

## **XI-BIDEN SUMMIT: DIALOGUE, BUT LITTLE COOPERATION**

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The APEC Summit (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) takes place in the United States, at the time of greatest geopolitical tension since its creation in 1989. Unlike then, when the dissolution of the USSR took place the following year and the United States became the only global power, today China disputes that leadership. Tensions between both countries have been building and it will not be easy to defuse them. Before his meeting with Xi Jinping, President Joe Biden stated: "President Xi is another example of how reestablishing American leadership in the world is taking hold" and added, "They've [China] got real problems." It was not the best way to start the bilateral meeting between both leaders. Although China-America competition unfolds in the commercial, technological and space fields, the geopolitical terrain is the most relevant today. Taiwan and the South China Sea are the two immediate issues that confront the two powers. In the first, the United States maintains and even increases its security guarantee to confront the Chinese threat, which seeks to enforce its sovereignty over the island. This conflict has a marked technological impact due to the dispute over semiconductors, a key input in the world of electronics and of which Taiwan is the world's leading manufacturer. As for the South China Sea, countries like Vietnam and the Philippines that face Beijing's aspirations receive American support. If these issues are not addressed, effective joint influence will not be easy to contain the risks of other regions, where regional powers acquire increasing autonomy.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine will reach twenty-one months on November 24 and has no prospect of a truce in the short term, nor of peace in the medium term. The signs of "tiredness" on the part of Ukraine have been various and coincident, even at the highest level. President Volodimir Zelensky and the head of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, General Valeri Zaluzhnyi, have expressed differences, but both agree that the supply of ammunition by NATO countries has slowed down, and they blame the non-compliance with the European military industry. The Ukrainian counteroffensive launched at the end of June has not been successful and a corresponding action is expected from Russia, for which time is already playing in its favor. United States economic support for Ukraine meets resistance in Congress. The speed and dynamics of European

military support slows down. Diplomacy does not show the capacity or decision to play an active role in the conflict. But at the same time, the risk of the conflict spreading has been contained. Only the confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan for control of the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave has shown the triumph of the second country with the support of Turkey, the emerging regional power with influence in the Caucasus, the Near East and even in countries bordering Israel, and is also a member of NATO. Washington seeks Chinese cooperation to contain Russia, but fails to achieve it. At the beginning of October, the third man in the Chinese military structure visited Moscow, and was received by Putin.

But the conflict around Gaza is spreading dangerously and in this case Beijing does not seem willing to support US policies; On the contrary, it seeks to benefit from its failures. A month and a half after the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, this conflict, which could well be called war, involves more countries. While Israel has actually militarily occupied the northern part of the narrow Gaza Strip - facing criticism for the so-called "collateral damage" - tension and violence are increasing in the West Bank, governed by the Palestinian Authority and partially occupied by Israel and its settlers. Military actions against Israel and the United States are taking place in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. In all four cases, pro-Iranian militias attack Israeli territory with missiles and also attack US troops deployed in the region, 2,500 in Iraq and 900 in Syria. It is a dilemma for Washington: withdraw them to avoid a greater effort to defend them, or deploy more troops to provide them security. The central risk of conflict escalation is that Iran may directly attack Israel. To prevent this, Biden requests Xi's support, which is not easy for him to achieve. Meanwhile, the Gaza conflict today has become an electoral problem for the American president, who will be up for re-election in November next year. In parallel, protests against Israel's action have become widespread in the Western world.

But these conflicts create a situation where others begin to escalate, and even eventual agreements between Washington and Beijing have limited capacity to contain them, if they decide to do so. That was the case with Nagorno-Karabakh. In the region of Africa known as the Sahel, military coups supported by Russian mercenaries produced government changes that affected French interests. The Gaza conflict has not only led the twenty-two Arab countries to align with the Palestinians, but also to suspend the policy of recognition of

Israel as a state, known as the “Abraham Accords.” But the problem also affects the fifty-seven countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, including the thirty-seven that are Muslim, but not Arab. Such is the case of Indonesia and Pakistan, among others. It also agitates Muslim minorities in Asian countries, such as India and the Philippines. In the diplomatic field, Latin America has differentiated itself from the United States, with both Brazil and Mexico criticizing Israeli actions in Gaza. The border conflict that has erupted between Venezuela and Guyana - a former British colony - in the north of South America, is a novelty that can be used by Russia in the global bid. The United States seems obliged to intervene to maintain its global hegemony, and China, rather than competing, seems to take advantage of this situation. The consequence is that cooperation between the two does not seem to advance easily.

In conclusion: the APEC Summit was the scene of the first bilateral meeting between Biden and Xi in a year, during which global geopolitics has become more complex and unstable. The war in Ukraine has been going on for twenty-one months with signs of fatigue on the part of this country, problems regarding NATO support and no effective diplomatic action in sight. At the same time, what can now be called the Gaza war spreads rapidly to other countries, and generates solidarity that benefits the Palestinians, but without implying endorsement of the terrorist actions. Finally, regional powers have acquired more autonomy and operate based on their own interests, limiting the possibility that agreements between Washington and Beijing will be effective in containing conflicts.