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"The European Union has miscalculated as much or more than Putin"

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15 January, 2023



It's been almost a year since Russia invaded Ukraine, but experts in international relations claim that the conflict between these two countries originated much earlier. Where would you place its beginning?

In the false closure of the cold war. In the early nineties it was agreed that the Soviet withdrawal from the Central European space, the dissolution of the Warsaw

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Pact and German reunification, would end the logic of military blocs in Europe. The general understanding was that all this would not be used to expand the adverse bloc, but that was what happened over the next twenty-five years. Instead of the "integrated continental security" signed in the Charter of Paris for the new Europe of November 1990, European security broke through first without Russia and then against Russia. NATO was not dissolved and today stands alongside Russia's borders creating the tensions that justify its existence.



La Puerta de Brandeburgo, el 3 de noviembre de 1990, día de la Reunificación de Alemania.

Obviamente las responsabilidades de este disparate se reparten entre todos los protagonistas, pero la principal es de Estados Unidos, que no quería perder su dominio político-militar en Europa sin el cual su potencia global se resentía considerablemente. En segundo lugar, una Unión Europea (UE) germanocéntrica que se ha demostrado geopolíticamente analfabeta e impotente. En tercer lugar, el grupo dirigente ruso que en los noventa primero fue demasiado optimista con Gorbachov por confiar en la buena voluntad de sus interlocutores, luego se centró con Yeltsin en la privatización del patrimonio nacional sobre cualquier otra consideración, hasta que Putin empezó a ordenar las cosas recuperando intereses nacionales rusos y chocando por ello cada vez más con un Occidente que solo preveía un papel subordinado y subalterno para Rusia.



All this has a long chronology and an outcome with the regime change in Kiev in the winter of 2014 to which Russia responded by annexing Crimea. Since then, that false closure of a quarter of a century ago has been decided militarily. The Ukrainian army that in 2014 was a birria was armed and financed intensively by NATO since then with the aim of beating Russia, recovering Crimea and imposing with forceps a national anti-Russian narrative on the majority of the Russian-speaking Ukrainian population that did not agree with it and that led to a civil war in the east of the country from the summer of 2014. All this is a long and complex story, full of shadows on both sides. Instead what they explain to us is a Hollywood children's script: in Russia there is a bad tsar who wants to recreate the USSR at the expense of the "Europe of values", "democracy against autocracy" and other stories. This is what usually happens in wars and in the pulses between powers that they present as stories of good and bad.

The stories about the war have three clear protagonists: Vladimir Putin, Joe Biden and Volodimir Zelenski. The portrait of each of them changes depending on its author. In your opinion, what are the roles they play in this story?

In general, personalities count for little. That's another aspect of the children's script that we're fed with. Putin and his autocratic regime were in decline in 2021. His neoliberal pension reform created an unprecedented wave of protest. Its geographical environment, from Belarus to Kazakhstan, experienced significant social upheavals. There is also the problem of succession in a system that ignores electoral rotation and has hardly any division of powers like the low-intensity democracies of the West. A short victorious war before the military setback in Crimea that Ukraine was preparing with the help of NATO matured, solved some of those things. He has found that the matter is more complicated

than anticipated. I did not expect such a strong reaction from the Ukrainian population in defense of their sovereignty, nor such strong support from Washington and the European Union. In fact, his army entered Ukraine with few troops and without hitting hard. He believed that the Ukrainian regime would fall apart... But myopia has been widespread. The West believed its sanctions would ruin Russia and weaken Putin.



