

THE WAR IN UKRAINE, THREE MONTHS AND COUNTING **(duration, dissemination, trends, nuclear and imponderable events)**

Rosendo Fraga

Director of CARI's Foreign Relations and Armed Forces Committee

Halfway through the third month of the war in Ukraine, the duration of the war is prolonged. It is not surprising. A month before the invasion, President Biden publicly said that if Russia entered Ukraine, there would be a long war of attrition like in Afghanistan in the 1980s. For his part, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson argued at the same time that Putin would face a "Greater Chechnya" if he invaded Ukraine. These statements are not too far from the situation that exists today in the theater of operations. Now, the US President - explained by his Defense Minister, Austin - has said that the war will continue until Russia loses its ability to re-invade a country, as it has done with Ukraine, and that this will require prolonged military assistance to this country. In turn, the British Prime Minister gave an accurate forecast: he said that the war would last until the end of 2023. On the other hand, the forecasts that Russia would develop a war on the successful models experienced with in Chechnya and Syria have been confirmed. What happens in the siege of Mariupol resembles the destruction of Grozny, the Chechen capital, which lasted four months, and the fighting for Aleppo, the main city of Syria, which lasted for four years and in which Russian forces played a decisive role. To reorganize his troops in Ukraine, Putin chose the general who commanded operations in support of the Assad regime.

As for the trend of the conflict, it is assumed that a less globalized world will emerge from this war, more nationalistic and with very weak rules of the game. Globalization has regressed to levels unthinkable for many until days before the war. The fight for gas is an example of this. During the first two months of the war, 71% of the gas Russia sold was destined to the European Union. The independence of this supply is key to trying to turn the course of the war in favor of NATO, without whose support Ukraine cannot sustain it. As the conflict progresses, alternative modes of international payments are emerging that weaken the dollar as the world's reserve currency. Financial rules have been broken to punish Russian oligarchs. So far it is a war geographically limited to the Ukrainian territory. But at the same time, a world economic war is taking

place, with the Western alliance and its allies showing their determination to finish off the Russian leader, who is resolved to maintain the existence of his country - backed by the "for Russia" neutrality of the Shanghai Group (China, India, Pakistan, Russia and the countries of Central Asia)-, and a group of medium-sized powers from Asia, Africa and Latin America that, although they condemn the invasion, do not participate in the economic sanctions or in the war effort in favor of Ukraine.

This situation is creating a world that economically begins to regionalize. The rejection in the West of the cultural expressions of Russia is another manifestation of the aforementioned deglobalization. Nationalism has once again become a value that not only defines policies, but also the decision to go to war. The Geneva Conventions that tried to regulate war conflicts before the World War have become non-existent. The risk of the war spreading geographically beyond Ukraine's borders grows as the war drags on. There have been Ukrainian attacks on Russian territory from the eastern border of Kyiv. The British Prime Minister stated that Ukraine has the right to attack the territory of Russia. At the same time, Moscow's warnings are growing that it could attack Ukraine's military equipment supply centers in neighboring NATO countries. Putin's strategic objective of leaving Ukraine without a seacoast increases the possibility that Moldova, where there is an autonomous pro-Russian zone, will be drawn into the conflict.

The eventual incorporation of Sweden and Finland into NATO would increase Russia's border with this military alliance by 1,300 kilometers and that increases the risk of extension. Until now, NATO has maintained its strategy of avoiding military involvement in the conflict. But it remains determined to do so if one of its 30 member countries were to be attacked militarily, and that is the greatest risk: precipitating a direct war between NATO and Russia. This could even happen because of miscalculations and not because of a deliberate decision to extend the geographical scope of the war. In this case, all of Europe, the United States and Canada, as well as Russia, would be involved.

The risk of the use of nuclear weapons by Russia grows as it assumes partial failures. You cannot predict who will win the war. It is the phenomenon most subject to chance, circumstances and unforeseen events, even more than politics. But you can predict Putin's personality: he will always double down.

The assumption is that he will use tactical nuclear weapons on specifically delimited targets and with a controlled shock wave. Faced with this risk, NATO would only respond with an escalation if one of the 30 member countries were reached. For Putin, this situation will occur if the existence of the Russian state is at risk.

The Russian leader contemplates that NATO's decision to attack his country until it no longer has the capacity to invade, may lead to imposing a division of its territory into several separate countries and demilitarization. This is the kind of situation that could lead Putin to use nuclear weapons. The one who has made this intention explicit is the President of the Russian Security Council, the former President and firm ally of Putin, Dimitri Medvedev. The nuclear arsenal is the weapon system in which Putin is strongest against NATO. Finally, there are the imponderable events, which can often decide the outcome of wars. Those situations that cannot be foreseen or make an accurate calculation of probabilities. One example is Putin's health. He may be an irreplaceable leader. His absence could generate unforeseen scenarios today. Cyber weapons have not yet been widely used and their use could generate different situations, such as the paralysis of the functioning of states. The same thing happens with chemical weapons in terms of the consequences of their use. Putin being overthrown within his own country is possible, but unlikely, due to the authoritarian exercise of power, together with Russia's wartime history and culture. But the imponderable events are usually the consequence of miscalculations and unwanted situations. Counterfactual history gives numerous examples. What would have happened if Germany had the nuclear bomb before the United States in World War II? This could have happened and surely the result of the war would have been different.

In conclusion: the war in Ukraine is heading to last long, as the western leaders had anticipated, and based on the notion of the Russian military action of not hurrying. A trend of a less globalized world is emerging, a more nationalistic one, and with greater regionalization, a more relevant military role and a generalized breach of rules. The spread of the conflict to NATO grows as the war continues and this can even happen due to miscalculations. The risk of Putin resorting to tactical nuclear weapons grows as his military goals become unattainable and the “existence” of the Russian state is at risk. Finally, the imponderable events such as Putin's health or the consequences of the use of

cybernetic or chemical weapons can create unforeseen scenarios that cannot be calculated today.