

NUCLEAR ESCALATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND NATO?

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After eight months of war in Ukraine, the conflict continues and escalates. Ukrainian troops continue to advance in two of the four provinces that Russia has declared as its own. The recruitment imposed by Putin weeks ago, for which 300,000 men with military experience were summoned, has not had bad results and there would already be 200,000 who have responded positively, despite the tens of thousands who seem to have avoided it. But as is logical, the arrival of fresh troops at the front is delayed for reasons of training and reorganization. As of Friday, September 30, when Putin declared the annexation of Donetsk, Lugansk, Kherson and Zaporizhia, the Ukrainian forces in military terms are acting on Russian territory in their offensive, which, although slower than the initial one, is developing systematically. Russia's response in the short term is not taking place with military operations, but with the reiteration of the nuclear threat. Putin is thus confirming the rule that governs his conduct as a leader: he can win or lose the war, but he will always double down. Since the end of September he has reiterated, more than once, that it is not convenient to challenge the world's greatest nuclear power. It should be remembered that Russia far outnumbers the United States in the number of active missiles. Whether or not Putin is encouraged to use the nuclear weapon is a matter of contradictory analysis and conjecture in the West.

The Russian leader has given concrete signs of his intention to use nuclear weapons if necessary. He has reiterated that he will do so when the existence of the Russian state is at risk and the same has been declared by his aids, such as the foreign minister, the head of the National Security Council and the pro-Russian Chechen leader. The point is that since September 30, Russian territory has been expanded by 15% at the expense of Ukraine, on whose periphery the Ukrainian military advance continues. President Zelensky's response to this situation has been to demand that NATO speed up the process of annexing Ukraine. It is not easy for the Western alliance to leave aside the process of gradual demands that a country requires to join. The Ukrainian President has also requested that the security guarantee of Article 5 of the Alliance Treaty be

extended to his country, by which all member countries concur in the military defense of any of them if it is attacked by non-NATO countries. Sweden and Finland have obtained this guarantee since June 30, 2022, when the NATO Summit held in Madrid began the process of annexing these countries, extending the security guarantee. But in NATO they fear that accepting it will provoke an even more dangerous military escalation by Russia. Meanwhile, a Russian nuclear military train has been deployed in the newly annexed territory. But the premise is always that Russia would use tactical nuclear missiles with limited and controlled effects.

But the most relevant signal in this field has been the movements of the Russian submarine Belgorod, which would have the greatest power of destruction in the world. It carries long-range nuclear torpedoes, called "Poseidon 2M39", which can travel 10,000 kilometers at 130 kilometers per hour and its length is 20 meters. This torpedo is the closest thing to an underwater drone. It is capable of carrying a multiple nuclear warhead of up to two megatons, can travel to a depth of between 50 and 1,000 meters and at a speed that makes it undetectable. The information disseminated by Russian media maintains that it sails in the Arctic area and could produce "radioactive tsunamis" by launching missiles, capable of destroying coastal cities of NATO countries. The Belgorod K-329 is a nuclear powered and armed submarine. It fulfills two main functions. The first is to serve as a "mother submarine" for smaller ones, which could work in deeper waters or at the bottom of the sea. Analysts link this capacity with that of attacking submarine infrastructure, such as the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. The other function is that of nuclear attack and deterrence. For this, it has 6 long-range nuclear missiles. The submarine has a range of 120 days without surfacing, is 184 meters long and 18.2 meters wide and sails at 60 kilometers per hour. Nuclear propulsion is driven by two OK-65V reactors, and its crew is made up of 120 people. At the same time, the Belgorod can carry a medium-sized Losharik submarine with a length of 60 meters under the hull. Putin has said that the Belgorod is the most powerful weapon in the Russian arsenal, but in NATO there are doubts about this. They estimate that it could test the launch of a non-nuclear missile in the Arctic. That is, trying to advance their threat, but avoiding precipitating nuclear war.

The United Nations Security Council voted to condemn Russia's annexation of the four separatist regions of Ukraine. In the first place, it ignored the

referendums, considering that they had been carried out under pressure, that is, forcing people to vote under threat of the use of force. Second, it condemned the annexation of a foreign territory by Russia. The Security Council is made up of five countries that are permanent members and have veto power over decisions. These are the victors of World War II: the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China. The other ten members are elected periodically on a regional basis and do not have the right to veto. Three of the five permanent members voted to condemn Russia, all except Russia - which exercised the right to veto and took away the effect of the vote - and China, which abstained. Three other countries did the same: India, Brazil and Ghana, which are rotating members. It should be noted that four of the five powers of the BRICS group that make up the Council, which are Brazil, Russia, India and China (South Africa is part of the group, but not the Security Council) did not vote against Russia. But perhaps most importantly, India, which voted this way, is the world's largest democracy, with more than 700 million voters, which is a larger electorate than all NATO countries combined. Brazil, which is the third largest electorate in the West and has just had the first round of its presidential election, also voted this way. This calls into question the Western idea that democracies are pro-Ukrainian and those in another position are third world dictatorships.

In conclusion: faced with the advance of Ukrainian troops in the territories annexed by Russia, Putin responds by ratifying the possible use of nuclear weapons. There are several signs that he has given in this regard, which in turn have been confirmed and repeated by his chancellor, the President of the National Security Council and the pro-Russian leader of Chechnya; but the sailing of the Belgorod nuclear submarine through the Arctic, armed with atomic missiles and which Putin considers the most powerful weapon in his arsenal, is perhaps the most concrete threat. Finally, the UN Security Council ignored the referendums carried out by Russia in the separatist areas of Ukraine, but China, India and Brazil did not.