



Editorial

UNIDAD DE ANÁLISIS POLÍTICO Y SEGURIDAD CORPORATIVA

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Where Is the War in Ukraine Coming From, and Where Is It Heading?

The Risk of a Protracted War Without a Political Solution.

The most impactful conventional war of the present 21st century has been fought between two nations that, for much of the 20th century, were part of the same centralized socialist federal state: the Soviet Union. These countries are Russia and Ukraine, which have been directly engaged in war since February 24, 2022. However, the background to this armed conflict dates back several years, specifically to 2013, when a series of protests erupted following the decision of then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to suspend the process of signing an Association Agreement with the European Union and to redirect the country's foreign policy toward closer ties with Russia. Subsequently, the protests also incorporated social demands related to criticism of corruption and the authoritarian nature of his government (CEMEES, 2025).

The intensification of these demonstrations, known as Euromaidan, subsequently led to Yanukovich's removal from power in February 2014. The president fled to Russia, and the Ukrainian Parliament subsequently approved his removal from office, giving rise to a new period of political instability that would become one of the main antecedents of the subsequent conflict between Russia and Ukraine (France 24, 2024).

Following the political and social instability resulting from the aforementioned events, a transition took place within Ukraine's political system, including the restoration of the 2004 constitutional amendments, which strengthened the parliamentary-presidential character of the system. Subsequently, Crimea was annexed by the so-called "little green men," a term used to refer to Russian special forces operating without insignia that would publicly identify them as members of the Russian Armed Forces.

This deployment was reportedly intended to maintain plausible deniability regarding Russia's direct involvement and, at least initially, to avoid openly attributing the operation to the Russian state. These forces were deployed across various geostrategic areas of the peninsula, with a significant presence at key locations for territorial control, including the city of Simferopol, as part of the process that culminated in Russia's annexation of Crimea (Deangelillo, 2024).

All of the above contributed to the evolution of the conflict up to the aforementioned date, February 24, 2022, when, under the direction of Vladimir Putin, the Russian Armed Forces launched a large-scale military operation in Ukraine, establishing a presence in strategic areas of the country, including its main economic and political centers, such as the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. These actions were justified by the Russian president as an exercise of legitimate self-defense in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. The Russian Government argued that Ukraine was being used by political actors to undermine Russia's defense and security and further claimed that the Ukrainian authorities were committing crimes against the civilian population. Based on these arguments,

Putin stated that the intervention had as its main objectives the "demilitarization" and "denazification" of Ukraine, as well as supporting the self-defense of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

However, these justifications fall outside the framework established by international law and the United Nations Charter, particularly insofar as Russia uses force against the territorial integrity of Ukraine. This constitutes a de facto violation of Article 2 (4) of the Charter, the same provision to which Putin appeals to support his actions. In this regard, invoking legitimate self-defense would distort the concept as established under international law (United Nations, 1945).

Furthermore, the argument concerning the self-defense and self-determination of the regions comprising Ukraine's Donbas is also incompatible with international law, since these territories formed part of Ukraine and did not possess the status of independent states under the international legal order. For this reason, Putin's argument justifying the military intervention on the basis of defending the sovereignty and self-determination of these regions is not appropriate from the perspective of international law (García Alonso, 2023).

