

## **WESTERN LEADERS IN THE UKRAINE CONFLICT**

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Compared to World War II, the leadership of NATO in its most difficult moment since 1945 lacks the knowledge of history and war experience of its predecessors. US President Joe Biden has not written about history and this has not been an area or discipline of his particular interest. For chronological reasons he has had no military experience, although he was contemporary to the Vietnam War. Boris Johnson has frequently quoted Churchill, but has no history papers or articles about him. Neither does French President Emmanuel Macron, but he seems to have a conception of the "meaning of history." When, a few months after assuming his first term, a journalist who was interviewing him for the German newspaper Der Spiegel asked him "What does it feel like to live at the Élysée?" Macron replied, "When you think that Napoleon I lived here, Napoleon III and De Gaulle, one feels that it is a link in the historical chain of France". Faced with this, critics of the French President often recall that two years ago, at the Annual Summit of Heads of State and Government of NATO, he erroneously diagnosed the "brain death" of the Atlantic alliance.

Kissinger's remarks at Davos went against what is "politically correct" in the West in 2022, regarding the Ukraine war. Few voices have managed to make themselves heard in the academic and intellectual sphere, warning about the risks that the world is facing at this time. There seems to be no aptitude for debates and discussions on the subject. Intellectual opinion seems to be ruled by the position that drags societies into war. In particular, diplomacy has been militarized. A very capable politician, such as the socialist Josep Borrell, in charge of the European Union's foreign relations, has said that "now the important thing is the weapon systems on the battlefield". The diplomacy of the NATO countries has been more focused on arguing why it is not possible to negotiate, than on looking for alternatives to do so. Only one NATO country has made efforts and gained some achievements in this field: Turkey. The only Muslim country of the 30 that make up the military alliance and that geopolitically belongs to both Europe and Asia. President Erdogan maintains direct dialogue with both Putin and Zelensky, has achieved the reopening of maritime traffic for cereals produced by Ukraine, and is actively working for a

meeting between Putin and Zelensky, while continuing to sell drones to the Ukrainian government.

The president of Turkey, Recep Erdogan, beyond his authoritarianism, takes action according to a "sense of history". Part of the confrontation of the Turkish Empire with Europe since the fifteenth century shifted in the Crimean War with Turkey's alliance with the Anglo-French axis against Russia, recognizing the strategic error of having joined the central empires in the First World War and the success of neutrality in the Second, which allowed for the particular situation from which it benefits in the third decade of the 21st century. But his achievements have not been appreciated in the West, and the US government spokesmen have accused Turkey of helping Russia evade economic sanctions ordered by NATO and the European Union. He has taken advantage of his situation to gain positions in several of the conflicts that particularly interest him. He supported the advance of Azerbaijan - a country of Turkish origin that is an ally - against Armenia - one of Russia's five military allies within the framework of the CSTO - without Russia reacting as in the recent past (2021). He also advanced in Syria against the Kurdish militias that are on the border, which he considers allies of the insurgency of this ethnic group in Turkish territory. Within NATO, he has opposed the incorporation of Sweden and Finland, preventing the Western military alliance from achieving major success by extending its border with Russia by more than 1,000 kilometers.

Although Turkey's strategic role in Russia's conflict with Ukraine is particular, it highlights the greater degree of autonomy that the "middle powers" have in this new scenario. It can be said that it has generated three different positions. On the one hand, the 30 NATO countries, plus their allies in the Indo-Pacific and some others totaling 46 nations, that support Ukraine's military actions. On the other, Russia's allies, represented by the Shanghai Group, as well as the countries participating in the Voks exercise that will take place in the first week of September in the territories of Siberia, as is the case with China. Thirdly, there are a number of countries that have condemned the invasion of Ukraine, but have not joined the economic sanctions on Russia imposed by NATO and the EU. This is the case in Africa with Egypt in the Saharan region, Nigeria in the sub-Saharan region and South Africa in the extreme south of the continent. In the Arab world, the Gulf monarchies led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have also avoided joining economic sanctions. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand have done the same, without breaking military

ties with the West. In Latin America, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina have maintained a similar position.

In conclusion: NATO's leadership in the conflict with Russia through Ukraine lacks the experience and military knowledge that its predecessors had in World War II. With little military experience but great knowledge of international relations, Kissinger has exposed a "politically incorrect" position, criticizing the leadership mentioned. There have been practically no strong attempts by the West to find a diplomatic solution to the war between Russia and Ukraine, only Turkey has done so with some success (cereal exports). Finally, although it is a particular case, it highlights the greater autonomy that this conflict has given to the intermediate regional powers in Asia, Africa and Latin America.