So far, that has not happened. The European Union has miscalculated as much or more than Putin and the war has turned him into a vassal of the United States that has even burst the German gas pipelines in the Baltic, without anyone mentioning it. Germany is covering itself with glory with the most incompetent political generation since the postwar period. With all his erratic senility, Biden is more coherent: he wants to weaken Russia – some still dream of its territorial dismemberment – and alleviate the slow but inexorable decline of its world power in the face of the rise of new actors, with China in the first place, who previously counted for nothing. Subduing Russia is important in that general context, but the internal situation in the United States is also confusing and uncertain... The simple reality is that all the actors involved in this war are exposed to major internal convulsions, but without a doubt, it is Ukraine that has the worst numbers. Zelenski won the elections with 70% of the vote with the promise of integrating a country regionally very divided in its identities and resolving the Donbas conflict via an understanding with Russia, but pushed by anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalism that then only embraced 30% of its population but dominated since 2014 the structures of the State and by the great Western powers, He turned completely. The most radical sectors threatened to "hang him from a tree" if he negotiated with the Eastern separatists supported by Moscow. Today they have made him a media star, but there may come a time when he is imprisoned by his

own role and any negotiated solution to the conflict, if Washington so decides, will have to settle with his displacement of power in favor of a military junta.



Comedian Zelensky wins presidency in Ukraine: Volodymyr Zelensky from TV star to president of Ukraine

Putin has accused the Kiev government of harbouring neo-Nazi groups and helping them persecute 'pro-Russian' Ukrainian citizens on numerous occasions. Are these assertions true?

It is evident that there is a strong repression, with physical elimination of "traitors", against those who do not agree with the government line. The US press has mentioned the phenomenon in the territories that the Ukrainian army recaptured in the autumn. In Kiev, those who did not agree with the government's views have had to remain silent, their parties have been banned, their media outlets closed, and many renowned analysts have disappeared from the scene. There are imprisoned opponents. I don't think the situation is very different from what they tell us about Russia in great detail. In Ukraine there are also tens of thousands of defectors with more than 12,000 detainees trying to cross the border illegally to leave the country, according to an official Ukrainian report last week. And that's in a country where it's even easier than Russia to buy a military exemption. In March there were more than 400,000 men of military age in Poland. There are many reasonable people with no enthusiasm for dying for the fatherland. And the same thing happens in Russia. These people on both sides who don't want to be cannon fodder, have my full sympathy and should be supported. With regard to neo-Nazis, it is true that in the radical nationalist ideology of Western Ukraine there is an open vindication of the Ukrainian F Nazis who made common cause with Hitler in World War II and with the CIA in the Cold

War. Throughout the country there are hundreds of monuments, streets and memorials to these people, including postage stamps, although very few of those tributes are in south-eastern Ukraine. That ideology has representation in military units and security services, but from that to define the Ukrainian regime as "Nazi" there is an absolutely disproportionate leap that Russian propaganda practices to sell its own justifying story. Ukraine does not have a "Nazi regime", but neoliberal, pro-occidental and clearly dependent on its American and European protectors and supporters.



The leaders of the two nations accuse each other of committing crimes against international law. The massacre perpetrated by the invading forces in Bucha or the murder of Russian prisoners by Ukrainian militias are not isolated events. Are measures being taken to combat these acts?

I do not know the reality on the ground and I distrust, from experience, the journalistic chronicle that already played it on us in the Balkans by emphasizing the crimes of one side and silencing the others, and staging false massacres such as that of Rachak, in Kosovo, but I am sure that there have been crimes in Ukraine. The Russian invasion itself was already a crime, all the circumstances that led to it and provoked it from the West, are also a crime. Crimes are inherent in every war. Regarding the measures that can be taken, the key question is who will judge? I don't see "international justice" with credibility. In the arc that goes from Afghanistan to Libya, passing through Iraq, Yemen, Somalia and Syria, the Western side has more than three million dead, between direct and indirect, and some forty million displaced, as well as entire societies destroyed and countries razed, according to the calculation "*Cost of War*" of the Brown University of the United States. Do they

have the authority to denounce Russian barbarity in Ukraine? Putin's crimes are credible as long as they are put on the side of those of the Bushes, Obamas, Clinton, Biden, etc., otherwise we are facing the usual fraud. At the moment the *really existing* Western justice has kept Julian Assange imprisoned for ten years for denouncing these Western crimes and they want to extradite him to the United States to try him without guarantees and sentence him to 150 years in prison. Let's be serious.