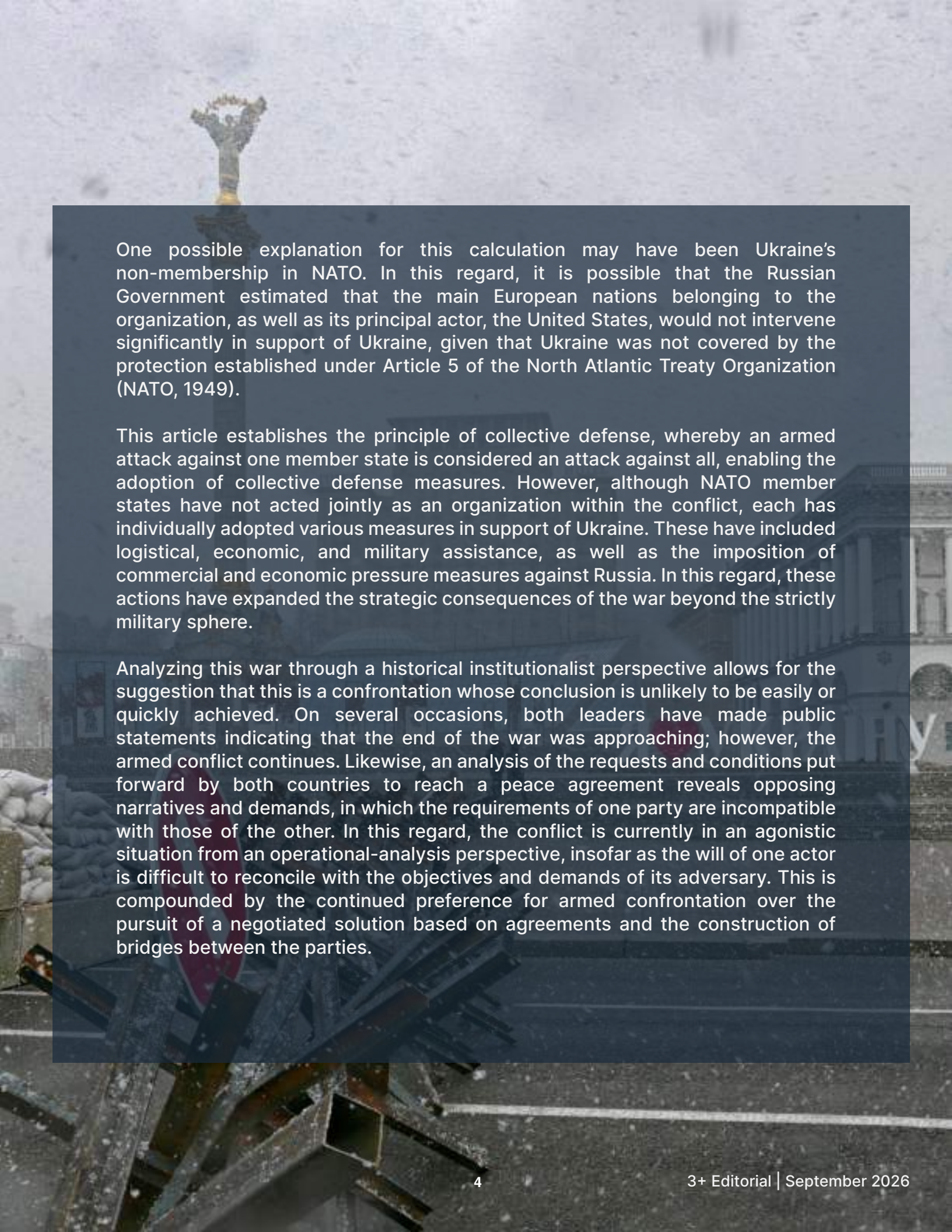
From that point onward to the present, this conflict has involved various violations of international humanitarian law and breaches of operational law, largely by Russia, although also by Ukraine, resulting in serious direct and indirect impacts on civilians and non-uniformed personnel in both countries. All of this has contributed to the development of a complex and constantly changing conflict whose end is not easily foreseeable.

One possible reason for the protraction of the conflict is related to a failure to understand or an underestimation of the enemy's capabilities, as may have occurred with Vladimir Putin. Based on Russia's superiority in terms of weaponry, manpower, military capabilities, and strategic depth compared with Ukraine, Putin may have anticipated a short-term conflict whose development and outcome would be considerably easier and faster to achieve. This possible underestimation of the enemy by Russia may have influenced the subsequent development of the conflict by failing to fully account for Ukraine's capacity for resistance and response. This can be related to Sun Tzu's argument in *The Art*

of War, in which he warned that if the enemy is not known, every victory achieved will also generate a defeat. This dynamic reflects the cycle in which the Russian-Ukrainian conflict currently remains trapped.

Likewise, a possible geostrategic miscalculation by Russia regarding the conflict may have consisted of failing to fully consider the potential non-military reprisals, particularly economic and commercial measures, that could result from the aggression against Ukraine, as well as the high level of logistical, economic, and military support that Ukraine would subsequently receive from the European Union, the United States, and various European countries that have also provided support to Ukraine individually and outside the framework of the European Union.





