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## War in Ukraine. Politi: "The parties have reached a crisis point: they have to overcome or there will be a collapse"

The war in Ukraine will not end tomorrow, but it is likely that the climax of the crisis is taking place in these very hours. Within a matter of a handful of days, a series of events marked an important phase in the conflict, such as President Putin announcing to the nation that he would partially mobilize the reserves and pro-Russians calling a referendum to annex four Ukrainian regions. For **Alessandro Politi**, director of the NATO Defense College Foundation, we are facing a moment of crisis that should not be accompanied by cheering demonstrations: "The world is facing crises that are endangering the survival of the human race, and there are some who still believe in war as a normal tool." **Putin announced partial mobilization. Is it a sign of an escalation?** It has always been said that Russia's human potential was without limits, but it is an old myth that has been going around since 1914. For decades, the Russian Federation and all of Eastern Europe have been facing a deep demographic crisis. Putin started the war with a part of the armed forces that never had a clear numerical superiority over the Ukrainians; for half a year he maintained the initiative with superior weaponry, but in the meantime he scraped the barrel of the recallables. At this point we will see how extensive the phenomenon of draft evasion is. To be sure, if some countries had not blocked tourist visas, they would have helped facilitate a number of potential evaders. **Where are we now in the war in Ukraine?** We are at a climax. It is not a turning point, but it is a moment of crisis. It is certainly not a time for the kind of stadium cheering that you see in certain debates on social media; when people die you have to focus on staying human. Of course war breeds hatred and hatred polarizes, but this is understandable for the belligerents, not for those who, fortunately, are not caught up in the conflict. Some polarizing dynamics in certain Eastern European countries are resurrecting old ideas from the 1920s and 1930s, as if some scores must be settled with the past; it is an explicable phenomenon, but it is politically unhelpful and dangerous for stability on the continent. This war was an unfortunate mistake and the wave of revulsion in Europe, because it is a war and regardless of political differences, is a sign of civility: the world is facing crises that threaten the survival of the human race and there are some who still believe in war as a normal tool. Logic, intelligence and human civilization demand that we treat it as a dangerous epidemic. **It appears that the Ukrainian counteroffensive has been gaining momentum over the past two weeks.** It is clear that Putin has suffered a serious breakthrough and is in crisis, but war is difficult: once the Russians settle in to defend themselves it will be difficult to move them, and if the weather does not change, autumn rains and mud will come to the region, complicating movement. Putting aside cheap propaganda, Putin cares what the circle of power around him thinks and how passive or convinced the rest of the population is. The Ukrainians have liberated only a limited amount of territory, albeit in spectacular fashion; Zelensky himself urges caution. Now it would be useful for the parties to start negotiating, albeit under the table, because when you look closely at the damage they have suffered, it is in their mutual interest. **Is it plausible to think that they have begun to meet?** The parties have reached a crisis point, and the crisis point is either overcome or there is a collapse. There are direct negotiations between the Americans and the Russians for mutual hostage management, which are not in the press spotlight. Objectively, this war risks permanently ruining Ukraine's potential for recovery.

For victory is only a tool; it is tomorrow's peace that matters.

On the one hand, Europe has had a series of growing economic difficulties since 2006, and it is not certain that it will have the money needed for reconstruction at the end of the day. On the other hand, even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans are not non-repayable. Ukraine is now employing its full human potential, refugees number in the millions, and this matters for the resumption of peace. The Russians, even factoring in a smaller effect of sanctions on IMF parameters, are in no better

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shape and their demographics are an equal disaster to Ukraine's. **In the next few days there will be referenda called by pro-Russian pro-annexation parties in the four Ukrainian regions of Donbass, Kherson, Lugansk and Zaporizhzhia.** This is a way of effectively creating a situation that is difficult to unravel. Referendums are ephemeral, but it is clear that they complicate the negotiations a great deal because, even following Putin's aggressive logic, one has to ask how he is going to emerge. In Samarkand (at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit, ed.), where the opinion of partners matters, the Chinese said they are concerned.

Putin is certainly not isolated, but the other side of the world has made its misgivings about the war clear to him behind diplomatic courtesies.

At the same time, Biden's public warning not to use atomic weapons complicates matters because in deterrence it is not always useful to talk to the media, as public political reactions are created that can complicate the management of the crisis and not resolve it. If we think about how much internal and external manipulation goes through public opinions in democratic countries, we understand the sensitivity of the situation: a behind-the-scenes warning is more manageable than a public one. **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says he is convinced that President Putin "is willing to end the war as soon as possible." Can we believe him?** If a politician lies it is quickly discovered, if he/she tells the truth it takes a little longer. The move to declare referendums does not facilitate negotiations nor does partial mobilization. Even Zelensky had said in the summer that around October the Russian offensive would not hold and that it would be time for negotiations. We hope that there will be actual contacts in secret. Of course the Ukrainians want compliance with the Budapest Memorandum signed by democratic Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom, where they reaffirmed the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation. However, if we question borders at gunpoint, it means that all borders in Europe can be questioned. When you set a precedent you have to be careful, in fact on Bosnia and Herzegovina Europe has been very careful. Whenever there has been a violation of international law in the world, fixing it is very complicated.

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