

HEADING TOWARDS A WAR WITH CHINA?

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NATO, the military alliance between the United States and Europe, is today waging a war through Ukraine against Russia: no one can know how long it will last or what its outcome will be. It is an uncertain military situation, with no political or diplomatic plans to put an end to it. In this context, the United States, which clearly leads NATO, simultaneously advances in actions that provoke an intensification of military tension with China. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine began on February 24, the United States and its military allies in the Indo-Pacific region have made precise moves to build a system of military alliances around China. The alliances and military bases that the United States has in Japan, South Korea and Australia are the foundation of this policy. The QUAD Group, made up of the United States, India, Japan and Australia - which is a forum for cooperation, not a military alliance - met to strengthen peace in the region. The validity of the AUKUS alliance, made up of the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, focused on the Indo-Pacific, was ratified. President Biden visited Tokyo and Seoul. The security pledge to Taiwan was renewed by Washington and its allies in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Now, the virtual meeting that Presidents Biden and Xi held on July 28, and the visit that Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, made to Taiwan on August 2, mark a dangerous turning point in the bilateral relationship between the two powers.

All these events imply an escalation of tension around the most relevant strategic conflict in the Indo-Pacific in the short term: between China and Taiwan. Although it is different, there are some similarities with the Ukraine conflict. Moscow supports its claim to sovereignty over Ukraine with historical arguments, and something similar happens with China over Taiwan. China's adversary at the global level, which is the United States, from the leadership of NATO in military terms, supports both Ukraine and Taiwan and takes military measures in their support respectively. The Western media and think-tanks, and in particular the Anglo-Saxon ones, have begun to disseminate analyses of the eventual war in Taiwan. For the most part, they argue that China would be defeated if it tried to take possession of the island by military means. They

claim that it does not have enough landing capacity and airborne forces to carry out an assault operation and take the main cities. They add that with the few aircraft carriers that China has in service, its air capacity to maintain an ocean war is very limited. The number of US aircraft carriers today is four times that of China; its military spending is four times that of China. The conclusion is almost inescapable: China would lose the war.

But all this argumentation is debatable and even refutable: an alleged global war with a de facto military alliance would take place between Moscow and Beijing, having in fact the same enemy. The simple observation of the military exercises carried out by China around Taiwan - the most important in its history - seem to indicate the opposite. A classic invasion of Taiwan is not in Beijing's scenario in the short term, but, on the contrary, the scenario would be an air-naval blockade of the island. In this case, the question would be whether the United States intervenes militarily to break said blockade. In other words, military aggression would be in the hands of the United States. When in February, before the invasion of Ukraine, Putin visited Beijing, Russia and China signed a joint declaration in which they maintained the need to "prevent the expansion of NATO". The Russian interest in it is obvious and explicit, as well as a consequence of geography. But China has experienced NATO's military presence on its own borders for the past two decades. The most important military operation in terms of duration, number of troops and the weapons systems used, has been that of NATO in Afghanistan -a country that has a land border with China-, which lasted for 20 years, until 2021. This operation established military bases in various countries, especially in Central Asia.

The situation becomes more complex during August: Taiwan responds by carrying out military exercises to respond to those of China and China, in turn, initiates them without a deadline. The US government is planning to concentrate resources and personnel of its Administration, removing them from the priority given to the fight against terrorism, to bring them into the competition with China for global hegemony. This happens when a large part of global commercial traffic passes through the Taiwan Strait, which separates the country from China and today is the epicenter of military exercises, transformed into an instrument of diplomatic pressure. In turn, this situation occurs with a country like Taiwan, which produces half of the world's semiconductors, a key input for the electronics industry.

It should be noted that China, as a sanction, has suspended its imports of fruits, juices and cookies from Taiwan. But its largest contribution to bilateral trade with the island is the import of semiconductors worth 108 billion dollars, and on this issue Beijing does not alter the relationship for its own interest. It is not clear to what extent Western allies in the region, and in particular Japan and South Korea, view the evolution of the conflict between the United States and China through Taiwan with ease. A military conflict around Taiwan can produce economic consequences in Asia even greater than those occurred in Europe due to the war in Ukraine. In May of this year, at the Davos Forum - the annual summit of the globalized elite - Henry Kissinger, aged 98 and in person, presented his vision of the Ukraine conflict. One of his three central conclusions was to "avoid the mistake of pushing Russia into a military alliance with China." Today the situation has gone far beyond what Kissinger wanted to avoid. He is challenging China militarily and this, in effect, drives it into a military alliance with Russia.

In conclusion: NATO is waging a war with Russia through Ukraine, the duration and scope of which are uncertain. At the same time, military tension between Washington and Beijing over the Taiwan conflict is rising to unprecedented levels. A military conflict between the United States and China through Taiwan would globalize the one taking place through Ukraine on the European continent. Finally, in the first fortnight of August, after the Biden-Xi virtual meeting on July 28 and Pelosi's visit to Taiwan on August 2, the tension continues with successive antagonistic military exercises.