

TAKING STOCK OF THE NATO SUMMIT IN MADRID

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The recent NATO Summit in Madrid has highlighted the importance, scope and significance of the military "asymmetry" concept, although not explicitly. The difference between Russia and Ukraine is clear. The Russian troops as a whole are close to a million men -militias, volunteers and mercenaries combined. A fifth of them are fighting in Ukraine. Kyiv has mobilized about a third of the total number of men that Russia has under arms, but all of them are on Ukrainian territory, thus surpassing those that Moscow has in the theater of operations. The quantitative advantage in armor, missiles, combat aircraft and other weapons systems is very marked in favor of Russia, but the big difference is in the nuclear field, in which Vladimir Putin's Armed Forces not only threaten Ukraine, but also NATO. This, in turn, creates some doubts in participating in the armed conflict for fear that the escalation will reach the nuclear level, allowing the supremacy of Putin's forces to be maintained in the air and naval spheres. The relationship of forces in the cyber field is difficult to measure in this conflict, for now.

But the economic supremacy of NATO over Russia is clear: according to the IMF, the 24,800,000 (million) nominal GDP of the United States is 14.5 times more than the 1,700,500 (million) of Russia. The United Kingdom, Canada and 27 other European countries are also part of the Atlantic alliance, which in total add another 25,775,000 (million) dollars. According to this, the GDP of NATO as a whole would reach 50,575,000 (million). This is 29.7 times more than the Russian, that is, an overwhelming asymmetry against Moscow. It should be added that Russia's GDP was 8.3 times more than Ukraine's at the start of the conflict. According to SIPRI, regarding military spending specifically, that of the United States reaches 778 billion (3.7% of its GDP). Russia, for its part, spends 61 billion (4.3%). In other words, the United States allocates to defense, in nominal terms, 12.7 times more than Russia. It should be noted that the latter country spends almost the same as the United Kingdom, which spends 59.2 billion (2.7% of its GDP) on defense, Germany spends 52.8 (1.4%) and France 52.7 (2.1%). Added together, these three countries spend 2.7 times more on

defense than Russia. An estimate of the defense spending of the 30 NATO countries places it almost 20 times that of Russia.

How does Russia offset this enormous asymmetry that does not seem to explain the fact that this country is the second military power in the world? First of all, its nuclear capacity. It has almost as many missiles of this type (with various ranges) as NATO, which establishes a virtual parity with the Western military alliance -almost all of its weapons are American. For this reason Putin, already in the first week of the conflict, put this issue on the table. Already before the Russian troops entered Ukraine, they had integrated nuclear capability in military exercises with Belarus. Secondly, the projection capacity, that is, the possibility of carrying out military operations far from its own territory. Although there is a very marked difference in favor of the United States in this capacity, Russia is the second country in the world. Parallel to the war in Ukraine, it has carried out naval exercises, of which 140 ships participated simultaneously in the waters of the Atlantic, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean and the Arctic. These exercises integrate naval, air, amphibious and space capabilities. Third, there are soldiers and mercenaries controlled by Russian intelligence services operating in Libya, Syria, Burkina Faso, Mali and other countries in the world, and Moscow has offered assistance and a military presence to Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Lastly, integrating military capabilities from 30 different countries is not easy, with which NATO's nominal numbers, when specifically put into action, are substantially reduced. The Western Military Alliance Summit in Madrid showed that improving this is their priority. These four causes -although there are others- explain how Putin's Armed Forces compensate for the marked military asymmetry they have with respect to NATO, and military spending as a percentage of GDP between the United States and Russia is not the cause that explains it, since it is only slightly higher than that of the latter.

NATO's new long-term strategic concept, which replaces the one in force since 2010, does not mention the nuclear issue, despite the fact that it is the key factor in Russian military power. The most relevant change is that twelve years ago, Moscow was considered "a partner" in European security matters and now it is a "direct threat" to continental security. Second, it defines North Africa and the Balkans as sensitive areas. But the other relevant change is that it sees China as

a "challenge" to the Western military alliance in terms of different "values, interests, and security." This implies that it has defined Russia as a potential enemy.

In fact, it is inducing a military alliance between Beijing and Moscow, against the West. In terms of operations, the number of troops in the rapid reaction force is considerably increased. The current 50,000 men will rise to half a million gradually over 180 days. It is a substantial change, but it will not be easy to achieve. On the political and strategic front, the change is also the decision to start the process of incorporation of Sweden and Finland. In the case of the latter, it implies that NATO now has almost 2,000 more kilometers of land border with Russia. The reaction of Russia and China was immediate and they questioned this new definition of NATO for the long term.

In conclusion: the recent NATO Summit in Madrid ratifies the strong military asymmetry of the Atlantic alliance over Russia. NATO's GDP is 29.7 times that of Russia. In terms of military spending, US spending is 12.7 times larger than Russian and NATO's as a whole is about 20 times larger; but in the variable where Russia continues to be the second military power in the world is the nuclear sphere, and this issue is totally absent in the new strategic vision of NATO for the long term. Finally, it was decided that the troops of the rapid reaction force of the western alliance be multiplied by 10, but the most important thing is that it considers Russia as a direct threat and China as a challenge in terms of security.