

ONE YEAR AFTER THE UKRAINE INVASION WITH NO SOLUTION IN SIGHT

Rosendo Fraga

Director of CARI's Foreign Relations and Armed Forces Committee

The possibility of peace in Ukraine receded, at the end of the first year of the invasion. From the West's point of view, while Biden refused to give multirole fighters to Ukraine, he stated that the Zelensky government would be given all the support it needed to win the war within the next year, rather a contradictory statement to Ukrainian eyes. Over the past two weeks, both US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and CIA Director William Burns have publicly maintained that they had information that China was preparing to deliver, directly or indirectly, lethal weapons to Russia. This would imply a substantial change in the position of Beijing, which has maintained its economic relationship with Russia unaltered during the conflict, but was careful not to provide lethal military material. The US intelligence information was neither confirmed nor denied by anyone except for China. In the days following the anniversary, military actions intensified. Russia attacked with the so-called "suicide drones" against dozens of strategic points in Ukraine. In turn, it responded with similar weapons that reached Russian territory and even 100 kilometers from Moscow. For his part, President Zelensky acknowledged that the situation around the city of Bakhmut is becoming critical. It is a strategic point that has acquired symbolic value due to the months of combat that have taken place around it.

On December 21, Henry Kissinger published in *The Spectator* a concrete proposal with a road map to resume diplomacy as an instrument against the war in Ukraine. Specifically, he claimed that both sides had to accept geopolitical realities that had arisen with the war. He argued that Sweden's and Finland's request for NATO membership and their alliance with Ukraine had rendered Russia's claim that NATO not reach its borders unfeasible. Likewise, Moscow's request that Ukraine be "neutralized" from a military point of view was no longer possible. He maintained that Ukraine was going to have to accept that Crimea and the part of Donbass that Russia occupied before the invasion, was not going to be recovered. He then proposed the return of the troops of both parties to the point where they were on February 24, 2022. Regarding the part of

Donbass occupied by Russia after that date -between 3 and 4% of the Ukrainian territory- it had to be put under control and eventually submit it to a referendum with international supervision if the population of this area wanted to belong to Ukraine or Russia. Kissinger's proposal added that the West would have to accept that Russia was still a nuclear power. It was not a proposal nor debated, discussed or refuted, but was ignored. In order for all this proposal to be carried out now, a new version of the Start III nuclear control treaty would have been necessary -which Russia has just abandoned-, in order to recognize the role of this country as a nuclear power.

The 12 points of the peace proposal presented by China were rejected by the United States and the European Union, without noticing -as Zelensky did- that Beijing's change in attitude had to be registered. The US government's position was clear: it discarded the proposal - called the "Peace Plan" - because it avoided condemning the Russian invasion. He did it without further explanation. Russia, according to the presidential spokesman, noted that "great attention" needs to be paid to the proposal, but that its details will take a long time and must be scrutinized. The Ukrainian authorities, after an initial rejection, stated through Zelensky himself that the proposal is "a positive change" due to "the fact that China is addressing the conflict." It should be noted that the Beijing proposal contemplates, in addition to the ceasefire, the opening of negotiations, the exchange of prisoners, the protection of nuclear power plants and a lifting of unilateral sanctions. According to Western experts, the Chinese proposal - presented on the same day as the anniversary of the invasion - clearly sees the conflict in Ukraine as a product of what it calls a "cold war mentality" and of an "outdated security architecture in Europe". But in the NATO countries it generated only rejections. The White House Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan, said that the proposal should have remained in the first two lines: "respect the sovereignty of countries." For his part, President Biden argued that "the war could end tomorrow if Russia stops attacking Ukraine and withdraws its forces." The US position also held that the Chinese proposal was invalid as it put the two parties to the conflict on an equal footing in their responsibility.

Meanwhile, the demand for Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine obtained 141 votes in favor in the UN Assembly, confirming the position taken by the international community a year ago. On March 2, 2022, a week after the

Russian invasion of Ukraine, the UN Assembly voted to condemn the invasion by 141 votes in favor, 35 abstentions and 5 votes against. Twenty-two days later, on March 24, a motion was voted to demand that Russia withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory. The votes in favor dropped to 140 (one vote less), the abstentions went from 35 to 38, and the negative votes remained exactly the same, at 5. The Asian nuclear powers (China, India and Pakistan) once again demonstrated for the abstention, major countries in Asia (such as Vietnam and Bangladesh), Africa (South Africa), and the Middle East (Iran). The G7 countries - which are all NATO members except Japan - and the European Union were once again the core of the condemnation, which dragged dozens of countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia, with the argument of preserving the value of the sovereignty. The day before one year after the invasion, on February 23, 2023, a motion was presented condemning Russia and demanding the withdrawal of its troops. It obtained 141 votes in favor, 32 abstentions and only 7 votes against, practically the same result as at the beginning of the conflict. It shows that there are clearly three positions: those who support Ukraine, those who condemn the invasion but do not join the economic sanctions, and those who neither condemn the invasion nor support the economic sanctions. The three mentioned UN votes express the sum of the first two positions. The refusal to join the economic sanctions takes place and more than 75% of the countries have not supported them.

In conclusion: one year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the chances of peace are receding. Kissinger presented a "road map" on December 21 for peace in this conflict, which was ignored. The "Peace Plan" presented by China on February 24 was flatly rejected by Western countries, but Zelensky, like Russia, recognized its importance, with different arguments. Lastly, the vote on February 23 in the UN Assembly showed that the rejection of the invasion was confirmed by 141 votes, exactly the same number as at the beginning of the war.