

TWO MONTHS AFTER THE START OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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Almost two months after the start of the war in Ukraine, it seems to have no end in sight. Starting with Russia, the initial military planning may not have gone as Putin and the Russian leadership expected. However, this is what usually happens in military operations. That is why the phrase goes, "No plan survives the enemy fire". But history also shows that Russia's military capability is highly resilient. In the 21st century, this was demonstrated both in the war to end Chechen separatism, and in Syria to give military support to the Assad regime. In both cases, Russian participation was vital in terms of laying siege to urban centers, using artillery fire and systematically bombing from the air. Such was the case in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. The position taken around the city began on October 17 and its fall was almost four months later, on February 6. The city was almost completely reduced to rubble. In the case of Syria, the seizure of Aleppo, the country's first city, was a much larger operation due to its population and the number of troops involved. In this case, the operation lasted four years, until the coalition of Syrian and Russian forces and the Hezbollah Shiite militia managed to take the city, which was also subjected to intense and prolonged artillery and air attacks. However, May 9 would be a decisive date for Russia's military operation: as that day marks a new anniversary of the German surrender in Berlin, Putin wants to announce the "liberation" of Donbas, the pro-Russian region of Ukraine.

In the case of NATO, it arrives at the Ukraine conflict with two warlike precedents: Serbia and Afghanistan. In the former, in the 1990s, the Western Alliance fought against the Serbian government, which was reluctant to accept the secession of Kosovo, whose population is largely Muslim. In this case, the United States and its European allies carried out a primarily aerial offensive, with few casualties on the ground. Serbia and its capital, Zagreb, were subjected to intense bombardment that did not spare monasteries from the Middle Ages. The other precedent is that of Afghanistan - NATO's other extra-zone operation - which lasted for two decades and was the most important operation of the Western Alliance since its constitution in 1949. In this case, it was a campaign that recruited over 100,000 men on the ground at its height. High-powered

bombs were used to destroy shelters and underground warehouses, drones and the most advanced fighter planes. Although it was a NATO operation under US command and with a marked majority of US troops, European and Canadian participation exceeded 10,000 men at its peak. However, it ultimately failed, when the withdrawal of the NATO troops immediately caused the fall of the pro-US regime ruling Afghanistan. The NATO fatal casualties reached almost 4,000 over the twenty years that the operation lasted.

The war in Ukraine is for NATO a failure and an opportunity at the same time. When French President Emmanuel Macron stated at a NATO summit that the organization was suffering from "brain death," supporters of the alliance countered that it had allowed Europe the longest period of peace in its history. It is enough to remember in the 19th century the Napoleonic wars, the Crimean war, the monarchical restorations, the wars of unity between Germany and Italy and the Franco-Prussian war. In the first half of the 20th century the Balkan Wars, the First World War, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. It was argued that the US military presence in the territory of its European allies was the key to that peace that had been maintained for three-quarters of a century. This is what was broken by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the human and material destruction it has generated in less than two months. The advance of NATO towards the east and the possibility that more countries of the former Soviet Union join (the three Baltic countries did so in the 1990s), has been the triggering factor for the war.

At the start of the third decade of the 21st century, three conflicts led Russia, in a year and a half, to deploy troops in Belarus, Armenia (due to the conflict with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh stronghold) and Kazakhstan. They intended that in these three countries, pro-Western political alternatives would not come to power, creating a climate that could promote opposition to Russia. But the most unexpected situation for NATO was Putin's quick announcement that he was ready to use the nuclear weapon. Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, which hastened the end of World War II, there has not been a military conflict in the world in which the possibility of the use of nuclear weapons has been raised. In that field Russia is the world's second military power and it can challenge US hegemony. Already in the second week of the conflict in Ukraine, Putin put his nuclear force on alert as it prepared to conduct its annual exercises this year, in conjunction with Belarus. The photos show that the Russian

President is always carrying the nuclear briefcase containing the keys for the use of nuclear missiles in the hands of an aide who walks next to him. It is presumed that tactical nuclear missiles very different from the explosions that took place in Japan would be used. These are weapons with much greater precision, with better control over their contamination and that would take place on Ukraine as a target so as not to precipitate NATO's military intervention if any of its countries were hit. It has been said that the United States would not respond with an immediate nuclear escalation if tactical nuclear missiles were used outside the territory of the Alliance. The President of the Russian Security Council, former President and close political ally of Putin, Dimitri Medvedev, has publicly explained the military doctrine of the use of nuclear weapons. He has said that there are four situations in which it can be used. The first three are linked to the protection of one's own nuclear power, but the fourth is "when the existence of the Russian state is at risk."

In conclusion: two months after the start of the war in Ukraine, the scenario resembles what Biden and Johnson said at the end of January: "a great Chechnya". Russia's campaigns in Chechnya and Syria, and NATO's in Serbia and Afghanistan, are the most important antecedents in both cases to anticipate alternatives and behaviors. This war is at the same time, for NATO, a failure (it failed to keep peace in Europe) but also an opportunity, demonstrating the need for its existence. Perhaps the most unforeseen event was the speed at which Putin made use of the nuclear weapon as a tool of his strategy.