

NATO MILITARY SKEPTICISM TOWARDS THE WAR

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On May 25, the monthly meeting of the Ramstein Contact Group - a US air base in Germany - that coordinates military support for Ukraine from NATO and its allies was held. It is carried out at the level of defense ministers of the 31 NATO countries and their 19 allies in this conflict in Asia, Africa and Oceania. The meeting was held virtually, from the headquarters of the Atlantic alliance in Brussels. The Head of the Pentagon, General Lloyd Austin, and the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, participated. The most important resolution adopted was to start training Ukrainian pilots in the use of F-16 fighters, insistently demanded by President Zelensky. Austin maintained that the Ukrainians would have to maintain the planes and see that they have the necessary ammunition. He also said that air defense systems are still the most necessary for the country's air defense before F-16s. Milley in turn agreed to lower expectations about the planes, saying that "there are no magic weapons", explaining that providing 10 planes with the training of pilots costs 2 billion dollars. He also said that "the Russians have 1,000 fourth- or fifth-generation planes, so if you're going to fight in the sky, you're going to need a substantial number of these planes." He added that "it will take a considerable amount of time to build an Air Force that is of the necessary size, magnitude and scale" for Ukraine. Austin said he is already working on the project with Denmark and the Netherlands and that Portugal, Poland, Belgium and Norway have offered to do so.

Regarding the expected Ukrainian counteroffensive, Milley said that Kyiv's military objectives do not seem achievable in the short term. General Austin explained that the Ukrainian forces face 200,000 men from Russia, occupying the territories they intend to recover. This could be done militarily but not anytime soon, agreeing with Milley. He in turn maintained that "the conflict will continue, it will be bloody, it will be hard." As he said on November 10 and January 30, he stated that "at a certain point both sides will accept negotiations for a solution or reach a military conclusion. We will continue to

support Ukraine in its fight for freedom." He explained that the US is not waging a war against Russia, and neither is NATO, but that it is a war between Russia and Ukraine, and Ukraine has the support of both. In the same vein as the US military leadership, the Chief of the General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces, General Karel, spoke on the same day. He said that "the outcome of the war depends not only on tanks and armored vehicles. There are too many unknowns here." He maintained that no one could predict how the announced Ukrainian counteroffensive will end. He told the German newspaper *Bild*: "Personally, I think we have to prepare for a bad scenario. A long war." He added that Western governments should prepare their societies for the fact that this war could drag on for years.

However, these are not isolated opinions, but are echoed by other US military chiefs and other NATO forces. US General Christopher Cavoli, Head of the European Command of his country, maintained that although the Russian Armed Forces had suffered many losses, their structure was intact, stressing that the Navy and the Air, Space and Cyber Forces are intact. He made these statements at a Security Conference held in the city of Tallinn, Estonia. In turn, in statements to *The Telegraph*, the Chief of Staff of the British Royal Air Force, Air Marshal Mike Winston, warned that Russia could become a direct threat to the United Kingdom if it were defeated in Ukraine and lost the territories which has occupied. He maintained that the air, sea and submarine capabilities of the Russian Armed Forces have not been affected and that must be taken into account. He claims that a Russia defeated on the land front will become more vengeful, saying "we will have a wounded, vindictive, and brutal Russia, whose means of harming us are through air strikes, missile strikes, and submarine attacks." He further argues that the problem is not just Putin, but that there are many officials willing to replace him and his successors could be even more warmongering. He added that a Russia humiliated by Ukraine could even exacerbate that threat.

The US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is skeptical of a quick win in Ukraine, but at the same time strongly supportive of raising the debt ceiling. Milley has been shown in recent months to agree with the vision of Kissinger, an expression of "realistic" American thought in international relations. In

contemporary historical terms, he resembles the positions that his predecessor, General Collin Powell, put forward in the Balkan war and those that he displayed in the early years of this century in the Iraq war. On May 25, Milley warned of the very significant negative consequences that the eventual suspension of payments by the US would have for national security. He said it would affect staff salaries, troop morale, weapons systems, contracts and the level of training. He added that large-scale exercises taking place at training centers - such as those with South Korea these days - could be suspended or slowed down. That is why he said that the country's international prestige would also be diminished. Milley added that the most affected would be, in the case of a debt default, the families, the beneficiaries of the social security of the military field and the personnel of the Armed Forces. The Republicans responded by stating that the defense area should be kept out of default.

In conclusion: at the Rammstein Contact Group meeting, held virtually from Brussels on May 25, it was decided to start the process to provide Ukraine with F-16 fighters. General Milley was skeptical that the Ukrainian counteroffensive could be decisive for the war, an opinion coincident with that of the Head of the Pentagon and the Czech Chief of Staff. The Chief of Staff of the British Air Force and the European Commander of the US forces in Europe agree publicly with this same position. Lastly, General Milley sided firmly with the Biden Administration, noting that if the debt ceiling is not raised, significant damage would be done to the military.