In your article Resigned to a Long War, you assert that Brazil's President Lula da Silva is the man who could act as an intermediary to agree on a ceasefire and lasting peace. Why? Because unlike leaders like Angela Merkel and François Hollande, who have recognized that the Minsk peace agreements, negotiated since 2015 between Russia and Ukraine with the mediation of France and Germany, were nothing more than a screen to gain time and go armed to Ukraine, Lula does have credibility in the true "international community". Which is not that small club of Western countries that usually arrogates the name. Lula was the architect of the nuclear agreement with Iran from which the United States withdrew. Like the majority of the true international community, which has voted at the UN against the Russian invasion but also against sanctions against Russia, Lula knows that the responsibilities for this war are shared. He knows that behind the war in Ukraine there is a struggle to eliminate Russia and weaken China, which are essential counterweights to the West on the world stage. In addition, Lula has an extremely complicated internal situation, we have seen it in the last Bolsonaroist assault on the institutions in Brasilia. He does not have as many resources to distribute income as he had in his previous mandate, he has a powerful extreme right in front of him, so international

action can be the catalyst for his 'own internal consolidation. Ukraine may be its great external challenge. There are few personalities in the world with credibility to mediate this war. Lula is the first of them.



Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (L) and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

From how the Western media portrays the situation, it seems that the military initiative is now in the hands of Kiev-controlled forces. Despite this, there are certain experts in the field who question the relevance of his latest attacks. Who do you think is right?

I don't think the Ukrainians have the initiative or that they are winning this war as our propaganda claims. I believe that right now, this week, Ukrainians are suffering horrible casualties, numbering 100,000 since the beginning of the conflict, as the incompetent President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, escaped. The artillery and industrial superiority of the Russians is overwhelming. Nor do I think that the Ukrainian counteroffensive of autumn was as important as it was sold in our press. It seems to me that there was a fairly orderly Russian withdrawal and that since then the whole strategy of the Russian army has been reconsidered. The fact is that the Russians have conquered 100,000 square kilometers of the 600,000 that Ukraine has. Does that mean they're winning? I don't think so either. It remains to be seen if there is a Russian winter offensive and what results it has, but the impression is that this is a war without winners, in which the Ukrainian population is paying a terrible bill for Russian aggression, the irresponsibility of its leaders and the use of the whole situation made by the West, with the United States in the first place.



Another issue is that of refugees. According to the Interior Ministry, Spain has granted more than 160,000 temporary protections for those fleeing war. With 22,963 statutes processed, the Community of Madrid is one of the most involved in the reception. What is the situation in which these people find themselves?

I don't know.

The money and war material that Europe and the US are sending to Zelenski are not infinite either, as Enrique Figueredo explained in the daily edition of La Vanguardia on October 21. Could peace be forced if the arms industry decides to turn off its taps?

The arms industry will never turn off a tap that gives it money. The question is political. One of the problems, particularly in the United States, is that this industry, the military-industrial complex, rules a lot politically, finances the main laboratories of ideas from which, by the way, our journalists drink, and of course it is not interested in cutting that vein. Peace is difficult because no one can lose face. Anything short of maintaining the regions conquered by Russia and which Moscow has declared annexed as part of its territory, namely Crimea, Donbas, Zaporozhie and Kherson, will be seen as failure in Russia. And a failure means for the Kremlin the risk of regime bankruptcy, as happened in 1905 with the Russo-Japanese War and then in 1917 with the debacle of the First World War that opened the door to revolution. So the Russian ruling group will fight to the end to avoid that bankruptcy scenario. On the other hand, anything resembling a Russian victory is unacceptable to the United States, because it would show its weakness and decline. In the European Union, which counts very little, there are a whole series of members like Poland or the Baltics capable of any military madness if there is a green light from Washington. The situation is very dangerous. At best, it could settle into a frozen conflict,

a kind of Korean-style armistice, rather than a real peace agreement. At worst there is an obvious nuclear risk.

Russia and China have worked ever more closely together in recent years to beat the common enemy. However, they have also had problems with each other in the recent past. To what extent do you think they are willing to cooperate with each other?

