

Trump's war in Ukraine

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July 16 — A day of reactions, broad-brush analyses, and self-serving positions on the message of each of the parties directly or indirectly participating in the war in Ukraine. Tuesday passed between the uncertainty of the signal sent on Monday by Donald Trump, the exaggerated hope of those who already see themselves as victors, and the fear of those who doubt whether the president of the United States

will actually follow through on his threats.

“Fifty days,” lamented Anne Applebaum, one of the usual propagandists of this war, suggesting that Trump’s announcement will be nothing more than a bluff. “Trump can’t back down and not help Ukraine,” headlined yesterday’s editorial in The Washington Post, using the acronym “TACO” (Trump Always Chickens Out), used by Chuck Schumer and other Democrats to claim that the president of the United States is a chicken who first threatens and then backs down.

“Ukraine needs more weapons. But Putin needs more pressure to end the war,” the outlet writes, insisting that “so far, Putin has calculated that time is his ally; he could wait for the West’s patience to run out with a grueling and costly war of attrition. Trump is trying to change Putin’s assumptions, forcing substantive negotiations within a tight deadline by wielding an economic weapon — secondary sanctions — that the United States has been hesitant to use” because, as the outlet admits, they are also a threat to the global economy.

Demanding compliance and praising the measure has also been the official position of the European Union, although there have been two sides to the issue. Like a good cop always trying to please Trump, the president of Finland wrote that he welcomes “the decision of the president of the United States to provide Ukraine with more weapons in its fight against Russia’s illegal war of aggression. The 50-day ceasefire, coupled with the threat of sanctions, including those included in the Lindsey Graham and Richard Blumenthal package, constitutes an important step forward in forcing Russia to the negotiating table. Collaboration with allies toward a just and lasting peace continues.”

Like Iran when it was attacked, Russia was already at the negotiating table, although not in a position of weakness or faced with the need to unconditionally accept the terms offered by the West. Alexander Stubb’s counterpoint was, predictably, Kaja Kallas, who believes the 50-day grace period Trump has granted

Vladimir Putin to reach an impossible agreement, given that Ukraine has never sent a delegation mandated to negotiate political issues, is “very long.” No measure can fully satisfy the continent’s most belligerent hawks.

Meanwhile, the work of Trump’s envoy to Ukraine continues, remaining in the country for a week that, in terms of logistics and planning, is significant. “I met with General Keith Kellogg: a clear voice of strength and strategy. We discussed weapons, sanctions, and the principle of peace through strength. We thank the U.S. president for his firm decisions. That’s what it takes to stop Putin: strength. Ukraine remembers those who lead with courage,” wrote Andriy Ermak, intoxicated with success since he managed to place his successor, Yulia Svyrydenko, as a candidate for prime minister and obtained from the United States exactly what Kiev was looking for: a large arms package that will not come with any restrictions.

This was reported yesterday by media outlets such as Axios and The Washington Post, each citing their own sources in the Pentagon or the White House, who announced that Ukraine will have no restrictions on the use of the weapons it currently possesses.

“A source involved in the decision has told me that this likely includes permission to use the 18 long-range ATACMS missiles now in Ukraine at their maximum range of 300 kilometers (about 190 miles). That wouldn’t reach Moscow or St. Petersburg, but it would allow attacks on military bases, airfields, and supply depots deep inside Russia that are now out of reach. The package could also include more ATACMS,” David Ignatius wrote yesterday in The Washington Post.

Moscow and St. Petersburg were also part of the speculation that circulated throughout the day due to allegations by Ignatius and Financial Times reporters Max Seddon, Christopher Miller, and Henry Foy. “‘Volodymyr, can you attack Moscow? Can you attack St. Petersburg, too?’ Trump asked on the call, according to the sources. Zelensky responded: ‘Absolutely. We can if you give us the weapons,’” they

wrote yesterday in an allegation that the White House later sought to deny. “Let them feel the pain,” Donald Trump reportedly added, referring to the population of the two Russian capitals. According to The Washington Post, he is even considering sending Ukraine Tomahawk missiles capable of reaching both cities.

If the weapons currently on the ground will have no restrictions on their use, it is to be expected that the weapons sent to Kiev from now on will not have any restrictions either, from which the United States will derive significant economic benefits, which is why Donald Trump’s team is currently congratulating itself in the press.

“The days of the United States sending unlimited amounts of taxpayer money to defend Ukraine are over. The president of the United States has made a very intelligent decision and reached an agreement with NATO, which stipulates that Europe and Canada will pay for the weapons; the United States will manufacture them,” boasted the U.S. ambassador to NATO in an interview with Fox News.

European partners, proud that the United States is progressively moving closer to their position on the use of force and the need to escalate the war one step closer to direct confrontation with a nuclear power, have responded by expressing their pride at being chosen to pay for the weapons with which Donald Trump will finally and completely join the common proxy war against the Russian Federation.

