

THE WORLD: SIMULTANEOUS CONFLICTS AND RISK OF ESCALATION

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The simultaneity of open conflicts between Russia and Ukraine in Europe and between Hamas and Israel in the Middle East put NATO in a complex geopolitical situation. The United States does not fight in either war, but it is involved and intervenes in both. The 30 remaining NATO members follow suit, although a bit reluctant, especially in the case of Gaza. The United States, since World War II, has had a plan to be able to fight two wars simultaneously outside of its own territory. Since then it has been the world military power with the greatest projection capacity. Faced with the Gaza conflict that broke out on October 7, three of the eleven US aircraft carrier groups that are deployed were moved to different locations. NATO is committed to providing weapons - which has already begun also to Israel - exchanging intelligence and training personnel. But for the geopolitical interests of the West, the simultaneity of fronts is a complex situation. It is acting in NATO "extra-zone" regions. The differences with respect to Ukraine are still contained, but with respect to Gaza they are more explicit. The most relevant risk is that this situation as a whole leads to a West-East confrontation. That is, the confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians escalates to a global conflict.

Demonstrations and street protests in solidarity with the Palestinians have spread in their favor since October 7. They were first limited to the first seventy-two hours, where the violence of the Hamas attack on Israel showed widespread repudiation on the international level. But starting on October 11, they spread, first in the majority of the capitals of the Arab world, made up of twenty-two countries, and then in Muslim countries, which total more than fifty. The protests have focused against the diplomatic headquarters of Israel, the United States and also France and the United Kingdom, which were the Western imperial powers in the region in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th. Following the Israeli decision to block the supply of electricity, water and food to the strip and the ultimatum for half of its population to leave the region that will be the target of the Israeli military offensive, Arab public opinion became more supportive with the Palestinians, although Hamas does not represent all of them by any means. Istanbul, the capital of Turkey, was the scene of one of the

most massive demonstrations, something significant because it is a key NATO country and is Muslim, but not Arab. President Biden defended the Israeli thesis that the attacked hospital had exploded due to an action by “Islamic jihad,” a Palestinian extremist group. But one of the Arab heads of state closest to Israel, Jordanian King Abdullah II, said that “the Baptist hospital massacre in Gaza is a heinous war crime that cannot be ignored.”

As for the conflict itself, the risk of both military and political extension is growing. Israel has four sensitive borders, although with different degrees of intensity. The first, which concentrates its main effort, is that of the Gaza Strip, governed by Hamas, whose militia carried out the October 7 attack. It is the front on which Israel will advance beyond the risks that this implies, such as engaging in a house-to-house war. The second is the border with Lebanon, where the Hezbollah group, an ally of Iran, is part of the government and has a militia that controls the territory in the border area with Israel. There have been numerous exchanges of fire, including short-range missiles, and casualties are already in the dozens. There are those who think that this second front can be promoted by Iran to extend the conflict. A third front is constituted by Israel's border with Syria. The government of this country has the support of Iran and Hezbollah, and a low-intensity conflict with Israel, with sporadic military actions. Exchanges of fire have been reported in the border area between pro-Palestinian Syrian groups. The fourth front is the West Bank, a Palestinian territory governed by the “Palestinian Authority” that suspended armed fight with Israel years ago. But the problem is the Palestinian extremist groups that coexist in this country, with Israeli settlers residing in small towns. In clashes, the deaths on both sides exceed fifty. The population of the West Bank exceeds two million people, as does that of Gaza, but the territory of the former is much larger.

Ten days after the Hamas attack, the meeting commemorating the tenth anniversary of the New Silk Road project was held in Beijing, of which one hundred and three countries, two-thirds of the total, are part. Twenty-three heads of state participated, the others were represented by delegations of different levels. President Xi showed a cautious attitude, seeking to capitalize on it in the face of the non-Western world. It should be noted that China faces dissent from the Uyghur minority, of the Muslim religion, one of the issues for which it suffers the most criticism from Western countries. Putin was one of the

heads of government present, which is important for him due to his diplomatic isolation. The head of the Government of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, participated in the meeting, the only country from the European Union and NATO that was present and met with Putin. At the G20 meeting, which took place in New Delhi, the United States presented in parallel its project to promote a communication route that connects India with Europe, passing through the Arab world, an initiative to compete with the New Silk Road in some respects. But now the Gaza conflict has caused key countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to put their participation on hold. But beyond the geopolitical and military conflict, individual attacks on the civilian population are beginning to spread. In Belgium, a pro-Palestinian extremist murdered two Swedish soccer fans who were attending a match for their national team. At the same time, in the United States, another white extremist stabbed a six-year-old Muslim boy to death. In a hyper connected world, these are facts that spread, disseminate and get deformed.

In conclusion: the simultaneity of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict puts the United States and its allies in a complex and challenging situation. Demonstrations in solidarity with the Palestinians have spread through most of the capitals of the Arab world and have been directed against the diplomatic headquarters of Israel, the United States, the United Kingdom and France. As for the conflict itself, the risk of both geographical and chronological spread grows, both due to the four fronts that Israel faces on its borders, and due to the role that Iran could play. Finally, the 10th anniversary of the Chinese New Silk Road project showed the Asian power in a cautious position, which seems to express a vision that it can benefit from the simultaneous conflicts.