The rapprochement between Russia and China has been forged by the common policy of harassment and hostility received from Washington. At the beginning of the century, at the beginning of Putin's term and with Jiang Zemin in China, both countries preferred an understanding of each of them with the United States to the current alliance. It has been U.S. policy that has brought them together. Both Russia and China have been surrounded by a belt of military bases and infrastructure and put economic pressure on them, lately with harsh sanctions. Common mistreatment is what has united Russia and China. A more skillful Washington policy would have tried to win Russia against China, but that required recognition of Russian interests in Eurasia and exploiting the mutual distrust of both countries, but instead Washington has pushed them closer to their relations. Today Russia is already too important for China and the war in Ukraine has brought them even closer. Not only has the West failed to get China to join the sanctions against Russia, but Moscow and Beijing have significantly increased their trade and political relations. Beijing understands that if Russia falls, China will be subject to concentrated economic and military pressure against it. U.S. policy toward increasingly belligerent Taiwan suggests in Beijing an analogy with Ukraine. So both countries maintain a common purpose of gradually disengaging from the dependence on the dollar and Western technology that is denied them via embargoes and sanctions. Something similar is happening with other large emerging countries that are approaching a non-Western pole more or less led by China, or, rather, that the Chinese economic power makes possible.

The US and EU are backing Ukraine against Russia in Europe, but they also don't lose sight of the Far East. They see China as a serious threat...



China is the only power that has an alternative plan for the future for the world, based first and foremost on Eurasian integration, from Shanghai to Lisbon. On that great landmass, the United States is geographically absent, so breaking that purpose is a fundamental axis of Washington's policy. The war in Ukraine must also be seen from that point of view. The conflict, the division of Europe, now on the Dnieper, breaks the channels of commercial and energy transport that China is charting in its integrative purpose. The attack, obviously American, against the German-Russian gas pipelines in the Baltic, is the event that best portrays the situation. Europe is being involved, via NATO, in a conflict with its main energy partner, Russia, and with its main trading partner, China. The strategic stupidity of the European Union, with Germany at the centre, is unheard of. Regarding the "Chinese threat" it seems to me a myth. I don't think China intends to "dominate the world." The problem is that its dynamic strengthening threatens those who have dominated the world for the past two hundred years. Westerners only conceive of a world of conflicts, of winners and losers, dominant and dominated, but if our world has a future, it is imperative to change that mentality and cooperate to face the challenges of the century, that is: global warming, social and regional inequality, overpopulation and the proliferation of resources of mass destruction, among others. It may be that a Western decline and a greater weight of China in the world will improve things somewhat for that necessary change of mentality to which I have referred, but nothing is certain.



The Asian 'giant' has been claiming from the international community its right of sovereignty over the island of Taiwan for decades. Do you think Putin's entry into Ukraine may tempt President Xi Jinping to regain the key that closes its mainland shores to the South China Sea and the East China Sea?

It is not that China "claims", but that the UN and even the United States and the European Union recognize that Taiwan is part of China, the so-called "one China" principle. That is why Taiwan is not a member of the UN or considered a country. The United States and China restored relations on that principle, but in recent years Washington is taking steps that call into question that consensus established in the seventies, which gives rise to military tensions in the strait. Every month or month and a half there is direct military contact between Chinese and US naval and air units in the South China Sea. It is a constant provocation against China and it is dangerous because, although no one wants it, it is easy for a military incident to degenerate into conflict. That said, I don't think China is going to start an invasion of Taiwan. Chinese politics is of much higher quality than Russia's.

There seem to have been very important movements in the international order over the past decade. Spain is particularly affected by the controversial issue surrounding Western Sahara, Morocco and Algeria. What is the response to President Sánchez's acceptance of the Moroccan autonomy plan?

For me it is inexplicable unless the United States has pressured Sánchez in an unappealable way. Without this, the clumsiness of deteriorating relations with Algeria is incomprehensible, the greater the dependence on gas. Not to mention the moral part of the matter, of abandoning the Saharawis.

Rafael Poch de Feliu, for La Pluma

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