One possible explanation for this calculation may have been Ukraine's non-membership in NATO. In this regard, it is possible that the Russian Government estimated that the main European nations belonging to the organization, as well as its principal actor, the United States, would not intervene significantly in support of Ukraine, given that Ukraine was not covered by the protection established under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, 1949).

This article establishes the principle of collective defense, whereby an armed attack against one member state is considered an attack against all, enabling the adoption of collective defense measures. However, although NATO member states have not acted jointly as an organization within the conflict, each has individually adopted various measures in support of Ukraine. These have included logistical, economic, and military assistance, as well as the imposition of commercial and economic pressure measures against Russia. In this regard, these actions have expanded the strategic consequences of the war beyond the strictly military sphere.

Analyzing this war through a historical institutionalist perspective allows for the suggestion that this is a confrontation whose conclusion is unlikely to be easily or quickly achieved. On several occasions, both leaders have made public statements indicating that the end of the war was approaching; however, the armed conflict continues. Likewise, an analysis of the requests and conditions put forward by both countries to reach a peace agreement reveals opposing narratives and demands, in which the requirements of one party are incompatible with those of the other. In this regard, the conflict is currently in an agonistic situation from an operational-analysis perspective, insofar as the will of one actor is difficult to reconcile with the objectives and demands of its adversary. This is compounded by the continued preference for armed confrontation over the pursuit of a negotiated solution based on agreements and the construction of bridges between the parties.

Implications of the “Shield of the Americas” for the Region: Combating Transnational Crime

Recently, new nations joined the Americas Coalition Against Cartels (A3C), promoted by the United States under the leadership of Donald Trump, the current president of the country. The purpose of this initiative is to promote multilateral security, freedom, and prosperity in the region through cooperation among countries that join the initiative and share the objectives established by the Trump Administration. These objectives include maintaining an offensive policy, through military and police operations, against armed groups operating outside the law, which finance their activities primarily through illicit economies associated with the trafficking of psychoactive substances. These substances are subsequently transported illegally to the United States and Europe, primarily through ports located along the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean coasts of Latin America (U.S. Department of State, 2026).

Currently, 14 nations are part of this initiative: Argentina, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Honduras, Trinidad and Tobago, Panama, Costa Rica, Chile, Guyana, Peru, and Colombia, with the latter being the second most recent country to join (U.S. Department of State, 2026).



Colombia's incorporation followed a change in government, moving from the administration of former President Gustavo Petro, whose defense policy was more oriented toward peace processes and dialogue with armed groups, to the current government of Abelardo de la Espriella, which maintains a more offensive and hardline policy toward armed groups operating outside the law (Ministry of National Defense of Colombia, 2026).

In line with the above, it should be noted that the "Shield of the Americas," as the A3C is also known, is not merely a security cooperation initiative, but also reflects a degree of political and ideological convergence between the participating states and the United States Government. The selection of invited countries appears to respond not only to their capabilities and willingness to cooperate on security matters,

but also to their alignment with the main priorities of the Donald Trump Administration, particularly regarding the fight against drug trafficking, illegal immigration, and criminal organizations.

In this regard, the absence of Brazil and Colombia from the initiative's initial composition highlighted the differences between their respective governments and Washington's priorities in these areas. Colombia's subsequent change in government and its immediate incorporation into the "Shield of the Americas" reinforce the relationship between the political orientation of participating governments and their involvement in the initiative (Mazo, 2026).



Furthermore, another aspect that demonstrates the ideological nature of the Americas Coalition Against Cartels is its possible connection to a reinterpretation of the Monroe Doctrine, whose central principle has historically been summarized under the premise of “America for Americans.” In this regard, one of the fundamental elements of the A3C may be related to the United States’ intention to reduce the growing influence of the People’s Republic of China in the Americas, particularly in Central and South America (Facio, 2026). In recent decades, several countries in the region have strengthened their ties with Beijing through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative,

increasing bilateral cooperation across various sectors, particularly in the construction, financing, and management of critical infrastructure, including maritime ports (World Economic Forum, 2018). Thus, the U.S. initiative could also be interpreted as a mechanism aimed at strengthening the strategic presence of the United States in the region and countering the expansion of Chinese influence in sectors considered geopolitically significant.