“President Trump took an important initiative today: the United States will provide Ukraine with large-scale weapons if its European partners finance it,” wrote Chancellor Friedrich Merz on social media, adding that he had assured Trump that “Germany will play a decisive role,” Merz concluded. So decisive that Defense Minister Boris Pistorius of the SPD has insisted that German soldiers will be prepared to kill Russian soldiers in the event of an attack — a completely gratuitous warning that, in the current context, in which Germany emerges as the continental leader in the discourse of massive shipments of weapons for war, sounds like a threat.

“This,” Merz added, referring to the supply of Western weapons, “will help Ukraine defend itself against terrorism through Russian bombings. Only in this way will pressure increase on Moscow to finally negotiate peace. In short, we are showing that we are working together as partners in security policy,” Merz concluded, describing a partnership in which one side bears the costs and the other reaps the economic benefits.

“The threat of imposing 100% secondary sanctions if Russia fails to reach an agreement within 50 days is unlikely to succeed,” wrote Ukrainian-Canadian academic Ivan Katchanovski, adding that “this has been demonstrated by the failure of numerous previous sanctions against Russia and the imposition of even higher tariffs against China, which had to be reversed due to the reciprocal tariffs imposed by China against the United States and their economic consequences for the United States.”

Focusing on the purely military issue, analyst Patricia Marins added that “if Putin is confident of forcing a breakthrough in 60 days and achieving his goals, Trump has given him 50 days,” she summarized, for example. “That is being pragmatic,” she added, “whether [Putin] will achieve those goals or not is his own problem. What cannot be done is to indefinitely delay the end of the war through politics.”

That last sentence perfectly sums up Donald Trump’s thinking. Despite the fact that there hasn’t been any kind of peace process, only isolated negotiations with Ukraine and its European allies and initial talks with the Russian Federation, he is convinced not only that the peace process existed, but that it was on the verge of resolving the conflict.

“I’m not done with it, but I’m disappointed,” Donald Trump stated, adding, incredibly, that he thought “we had reached an agreement four times, and then you come home and see he just attacked a nursing home or something. ... I said, ‘What the hell was that all about?’” Donald Trump hasn’t noticed that Ukraine derailed a

passenger train, causing civilian casualties, but he has been informed of a nonexistent bombing of a nursing home.

The U.S. president is simply projecting frustration at his failure to initiate a peace process that was supposed to involve direct dialogue between the parties and which, due to the complexity of the causes and the contradictory red lines of both countries, was always going to be long, hard, and difficult — a very different kind of negotiation from the one Trump enjoys.

Unable to reach an agreement and without the possibility of applying against Russia the measures he applied against Iran, the moment he realized Tehran would not accept the unacceptable agreement he offered as his only option, with no possibility of negotiating, the U.S. president moves into the phase of threats.

Explaining the sharp increase in arms deliveries expected to occur over the coming days, weeks, and months as the equivalent of the military attack on Iran, analysts like David Ignatius referred to the intention to “escalate to de-escalate,” a concept widely used by Israel to describe its bombing campaigns to force its numerous regional enemies to accept, by force, the conditions imposed by Tel Aviv.

However, threatening and even attacking a smaller country, subjected to sanctions for decades and under an arms embargo that has only been lifted in recent years, is not the same as attacking a nuclear power whose population is increasingly aligning with the official narrative that they are not confronting Ukraine but the West as a collective.

“We have already been through all this. ... We are overcoming it and we will overcome it,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in a statement that contrasts with that of Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, who did not downplay Trump’s threats, which he described as “very serious.” In this context, the press yesterday not only tried to decipher what Trump will do in the medium term, but

also what Vladimir Putin's response will be in the short term.

"Putin intends to continue fighting in Ukraine until the West accepts his peace terms, and his territorial demands could expand as Russian forces advance," three sources close to the Kremlin told Reuters. The Russian president believes Russia's economy and military are strong enough to withstand additional Western measures, the sources said.

One of the sources stated that Moscow could halt its offensive after conquering Ukraine's four eastern regions if it encounters strong resistance. "But if he falls, there will be an even greater advance on Dnipropetrovsk, Sumi, and Kharkov," the Reuters news agency wrote yesterday.

Without the possibility of negotiations — which Russia has not refused to accept, but as Sergey Lavrov recalled yesterday, Ukraine has not responded to the proposal for a new meeting — Russia's only option is active defense, an attempt to consolidate its positions on the front, weaken the Ukrainian ground contingent as much as possible in key locations such as Krasnoarmeisk-Pokrovsk, Konstantinovka, Kupyansk, and Sumi, and prepare its air defenses for the massive use of Ukrainian drones accompanied by Western-made missiles.

If there's no agreement in 50 days, "bad things will happen," "sanctions and more," Donald Trump declared yesterday afternoon. The threats continue and will increase as time passes and the deadline approaches.

"If Putin and others are wondering what will happen on the 51st, I would suggest they call the Ayatollah," said Senator Lindsey Graham, emboldened by his recent successes.

His fanaticism is nothing new, nor is the attempt to take the war to Russia, a rhetoric that is increasingly becoming the official one.

Translated by Melinda Butterfield

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