

Biden in Kiev: reality of the 'global' war

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U.S. President Joe Biden signs the orders and Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Zelensky stands framed by U.S. flags in Kiev, Feb. 20. Photo by Ukrainian President Press Office

Feb. 21 — Of late, Ukraine's Western allies, which include some of the world's major military powers, have admitted the difficulties they are experiencing in securing supplies of weapons and especially ammunition for a war unmatched by any conflict in which they have participated in recent years.

Accustomed to conflicts with a great imbalance of forces, in which they have been able to impose their air superiority and artillery power over militias, guerrillas and smaller armies that they have faced – and whom they have not always been able to defeat – Ukraine's Western allies now face, albeit in a subsidiary way, a well-armed army supported by a country with the military capacity to supply its armed forces in a long conflict.

In the year since the Russian military intervention, Kiev and its partners, especially Washington, London and Brussels, but also the smaller capitals of Europe, have tried to present a discourse of world unity in the face of an aggressor that caused an unstoppable war, unprovoked and unprecedented in the rule-based international order, specifically those of the United States.

This simplistic speech tries to make us forget the eight years of war that preceded the Russian intervention, Ukraine's attitude towards the peace agreements signed in 2015 and the use that external actors such as the United States have made of the conflict in their successful attempt at hindering political and economic relations between Moscow and the European capitals, mainly Berlin.

However, as evidenced by the case of sanctions, to which a large part of the countries of Asia, Africa or the Americas have not joined, this global unity against Russia that European and North American officials proclaim lacks a foundation.

Aware of this, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell has lamented the situation. But even in those moments when the leader of European diplomacy has managed to carry out a correct analysis of the situation, its causes are always found in those commonplaces based on the condescension of seeing the countries of the global south as easy to manipulate through “disinformation.” With Russian media banned from the European Union despite its more than limited diffusion, Borrell observes the danger it poses to those countries that he tries to convince “with arguments.”

“That battle against misinformation must also be fought. Because whether we like it or not, there is still an anti-colonial sentiment in Africa, and in Latin America, an anti-imperialist sentiment that makes many of its leaders - and its inhabitants - look at this war with different eyes from ours”, affirmed the High Representative of the European Union in one of his many speeches.

“Minister Lavrov is touring Africa again these days. Mali, Eritrea. Well, those are easy countries for him, but others are not so easy,” he added on another occasion, a comment that can hardly be misunderstood as anything other than European condescension about the credulity of countries that are not part of his garden.

Like Borrell, Emmanuel Macron has also recently been surprised by the unwillingness of the former colonies to accept the discourse of the old metropolis. But beyond disinformation - defined as any message from Russia, whether false or not - France has focused on political and military issues and views, with extreme concern for the tendency of several countries to prefer the presence of Russian mercenaries instead of the armed forces of countries like the one he himself presides over.

The refusal of the African countries to take a position on a war that is completely foreign to them was made clear by Zelensky’s failure in his meeting with the countries of the African Union. Western diplomacy in Africa has only one great

success: convincing Morocco, a staunch ally of the United States, to send Russian-sourced tanks purchased from Belarus to Ukraine.

The case of Latin America, for its part, is even more painful for Western countries, since not only has a political position been required of them, but they have also been required to get directly involved in the European and North American effort to finance and equip war.

Without understanding why progressive governments and the working classes, who have suffered the consequences of U.S. interventionism in the region and their fight “against Moscow” through death squads or coups in the Cold War era, the United States and its European partners are also surprised by the Latin American refusal to join the war drums.

Even before his electoral victory, in an interview published by Time magazine, Lula da Silva described Zelensky as a bad actor and stated that “this guy is as responsible as Putin for the war. Because in war, there is not just one guilty person.” Lula, comparing the current situation with the 1962 missile crisis, a comparison that has been made in recent years, argued that diplomacy should be favored instead of “motivating this guy and thinking that he is the icing on the cake” and, above all, to guarantee Russia that Ukraine will not be part of NATO.

Lula’s speech, similar to that maintained by other continental political leaders such as Andrés Manuel López Obrador or Alberto Fernández, does not seek to defend the Russian position but simply advocates peace.

However, in the current context of exaltation of the war, this position is such a surprise for Western countries, accustomed to the fact that the global south complies without question with the orders of the United States, that even large media publish reports about it. “The U.S. offer sounded attractive: if Latin American countries donated their aging Russian-made equipment to Ukraine, Washington

would replace it with superior U.S. weaponry,” the Financial Times wrote last week, surprised that “far from accepting the U.S. proposal, revealed last month by General Laura Richardson, head of the U.S. Southern Command, Latin American leaders have lined up to denounce it.”

Richardson, who in the past has not hesitated to speak of Russia and China as enemies “that are there to undermine the United States” or to refer to the natural resources of the region as a fundamental interest of the U.S., presented, smiling, a proposal that always she must have known would be widely rejected. The same thing happened with the European attempt to obtain Western weapons and, above all, ammunition for the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

It is possible that the surprise was actually the public way in which, from Mexico to Argentina passing through Brazil, Chile and Colombia, one by one, the Latin American countries have refused to interfere in an alien war between two European countries in which they aspire to mediate. Unlike the European countries, many of which sought war against Russia since the war years in Donbass, the Latin American countries have shown an independence that those who colonized them politically or economically did not expect to face in their backyard.

“With all due respect, we are all America,” said Andrés Manuel López Obrador, criticizing that Joe Biden had welcomed Volodymyr Zelensky “to America,” not to the United States, during his visit. Those same Latin American countries whose existence they forgot to the point of having appropriated for themselves the name of the continent, they now demand to join their war against Russia.

The surprise caused by the Latin American refusal to join a conflict and the autonomy shown in these times of geopolitical pressures is as relevant as the complete lack of independence shown by the European countries in this war that Rishi Sunak has already described as “global.”

Joe Biden's visit to Kiev yesterday, more propaganda than strategic, sought to show the importance of the Ukrainian issue for the Western alliance. The war in Ukraine has reached the pinnacle of global prominence to which Kiev has been aspiring for years. But in that global war, a large part of the globe is missing. Unless it is forgotten that the West, defined as NATO and its closest allies, can no longer impose its will on countries that it considers should, as a matter of course, follow orders without question.

Translated by Melinda Butterfield

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