On the other hand, an important point to highlight is that, following Colombia’s accession, the United States, represented by Southern Command Commander General Francis Donovan; Ecuador, represented by its Minister of Defense, Gian Carlo Loffredo; and Colombia, represented by its Minister of Defense, Major General (Ret.) Jorge Mora, announced the “Security Trident.” This initiative involves trilateral cooperation within the framework of the “Shield of the Americas,” aimed at blocking drug-trafficking routes that cross the territories of the three countries and thereby disrupting the illicit economies that finance criminal organizations. This will be carried out through strengthened intelligence cooperation, a coordinated response to these groups, and greater operational coordination among the security forces of the three countries (Ministry of National Defense of Ecuador, 2026).

Finally, it is essential that this initiative respect the basic principles of international law and the international system of states, particularly those related to state sovereignty and independence. This consideration is especially relevant given the presence of uniformed U.S. Armed Forces personnel in participating countries and the immunity clauses established for their operations. These provisions could raise questions regarding the exercise of state sovereignty, insofar as U.S. personnel would be exempt from the application of local criminal law during operations conducted under the joint framework of the “Shield of the Americas.” Likewise, these provisions would reportedly allow unrestricted access to critical infrastructure, including maritime ports, for surveillance and security activities related to the objectives of the initiative by U.S. military personnel (Facio, 2026).

In this context, the incorporation of Latin American countries into the “Shield of the Americas” presents a balance between opportunities and challenges for participating states. Strengthened security cooperation could contribute to addressing illicit economies and transnational criminal structures; however, the implementation of these operations must maintain a balance with respect for the autonomy, sovereignty, and independence of states. Ultimately, the scope of this initiative will depend both on the ability of member countries to preserve their autonomy in decision-making and on the actions of the United States within their territories, ensuring that cooperation remains within the principles established by international law and the frameworks governing the international system.



LOCAL

Is Colombia Entering a New Hybrid Conflict Against Illegal Armed Groups Operating Within Its Territory?

In recent years of Colombia's internal armed conflict, the means and methods of warfare have undergone significant transformation. The country has moved from a guerrilla warfare dynamic, characterized by the use of small units carrying out rapid attacks with light weapons, primarily rifles, before subsequently withdrawing to avoid prolonged engagements—academically known as “hit-and-run” attacks (Pilbeam, 2025)—toward a form of conflict displaying hybrid characteristics. This new dynamic incorporates tools such as cyberspace and drones while seeking to reduce combatants' exposure and minimize direct engagements.

This recent form of conducting operations in the operational theater is being adopted both by the country's Military and Police Forces and by illegal armed groups operating within the national territory. In recent years, the institutions comprising Colombia's Public Force have faced various adverse incidents associated with the use of drones, cyberspace, and other tools characteristic of

what is known as hybrid warfare. These incidents include the downing of a UH-60 helicopter operated by the National Police, commonly known as a Black Hawk, using a drone, in which 13 uniformed personnel were killed (Quevedo, 2026); more than 80 attacks involving small unmanned aircraft against the Public Force recorded between 2023 and 2024 (El Espectador, 2025); a drone attack against a military base in Nariño, which resulted in the deaths of three professional soldiers (Semana, 2026); and a drone attack against a military base in Cesar, in which six soldiers were killed (Pulzo, 2025).

Likewise, another manifestation of these new dynamics involves the recruitment of minors through social media, a phenomenon that has increased significantly in recent years through platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Through these platforms, illegal armed groups have used content that glorifies criminal lifestyles and encourages young people to join these structures, while also establishing direct contact with potential victims through more than 70 pages and accounts identified on these social networks (Human Rights Watch, 2026)..



Faced with this new environment, in which illegal armed groups are also adapting and resorting to new forms of combat, Colombia's Military Forces and National Police have had to seek to remain one step ahead of these structures, with the objective of countering their attacks and strengthening their response and deterrence capabilities against their members. To achieve this objective, the Military Forces and National Police have implemented specialized units focused on the use of unmanned aircraft and weapons systems designed to counter drones.

