituencies or in their interests elsewhere, not in the regions with which they had traditionally maintained special relationships of friendship and cooperation.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, some pieces in the international chessboard were suddenly put in motion, such as the Biden Administration reaching out to the Maduro regime in Venezuela and a renewed interest of European countries in Central Asia and Latin America.

Latin America shares common values with the West, as well as a common conception of the international order based on the respect of the United Nations Charter principles, particularly the respect of Human rights and of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. The present crisis should be a good opportunity to deepen mutual cooperation in both economic and political terms. The conclusion of the UE-Mercosur agreement and other bi-regional agreements would be a good starting point to a renewed relation of cooperation in mutual benefit and could also contribute to international economic stabilization.

The path forward

One year after Russia's full-fledged invasion of Ukraine, there is no clarity whatsoever to the war's end. In the present circumstances, there is little room for a negotiated exit to the conflict, given the stagnation of actions on the battle field and the determination of both sides to go on fighting until the achievement of their respective objectives. Notwithstanding the flattening of their cities and the toll of civilian and soldiers deaths, the Ukrainian people is determined to win the war and to get all of its territory back.

To the questions frequently posed: 'will this be possible?' 'how long will it take?', polls on the ground may give some answers.

A Gallup survey conducted in October 2022 found that 70 % of Ukrainians want to continue the war with Russia until they achieve victory, and 91 % of them said victory means recapturing all Ukrainian territory seized by Russia, including Crimea. Numbers were higher in the country's capital Kiv, and in the West, Central and North regions of the country, and smaller in the country's East and South, where the fighting is intense. The poll also showed a strong support for President Zelenskiy, who shortly before had declared that he would not pursue a negotiated end to the war as long as

Vladimir Putin remains president of Russia¹⁵.

The results of the Munich Security Index 2023, based on data collected in November 2022, are a strong evidence of Ukrainian unity and resilience in face of Russian aggression. The majority of Ukrainians chose to continue fighting until complete victory, in several hypothetical scenarios (95 % to 89 % in cases of conventional bombing of cities to Russia's use of tactical nuclear weapons). For most Ukrainians, only a complete Russian withdrawal from Ukrainian territory, including Crimea, would be the acceptable condition for a ceasefire (93 %)¹⁶.

On the other hand, results of a survey on Russian citizens' opinion about the war, released by the Levada Center in February 2023, indicate that 75 % of them support the actions of Russian military forces in Ukraine. This support had fell to 72 % in September, at the time of the announcement of partial mobilization and again to 71 % in December. When the war had just started, support had been at 80 percent. Opinions about continuing the war or proceeding to negotiations are divided in half.

There is also a noticeable differentiation by age. The greatest concern is typical for people aged 55 and older¹⁷.

A preliminary conclusion would be that the biggest war since WWII is not near to an end

and that the world has to prepare for new and probably unstable scenarios.

The most prominent consequence of Russian invasion is a menace to global security, which has been put in danger by Putin's reckless actions. We need to work on concerted actions to stop this global risk.

The war isn't just menacing the European continent, but it is having a domino effect on other authoritarian regimes, with a consequent resurgence of conflicts, hostile actions and new alignments, in the midst of a generalized atmosphere of concern for future global peace and security.

It is time to enhance international efforts in order to build a new global security architecture which guarantees peace and security for all. Regional and political alliances will surely have a central role in building it.

Latin America, as a Peace Zone and a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone which has traditionally maintained a policy of non intervention in armed conflicts, should contribute to this effort.

References:

- (1) Direct Line with Vladimir Putin, April 17, 2014. The annual special Direct Line with Vladimir Putin was broadcast live by Channel One, Rossiya-1 and Rossiya-24 TV channels, and Mayak, Vesti FM and Radio Rossii radio stations.
- (2) BOLAND, Hans: "It was Russia that was born out of Ukraine, and not the other way around". Газета «День» ("Day" Newspaper), September 8, 2015.
- (3) ROLDÁN VÁZQUEZ, Lila: "La Guerra en Ucrania: motivos y probables consecuencias" ("The War in Ukraine: its reasons and likely consequences"), Social Sciences Journal, Y. 10, N. 18, Social Sciences Faculty, Palermo University, Buenos Aires. April 29, 2022.
- (4) FEIGENBAUM, Evan A. and SZUBIN, Adam: "What China Has Learned From the Ukraine War. Even Great Powers Aren't Safe From Economic Warfare-If the U.S.-Led Order Sticks Together", Foreign Affairs, February 14, 2023.
- (5) President Joe BIDEN's State of the Union Address to Congress on February 7, 2023.
- (6) Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, February 4, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>.
- (7) President Xi JINPING's words in a virtual meeting with EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel, April 1, 2022.
- (8) President Xi JINPING's words in a virtual meeting with EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel, April 1, 2022.
- (9) Chinese President Xi JINPING, discussing Ukraine with US President Joe BIDEN during their bilateral meeting on the sides of the G20 Summit in Bali, Indonesia, on November 14, 2022, according to a statement by the Chinese Foreign Minister. <https://www.thejakartapost.com/world/2022/11/15/nuclear-wars-cannot-be-fought-in-ukraine-china-.html>.
- (10) India's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Subrahmanyam JAISHANKAR's intervention in the United Nations Security Council's 9135th meeting - Thursday, 22 September 2022 - S/ P V.

9135

- (11) President Cyril RAMAPHOSA responding to questions at a hybrid plenary sitting of the National Assembly at Parliament's Good Hope Chamber in Cape Town South African Parliament, March 17, 2022. SABC News, available in YouTube.
- (12) ROLDAN VAZQUEZ, Lila: "Reasons for Russia's War on Ukraine and its foreseeable consequences on Latin America", Argentine Council for International Relations, Articles and Testimonies No. 168, August 2022.
- (13) Statement from the OAS General Secretariat on the Russian Attack on Ukraine C-008/22. 24/02/2022. Source: Organization of American States (OAS). Organization of American States Permanent Council Resolution: "The crisis in Ukraine" (CP/RES. 1192 (2371/22), 25/03/2022. Source: OAS. Organization of American States General Assembly Statement "Continued Support for an End to Russian Aggression in Ukraine" 52 OAS/GA, 6 October 2022. Source: OAS.
- (14) Organization of American States Permanent Council Resolution "Suspension of the Status of the Russian Federation as a Permanent Observer to the Organization of American States (CP/RES.1195 (2374/22), 21/04/2022. Source: OAS.
- (15) ROLDÁN VÁZQUEZ, Lila: "Reasons for Russia's War on Ukraine and its foreseeable consequences on Latin America", Argentine Council for International Relations, Articles and Testimonies No. 168, August 2022.
- (16) Source: Gallup survey on Ukrainians' support to continuation of the war until their victory / <https://news.gallup.com/poll/403133/ukrainians-support-fighting-until-victory.aspx>
- (17) Source: Munich Security Index 2023. / <https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report-2023/spotlight-ukraine/>
- (18) Source: Yuri Levada Analytical Center. November 2022 / <https://www.levada.ru/en/2022/12/12/conflict-with-ukraine-november-2022/>

Lila Roldán Vázquez / Ambassador, Director of Eurasian Studies at the Argentine Council for International Relations, Former Ambassador to Ukraine (2007-2015)

Para citar este artículo:

Roldán Vázquez, Lila (2023), "One year on..." [disponible en línea desde febrero 2023], Serie de Artículos y Testimonios, N° 169. Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales. Dirección URL: <http://www.cari.org.ar/pdf/at169en.pdf>