

TAIWAN, EU, USA

Wars in 2024 will be decided by three key elections

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Resolving the war and crisis scenarios inherited from 2023 is already an arduous task for this new year. But, the new crisis hotbeds seem to have been added to complicate matters.

The war in Ukraine has been a watershed which in two years has brought about profound global changes. Beyond the military developments that could put Kiev in serious difficulties, military advances and the reinforcement of Russian troops (coupled with the rapid decline in Western aid, which is bound to consolidate due to the US election campaign and the limitation of military aid that the Europeans can donate), the global consequences of that war will consolidate in the new year mainly on a political level.

The Western objective of inducing the world to isolate Russia has not only not been achieved, but it appears that it is the US and Europe that are gradually being isolated, firstly by a rapid collapse in the use of currencies, the dollar and the euro, in international transactions, and then by a marginalisation of the West's role in various crisis areas.

The rapid adhesion since 1 January to the BRICS of raw material and energy producing nations and leading regional powers (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Iran and Egypt) confirms how the Middle East is moving away from the West's reference points in economic and political terms.

The same assessment also emerges from the Gaza war, which could spread to Lebanon and Syria, but with Israel risking to find itself isolated if it does not put political options for the future of the Strip on the table. Netanyahu's all-out military campaign makes sense to annihilate Hamas and its allied militias, but Israel will not be able to fight forever by threatening to involve Iran as well, without elaborating political perspectives, especially if ammunition supplies are increasingly dependent on US supplies which could be compromised or dwindle as the presidential elections approach. Which, regardless of who the winner will be, are already undermining the residual trust in the US by its allies.

Indeed, Ukrainians and Israelis risk paying the price of the American election campaigns, as already happened in the past to the Vietnamese, Iraqis, Kurds and Afghans. Even in the tug-of-war with the Houthi militias attacking Israeli merchant ships, either bound for Israel or owned by Israeli ship owners, the West risks finding itself isolated and divided. Isolated because the naval operation launched by the United

States to protect the ships and entitled Operation Prosperity Guardian has been joined by only a handful of nations of which there are no Arabs, while the European Union has failed to take a decision on the matter and Italy and France intend to keep their ships well detached from the US command.

Moreover, it was difficult to expect Arab nations to mobilise against the Houthi militias, which are also Arab though Shia, at a time when Arabs and Iranians have made peace thanks to Chinese mediation and are joining the BRICS together, especially taking into account that the Houthi attacks have all but halted commercial activities in the Israeli port of Eilat. Moreover, some European nations seem to have well understood the risk that the US might launch an attack against Houthi militias on Yemeni territory, which would appear like yet another Western attack on an Arab nation.

The scenarios therefore seem destined to become even more complicated, and even the crisis in the Middle East is unlikely to be resolved by an inconsistent Europe or the current US administration, which is considered to be too flattened by Israeli positions and too influenced by internal electoral struggles. It is more likely that Israel will reach a negotiated solution to the conflict with Turkey, Qatar, China and Russia.

The clash between the West and the Russia/China axis is, moreover, leading to the escalation of other existing crises, such as the one in Korea where the North's regime is now accused more of supplying ammunition to Russia than of not respecting democracy and human rights. Pyongyang therefore continues to pursue its missile and nuclear rearmament campaign that makes it capable of striking the United States with atomic bombs, causing great concern in Japan and South Korea, nations in which there is increasingly open talk of the need to equip themselves with nuclear weapons for deterrence purposes, not trusting the guarantees offered by the so-called US 'atomic umbrella'.

Drums of war are also being heard in the South China Sea, due to the renewed crisis between Beijing and Taiwan, which will culminate with the vote in the island-state in mid-January, and the growing tensions around the archipelagos that are disputed between all the riparian states, but in particular, these days, between China and the Philippines.

In Africa, after the expulsion of the French and EU missions from Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, Europe's weight is in free fall while Turkish, Chinese and especially Russian influence is growing. A few days ago, the agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland contributed to increasing crisis hotbeds. The agreement will see the Somali

region, which proclaimed its independence in 1991, recognised by Addis Ababa, from which it will receive economic aid, in exchange for an outlet to the sea that will allow Ethiopia to use 20 kilometres of Somali coastline for commercial and military purposes (probably the port of Berbera and its surroundings). An agreement that is already unnerving Somalia, but which will determine the return to the waters of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden of the reconstituted Ethiopian Navy, dissolved in 1996 but which in fact ceased to exist in 1991 when Eritrea gained independence. It is hard to believe that the return of Ethiopia's regional power on those already highly destabilised and disputed coasts will have any relaxing effects on a continent that, from Sudan to Congo to the Sahel, is full of unresolved conflicts.

Lastly, 2024 will perhaps also be decisive for the future of the European Union, especially after the disastrous management of the Von der Leyen Commission, which proved incapable of handling the Covid crisis (with the shadow of heavy vested interests) in a dignified manner, as well as the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, where the only position taken by the EU was entirely in the US's favour, with devastating economic and energy results that are causing Europe's economic supremacy to collapse. The assertion by parties that openly contest the policies implemented by the EU could revolutionise the European Parliament and pave the way for robust changes of course with a new Commission. On the contrary, maintaining the status quo is likely to contribute to the rapid decline of the entire European structure.

Ultimately, three election rounds, first in Taiwan in January, then in Europe in June, and finally in November in the US, will directly influence international balances and tensions.