In this regard, the National Army activated the Unmanned Aircraft Battalion (BANOT), attached to the Air Assault Division of the same institution. This unit's primary task will be to direct, operate, and maintain the National Army's Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), as well as contribute to the neutralization of drones and UAVs employed by illegal armed groups for surveillance, reconnaissance, and information-gathering purposes, or used directly to carry out attacks against civilians and military units.

Similarly, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technologies announced the creation of a specialized group to combat the recruitment of minors through cyberspace, specifically through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. As previously mentioned, these are among the platforms most frequently used by criminal

structures to attract young people's attention and carry out forced recruitment processes.

Among the main measures to be implemented by this specialized group is the use of technologies designed to detect content that promotes or contributes to the recruitment of minors. Such content would subsequently be verified by an interdisciplinary human team responsible for determining whether it is indeed intended to facilitate the recruitment of minors. Finally, algorithmic mechanisms would be developed and implemented to limit the dissemination and exposure of users to this type of content.



The main reason why illegal armed groups in Colombia have shifted toward the use of new technologies and the implementation of strategies associated with hybrid warfare against the Colombian state is that these actors have identified that, in a conventional conflict against a regular force such as the Military Forces and National Police, their chances of success would be considerably limited. In contrast, in a hybrid conflict, differences in power levels are reduced because irregular actors are able to exploit these new technologies and employ them against regular forces, increasing their ability to develop operational capabilities without necessarily suffering defeat (Baqués, 2023).

Likewise, one of the main advantages of hybrid warfare for these actors is its ability to prolong conflicts, thereby generating

political and social pressure on the regular actor and eventually forcing it to seek measures beyond the strictly military sphere in order to end the armed conflict. Cases such as the U.S. military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and the subsequent withdrawal of U.S. troops from these operational theaters illustrate this dynamic. Despite U.S. military superiority, no definitive military victory was achieved, and significant casualties were recorded as a result of the use of mechanisms and tactics of a hybrid nature, developed through improvised means by illegal armed groups. Ultimately, hybrid warfare provides greater opportunities and capabilities to the less powerful actor, particularly when it faces unfavorable conditions in terms of human resources, weaponry, logistics, and structural capabilities compared with its conventional adversary (Baqués, 2023).

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the use of hybrid tools and the transition toward conflicts increasingly characterized by mechanisms associated with hybrid warfare and gray-zone dynamics do not imply the end of conventional warfare in Colombia or elsewhere in the world. The coexistence of different methods and means of combat and armed struggle does not entail the disappearance of conventional dynamics, but rather the emergence of increasingly complex and multidimensional conflict environments. This situation creates new challenges for defense planning and the conduct of defense operations in the 21st century, requiring states to develop capabilities that enable them to respond simultaneously to conventional and unconventional threats (Hoffman, 2009).

In the Colombian case, although conventional confrontations occur to a lesser extent than other forms of confrontation, they continue to take place. Therefore, the country's internal conflict retains conventional components that coexist with the use of hybrid tools, reinforcing its multidimensional nature and creating additional challenges for defense planning and the state's response to different forms of threat.



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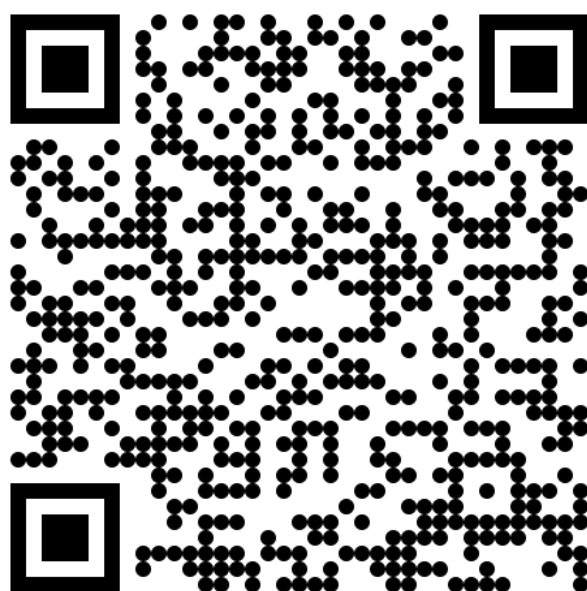
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