

## **FOUR MONTHS INTO THE INVASION OF UKRAINE**

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Four months after the invasion of Ukraine, many of the initial forecasts turned out to be unsuccessful, as is the case of the cell phone as a substantial key in the war. It was argued that it was going to be the first war in which everyone was going to experience it virtually, with broad and direct access to the events. The argument was that people, with their cell phones, were going to record the events and situations live, through social media, and broadcast globally. In other words, a multitude of spontaneous correspondents on the ground was going to generate simultaneity in the transmission of information. There have been very few images of war actions captured by cell phones and disseminated on social media. The photos that account for the events of war resemble those of 80 years ago, in World War II. They focus on the consequences of the war and not on the development itself. The buildings destroyed by the bombs, the corpses and the dismantled vehicles have been the most widespread images. The fighters themselves appear to have made little use of phones to film operations. From a certain point of view, it seems like a step backwards. Half a century ago, during the Vietnam War, American television broadcast live war actions. The audiovisual media had surpassed the print media in the dissemination of war actions. From this perspective, the war in Ukraine seems more like a return to the past than a scenario of change towards the future. A quarter of a century after the end of World War II, the mass of helicopters in Vietnam showed a substantial change in the way of waging war. Half a century has passed since then and the images of Ukraine are more similar to those of the siege of Stalingrad.

The cybernetic front was considered one of the central battlefields in this conflict and it has not been so. The great technological changes that took place after the fall of the Wall had generated a new scenario for military actions added to land, sea and air operations. The ability that the Russian intelligence services demonstrated to operate in this new sphere, whether to obtain information, disseminate it or block their opponents' systems, had generated the impression that it was going to be a central sphere for the development of Putin's operations. The paralysis of the cybernetic networks of the Estonian government

at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is usually taken as the initial event of this type of conflict.

By the beginning of its third decade, hackers linked to the intelligence services of the countries used this type of tool for political-strategic objectives, while private groups used it for organized crime. But the reality is that no relevant actions have taken place in the last 4 months in the cyber field. They have been more propaganda channels than instruments used in the military conflict itself. In early March, a Pentagon spokesman said that if Russia used the cyber weapon against any of NATO's 30 countries, it would be considered military aggression under the terms of Article 5 of its treaty, which binds all country members to militarily defend any of them who is attacked. Not only have relevant cyber actions not been evidenced, but neither have they been the subject of debate or discussion. It is clear that communications have been a central objective of Western intelligence services and that this has been a relevant instrument for obtaining information, but not in the field of operations. On the contrary, the nuclear weapon, which was seen as of distant and improbable use, was at the center of the conflict as a possibility of use by Putin. He made public his decision to put Russian nuclear weapons systems on alert. The doctrine of the use of Russia's nuclear weapon was disseminated, which contemplates its use when the "existence of the Russian state" is at risk. The use of the nuclear weapon was present, as well as a possibility of employment by Moscow from the beginning of the invasion. Western intelligence services made it known that the Russian armed forces' nuclear weapons were not ready for use. But tests of new Russian weapons have shown the ability to hit targets at long ranges, including US territory.

Hypersonic missiles and their combination with aerial and ground means were a signal from Putin of his decision to use these weapon systems if necessary. In NATO, in the event of facing defeat, the possibility of Putin resorting to nuclear weapons increases. In the case of Ukraine, a counterfactual scenario was raised: what would have happened if Kyiv had not handed over its nuclear weapons after the fall of the Wall? It should be remembered that at that time it was the third country in the world for its arsenal of nuclear warheads. He handed them all over against an assurance from the US, UK and Russia that their territorial sovereignty would not be threatened. But when the occupation of Crimea took place, the United States and the United Kingdom did not react, failing to fulfill

their commitment. But at the same time, in the statements of the NATO leaders, there were details that correctly anticipated what was going to happen. On January 24, exactly one month before the invasion, US President Joe Biden, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said separately but concurrently that if Russia invaded Ukraine, it was going to suffer unprecedented economic and financial isolation, a general scientific-technological disconnection, and an asymmetric war in this country. They made this explicit with the case of the war in Chechnya, which in two stages and over a decade and a half, generated a very large cost in lives, equipment and money for Russia.

The idea that a prolonged conflict was going to "bleed" Russia "out" was a clear and compelling message. Four months later, there has been neither the Ukrainian collapse that many initially foresaw, nor the Russian defeat that was predicted after the first setbacks of the invading troops. Now, on June 17, the British Prime Minister and the Secretary General of NATO have, coincidentally, said that the Ukraine war will last for years, both stating that the West, and in particular the NATO countries, should prepare to sustain the Ukrainian war effort for an extended period of time. This is the view that seems to predominate when the NATO Summit meets in Madrid, but at the same time European opinions regarding sustaining the prolonged conflict are divided by its political and economic costs and this is felt at the European Union Summit.

In conclusion: the idea that the invasion of Ukraine was going to be the first war that was going to be experienced through people's films using cell phones, was not fulfilled; nor has the idea that the cyber field was going to be a central theater of operations been confirmed, despite the great technological changes that have taken place after the fall of the Wall. Instead, the nuclear weapon, which was not foreseen as an immediate threat, was placed by Putin at the center of the conflict from its initial days. Finally, the forecasts of the NATO leaders regarding the characteristics and duration of the war have been correct, although they are more a consequence of their decisions than of their analysis.