

UKRANIE: COUNTERATTACK WARNINGS WITHOUT PRECISION

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Putin's announcement that he is deploying tactical nuclear missiles in Belarus rules out the possibility that the Chinese peace proposal will have effects in the short term. The purpose was to avoid the nuclearization of the conflict and this was recognized by the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell. They now argue that China's refusal to criticize the deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus implies that the Asian power has no real vocation to bring about peace between Russia and Ukraine. For Putin, the decision has been motivated by the British announcement that he will send depleted uranium ammunition for the Challenger tanks that he delivers to Ukraine. Spokesmen for the Russian government had already anticipated that there would be reactions to this decision, which was maintained despite this. Putin's decision once again reactivates the nuclear weapon as a threat. In this case, he was seconded with statements in this regard by the former president and current vice president of the Russian Security Council, Dimitri Medvedev, and by its Secretary, Nikolai Patrushev, considered the "hard man" of the regime and eventual successor to Putin in case of an accident. In NATO it is considered that the Chinese silence regarding Russian tactical nuclear weapons is a sign that the influence over Russia is limited, because the expectation of the Chinese peace management has been diluted too soon.

The battlefield confirms the stalemate with respective counteroffensives announced but not started. June 21, the beginning of summer in the northern hemisphere, is considered a date when more forceful military actions could resume. In Donbass, the Russian offensive against Bakhmut seems to be on hold, but the center of gravity has shifted to the city of Avdiivka, a relevant crossroads for controlling the area. Ukrainian forces began receiving the first German-delivered Leopard tanks. The first crews trained in NATO countries to drive them are also returning. This seems to have improved the speed and efficiency of this type of training, which in a few months allows a complete cycle of instruction. But gathering the armored vehicles necessary for a counteroffensive takes months ahead. President Zelensky's request to receive

multi-role fighter aircraft is frozen. Without them, a Ukrainian offensive will be more difficult. Artillery ammunition remains vital for the Ukrainian forces and the European Union decided to finance the purchase of one million shells. Artillery continues to play a decisive role, especially for Russia, which gives it priority, as it also did in World War II. Both parties use drones intensively. But Russia has increased its production capacity -as in the rest of the weapons systems- and Ukraine depends entirely on foreign military supplies.

Parallel to the war in Ukraine, strategic-military tensions are increasing in the vast Asian continent. From the city of Vladivostok, Russia carried out test launches of anti-ship cruise missiles -specifically the supersonic Moskit-towards the Sea of Japan, a country that criticized the "escalation" of military activities around the Japanese archipelago, and warned that it "monitors closely" these movements. At the same time, the North Korean dictator ordered his armed forces to step up their ability to have submarine missiles that can carry atomic payloads. He also suggested that it has tactical nuclear weapons, similar to those deployed by Russia in Belarus. The North Korean government reported that the two KN-23 missiles, which were launched on March 27, were equipped with simulated nuclear warheads. These launches are intended to be a response to the military exercises carried out by the United States and South Korea this March. It should be noted that Seoul and Tokyo are the most important allies of the United States in the Far East. China sees the decision of the AUKUS alliance in the Indo-Pacific (United States, United Kingdom and Australia) to provide the latter country with nuclear-powered submarines, as a threat. But Taiwan appears as the greatest threat in the conflict between Washington and Beijing. There is a precise date on it. The public documents of the Chinese government speak of achieving the reunification of China during the current decade. Added to this are the presidential elections that will take place next year in Taiwan. If the current ruling party, which is promoting the declaration of independence from Beijing, maintains power, the risk of an escalation in the conflict will increase. If the current opposition of the Kuomintang party (the most traditional), which is not promoting the declaration of independence, wins, the tension may be reduced.

But the central strategic conflict unfolding in the world is between East and West. NATO, made up of the United States, Canada and 28 European countries, signifies the military unification of the West. Led by the United States, it is

expanding to Sweden and Finland -challenging Putin's position of not accepting NATO reaching Russia's borders- it has requests for the incorporation of Ukraine and Georgia, and shows signs of growing military integration, such as that of unify the Nordic air forces: Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. In the face of the Russo-Ukrainian war, NATO, led by the United States, maintains a united position that has not broken in the elapsed wartime. Regarding China, the intensity of the conflict is different. Europe also accompanies the United States, but is less willing to take the risks of a confrontation with Beijing, which could have negative global economic consequences. However, the third vertex of the triangle is Iran, which has increased its risk in recent weeks. Information from the International Atomic Energy Organization (IAEA) shows that this country has accelerated its nuclear plan and would have already reached 90% uranium enrichment. This means that the possibility of reaching nuclear weapons is close. Trump abandoned the agreement to control Iranian nuclear development in 2017 and Iran has since taken advantage of it to renege on it. Germany, France and the United Kingdom, for their part, kept it, but it lost its effectiveness. The role of China in the gestation of the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore diplomatic relations showed that both the Asian power and the Arab world have a different position from that of the NATO countries in this conflict.

In conclusion: the Russian decision to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus rules out the possibility that the Chinese peace proposal will make progress in the short term. Meanwhile, operations in Ukraine continue to stall, with both forces preparing counteroffensives about which there are not too many certainties. Tensions between the United States and its allies and China and Russia escalate, with the participation of North Korea. Lastly, the central problem is that NATO has three conflict fronts simultaneously: Russia, China and Iran.