

UNITED STATES: THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE TENSION AROUND TAIWAN ESCALATE

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As the war in Ukraine escalates, so does the growing military tension between China and the United States. At the end of 2022, two scenarios were being considered: chronic war or military escalation between Russia and NATO. The decision to deliver modern tanks to Ukraine meant the Western option for escalation, although gradual, as the discussion regarding the delivery of fourth-generation fighters by the Western alliance shows. But at the same time, the military tension between Washington and Beijing escalates. This began in August last year, when the then Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, visited Taiwan, prompting a Chinese response with military exercises around Taipei. Since then, episodes of military tension with the deployment of ships and planes have been intermittent but constant. In parallel, China maintained its support for Russia, especially maintaining trade and economic relations, but not getting involved in the war with Ukraine. During January 2023, the United States Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, visited South Korea, expanding the agreements and military exercises with this country. In turn, the Secretary of Defense, General Lloyd Austin, traveled to Manila to sign important defense agreements in military matters. South Korea, thus, advances in the pre-existing military alliance, while the Philippines transforms the authorization for US forces to be in the country into a military alliance.

China perceives the United States as enlarging a military fence around it, and not just in anticipation of a military conflict with Taiwan. The Commander of the United States Air Mobility Command (AMC), General Mike Minihan, publicly said in January that a military conflict between the United States and China over Taiwan could happen in 2025, because in 2024 the presidential election takes place in that country and this will escalate the conflict from a probable victory of the independent. A public statement from this entity by a General on duty, who argued that this is the guidance he is giving for the instruction of his subordinates, is unusual. At the same time, China's military exercises with dozens of planes and half a dozen ships around Taiwan were a

concrete response. This escalation is dangerous for the United States in the face of the simultaneous war in Ukraine. It should be noted that a large part of the ammunition reserves that the United States had in South Korea - to be used by US troops that would have to act from it due to a possible conflict in Taiwan - have already been delivered to Ukraine. But the Chinese white balloon that flew over the US territory, and in particular one of the three most important missile bases that is in Montana, is also a sign that the tension is escalating. It is not clear what has happened, whether it is a tool of Chinese intelligence, as Washington says, or a mistake by Beijing. But the US decision to shoot it down over the sea was a forceful response and the flight of a second balloon over Latin America confirms that the issue is not closed.

For the United States, China is its biggest challenge, while it considers Russia its most important threat. Although this characterization defines a priority in temporal terms -the threat is concrete and the challenge is projected-, the fact is that the two fronts run the risk of being articulated at the same time. As February 24, 2023 marks one year from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Washington's relationship with Beijing is more tense and conflictive than it was a year ago. Henry Kissinger's warning at the Davos Forum in May to avoid pushing Russia into a military alliance with China shows that his words were not heeded. President Biden, in his February 7 "State of the Union" address—the most important speech the president delivers annually—stressed that the United States would not tolerate any violation of its sovereignty by China. It was a message in relation to the Chinese white balloon that concentrated the attention of the Americans in the first days of February. In the United States, there are thinkers who maintain that time plays against their country against China. Although Chinese military spending is less than half that of the United States, its annual increase allows us to project that it will even out towards the end of the 1930s. Accordingly, the United States would be better off accelerating its military confrontation with Beijing. It is not the prevailing doctrine in Washington, where it is assumed that the challenge of China is increasingly relevant in the military sphere. But in the short term, the conflict over Taiwan involves those of microchips, a key input for the most advanced technology industries. Taiwan is the most prominent producer, China is also, albeit to a lesser extent, and the United States is developing plans for urgent production in its own territory given the possibility that the conflict could go ahead.

But between the United States and China, not only Taiwan plays as a possible trigger for the war, but also North Korea. It is a very particular country, governed by three generations of the same family of dictators, with unique characteristics and personalities. It has a very small economy and high levels of poverty, but it has acquired a capacity in the nuclear-military field that allows it to be a regional threat due to the range and capacity of its missiles, which can carry a nuclear charge. International estimates give this country the possession of dozens of warheads. North Korea is a direct threat to America's two key allies in Asia: Japan and South Korea. The North Korean launches have reached the waters close to both countries, which, without abandoning the US "nuclear umbrella", are beginning to think about having their own capacity. North Korea is clearly under the hegemony of China, but maintains some autonomy. In the war in Ukraine, it has assumed the role of an ally of Russia, which it has provided with missiles and drones. There are those who consider Kim Jong-un an irrational actor, and therefore extremely dangerous. However, he is actually a precise player who takes calculated risks and often causes surprise.

In conclusion: one year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the conflict escalates at the same time as the tension between Washington and Beijing; but China perceives that the United States is not only looking for forecasts based on a conflict with Taiwan, but that it is expanding a military siege around the Asian power. For the United States, Russia is its biggest threat in the short term, but China is the most important challenge going forward. Finally, North Korea is a regional threat that plays in China's orbit and worries both Japan and South Korea, the United States' most important allies in Asia.