

MOUNTING TENSIONS IN THE RUSSIA-NATO CONFLICT

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Putin and Xi met in Uzbekistan on the sidelines of the annual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). It was the Chinese President's first trip abroad since the pandemic and the first meeting between the two since the invasion of Ukraine. The meeting had this conflict as a backdrop. The Russian President thanked his Chinese counterpart for his "balanced position" in the conflict between Russia and NATO. Xi responded by saying that "China wants to work with Russia to strongly support each other's core interests and deepen cooperation in trade, agriculture and other fields." He also ratified the alliance between the two countries, signaling his willingness to work with Russia as "great powers," saying China wants to "inject stability and positive energy into a chaotic world." Putin added that "attempts to create a unipolar world have recently been deformed and are absolutely unacceptable to most states on the planet." China has not openly backed the invasion of Ukraine, but has developed economic and strategic ties with Russia during this conflict, expressing support for the "sovereignty and security" of the Eurasian giant. Putin, in turn, emphasized that "for our part, we adhere to a one-China principle. We condemn the provocation of the United States and its satellites in the Taiwan Strait", expressing its purpose of achieving the "global strengthening of the SCO" and claimed "to be sure that the meeting will contribute to strengthening the Russian-Chinese partnership". The difficulties Putin faces in Ukraine weaken him against China and make him more dependent on Xi, at a time when Turkey says the war must come to an end.

In parallel to this Summit, the Russian and Chinese Navies conducted joint patrols in the Pacific Ocean, deepening diplomatic and military ties. The crews of both countries carry out joint maneuvers with artillery exercises and helicopter troops. The Russian Defense Ministry maintained that "the tasks of the patrols involve the strengthening of naval cooperation between Russia and China, peace maintenance and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, the surveillance of the coasts and the safeguarding of the Russian and Chinese nautical places". Both powers carried out their first joint patrols in the Western Pacific Ocean in October last year, a move that Japan characterized as "unusual

maneuvers".It should be noted that the Navies of the two powers participated in the Vostok 2022 exercise, which took place in Eastern Siberia and the Sea of Japan. For Western intelligence, the drills are intended to "show the West and its allies in Asia that this is an emerging military and security relationship that needs to be taken into account." President Biden's statements that the United States would send forces to Taiwan to defend it from Chinese aggression increased tension between Washington and Beijing.

The rise in hydrocarbon prices generated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine has increased the role of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). This organization plays an important part in setting the price of oil. It was established in 1960 by five countries: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. Then Libya joined in 1962, the United Arab Emirates in 1967, Algeria in 1969, Nigeria in 1971, Gabon in 1975, Angola in 2007, Equatorial Guinea in 2017 and Congo in 2018. Qatar, Indonesia and Ecuador used to be part of the organization but then quit. Approximately 80% of the proven oil reserves are found in OPEC countries, and of these, two thirds are in Middle Eastern countries. In 2016 OPEC was expanded to 8 more producing countries, which became the OPEC+ group, constituting a second category with fewer commitments to the organization.

It is made up of Russia in Eurasia, Kazakhstan in Central Asia, Azerbaijan in the Caucasus, Bahrain and Oman among the Gulf monarchies, Malaysia and Brunei in Asia, and South Sudan in Africa. Russia and Algeria are major gas producers and have developed an organization that claims to be similar to OPEC, but has been less developed. The Gulf monarchies that lead OPEC have had a strategy that coincides with that of the United States during the last decades most of the time. But with the creation of OPEC+, of which Russia is a part, they have simultaneously developed a strategy towards the Eurasian power that the war in Ukraine is putting to the test.

At the other end of the world, the United States, for its part, is closely following the Brazilian electoral process and the role that the Armed Forces may have in it. In an unusual development, eight former Secretaries of Defense who served in both Republican and Democratic administrations, and five former Joint Chiefs of Staff also from different governments and parties, signed a letter urging the Brazilian military to subordinate itself to the constitution. The

Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, seems to have adopted the same strategy as Trump in the face of the elections: to question the eventual adverse electoral result. The letter lists fourteen points and highlights that "civilian control of the Armed Forces is part of the foundation of American democracy that operates within a constitutional framework under the rule of law." It adds that "military officers take an oath to support and defend the constitution, not an oath of allegiance to an individual or position. All civilians, whether or not they take an oath, are equally obligated to support and defend the constitution as their highest duty." According to the US constitution, civilian control of the Armed Forces is shared among the three branches of government. The signatories declare that "civilian control is exercised within the Executive Power for operational orders by the chain of command, which goes from the President to the Civil Secretary of each Force and the combatant commanders." The message becomes more direct when it says "during the presidential elections, the military has a double obligation. First, because the constitution provides for only one Commander-in-Chief at a time, the Armed Forces must assist the current Commander-in-Chief in the exercise of his constitutional duty to preserve, protect, and defend the constitution." It ends by saying "Second, because the voters (not the Military) decide who will be Commander-in-Chief, they must prepare for who the voters choose, whether it's a re-elected incumbent or someone new. This dual obligation reinforces the importance of the principles and best practices outlined above." The presence of the Brazilian President in London for the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II and in New York to speak at the United Nations General Assembly made evident his differences with the United States and its allies in the war in Ukraine.

In conclusion: the Shanghai Group Summit was the scene of the first meeting between Xi and Putin since the invasion of Ukraine and both showed the proximity of the two powers against the hegemony of the United States. Simultaneously, the Navies of the two countries conducted joint patrols in the Pacific off Japan, deepening the military cooperation that was evident in the Vostok exercise. The increase in the cost of hydrocarbons that the war in Ukraine has produced highlights the importance of OPEC, which plays a decisive role in determining oil prices. Finally, eight former Secretaries of Defense and five former US Joint Chiefs of Staff warned the Brazilian military to remain loyal to the constitution in the face of pressures from Bolsonaro.