

HYPOTHESIS ON THE NATO-RUSSIA CONFLICT

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Some argue that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was Putin's mistake because it has actually unified the West. Joe Biden's thesis that the axis of the global conflict is the democratic countries against the authoritarian ones fits into the current European conflict. Although Russia has an ideologically conservative and politically authoritarian government, China has a reformist economic model controlled by an elite that exercises power in an authoritarian manner. At the time of the invasion of Ukraine, NATO was in a difficult situation that President Macron came to describe as “dead brain”. It got the consensus from those who argued that the main danger came from the north (as has been confirmed now); the countries of the southern flank privileged the threats of the Mediterranean, migrations and terrorism, and in a third position, there were those who wanted to reinforce the extra-regional role of the Atlantic alliance. Now, a *de facto* unification has taken place. Of the thirty countries that make up NATO, only four have marked differences with their position against the Russian invasion of Ukraine: Slovakia, Hungary, Turkey and Croatia, which later aligned. The differences between France and Germany remained in the background. The same happened with their divergent approaches with Washington. Finland and Sweden, without being part of NATO, aligned themselves with it and Switzerland joined the economic sanctions. Outside the European framework, in the Indo-Pacific, Japan and Australia ratified their strategic alliance with the United States, aligning themselves against Russia.

Others, on the other hand, argue that the Russian invasion of Ukraine weakens NATO, which was not capable of articulating a military response and diplomatic management that would have preserved Ukrainian territory. Putin

defies NATO with only 5% of the military spending of the 30 countries of the Western military alliance. The preventive deployment of NATO forces in the countries where it has permanent military bases and which border Ukraine (Poland, Romania and Lithuania) did not reach 10,000 troops. The 50,000 that the United States has permanently in Germany have not moved, until now, from their bases. Putin was betting that Western societies that saw less than a year ago the anarchic withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan would not agree to participate in a war.

That is the way it is so far. NATO countries will not enter Ukraine to defend it from the Russian invasion, and this will weaken the Western military alliance in the face of global public opinion, if the Ukrainian forces are finally defeated. In addition, NATO has acted in countries that did not have a security guarantee because they were not part of it and now it does not do it anymore. This was the case of Serbia, during the Kosovo secession at the end of the 20th century, and of Afghanistan in Asia in the following two decades.

The two parties to the conflict are betting on the respective breakdown of the internal fronts of Russia and Ukraine. Russia's biggest opponent in prison, Alexei Navalny, has said that the real risk to world peace is Putin and not Russia. There are those in the West who argue that if the military actions are prolonged, the democratic Russian opposition will gain space and influence, precipitating protests that can lead to insurrection, as happened in several countries of the former USSR. On the contrary, there are those who maintain that the exaltation of Russian nationalism that Putin motivates will be an argument and a pretext to further stifle dissenting voices. For his part, Putin aspires to a breakdown of the Ukrainian internal front through rapid and forceful actions - which are slower than expected - that lead Ukrainian public opinion to support "a model of neutrality" such as the one assumed by Finland after the Second World War. In this case, the current pro-Western government of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, could be replaced by one that proposes to neutralize the country from the military point of view, which in fact would be

pro-Russian. Both perceptions are determinants of the military strategies of the two contenders. Ukraine wants a long war that wears Russia down, and Russia wants a quick war that weakens the Ukrainian home front. A deeper analysis of Putin's attitude as a Russian leader can be found in the "humiliation" factor generated by nationalist extremisms aimed to reverse the decline by military means. Although there are exceptions to this theory (such as Germany and Japan after World War II) numerous examples fit it. Perhaps the most relevant is that of China, which suffered the humiliation of the West since 1836 when the first opium war began, which culminated in the seizure of the Hong Kong peninsula by British forces, generating an occupation that only ended in end of the 20th century. In the 19th century, the European powers took position in different Chinese ports to ensure trade.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Chinese capital was occupied by a multinational force of countries consisting of the United States, Japan and various European forces. The Japanese occupation of Manchuria was another humiliation of China before and during World War II. This sentiment explains the resurgence of the Asian power represented by President Xi Jinping. The Germany defeated in the First World War, generated Nazism and the arrival of Hitler to power with his idea of political and ethnic German nationalism in search of revenge and reprisal. Russia, in turn, has perceived threats from the West for three centuries. Napoleon at the beginning of the 19th century, Crimea in the middle of that century, and the two invasions of Germany in the First and Second World Wars. These were all invasions of their own territory. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, considered by Putin to be the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, was also perceived by Russia as a humiliation.

In conclusion: the first days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine show a reinvigorated US-European alliance, but it is a conflict that is by no means over. Another hypothesis is that NATO's great success, which was to have avoided war in Europe for almost 8 decades, has been lost and that its military

inaction in the Ukrainian conflict is going to weaken it. Both Russia and Ukraine play to break the "internal front" of their respective adversary and although there are signs on both sides, the one that resists the most will prevail. Finally, the "humiliation" factor not only explains the search for "revenge" by a power that is trying to recover, but it must be taken into account with respect to Russia in the development of the current conflict.