



The voice of Maria Dolens

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Monthly newsletter from the Peace Bell Foundation



A worrying year

Since December is traditionally the month of balance sheets, let us try to formulate one of our own, of a geo-political nature, taking the previous 11 editions of «The Voice of Maria Dolens» as our reference since they span the whole of 2022.

Predictably, particular attention has been focused on the dramatic Russian/Ukrainian conflict, examined in its main, multifaceted components - from the economic to the humanitarian, from the multilateral to the military - in three leading articles. As a first observation, in re-reading them we notice (but this is true almost unanimously for other and far more authoritative commentators) the absence of a prediction, even if only approximate, of the dura-

tion of the conflict. It is almost as if – by meeting the question with silence - its conclusion might come quicker. Almost 10 months after President Putin's disastrous, criminal decision to attack the neighbouring country for no concrete reason, it must unfortunately be recognized that the time for settling the crisis is stretching painfully while there is the possibility of risks that not even the belligerent forces are able to control (as demonstrated by the recent case of the missile, of uncertain origin, which misguidedly crossed the boundary into Poland). The situation risks turning into a sort of unsolvable "Rubik's cube" except for the commitment (and, again, not without some setbacks) of the so-called "Wheat Agreement".

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The agreement was favoured, as embarrassing as it is to recognize this fact, not by the institutional mediator, i.e., the United Nations, but by a figure with dubious democratic credentials and that is the Turkish president Erdogan. On the one hand, the Kremlin has in fact proceeded with the annexation of four "separatist" Ukrainian territories; on the other, the troops of Kiev have been engaged for several weeks now, successfully as in the case of the reconquest of Kherson, in a counter-offensive aimed without any ambiguity at the re-establishment of the "pre-24 February" borders. This circumstance has led to the threat of the use of tactical nuclear weapons on several occasions by senior Russian officials starting from the assimilation - of course, devoid of any international legitimacy - of the "neo-Russian" areas to the territory of the Federation.

Considering this background, President Putin's permanence in power is identified by the majority of political analysts as "incompatible" with any hypothesis of cessation of hostilities or opening of a negotiating table. When he announced last spring, in the wake of an enthusiasm for the first Russian successes on the ground which later proved to be completely unfounded, that the fighting would be concluded "by 9 May" (a "sacred" date in Russia, as it is associated with the victory of 1945 on Nazi Germany) the joke that he intentionally or unintentionally omitted to specify the year seems to take on a tragic truthfulness.

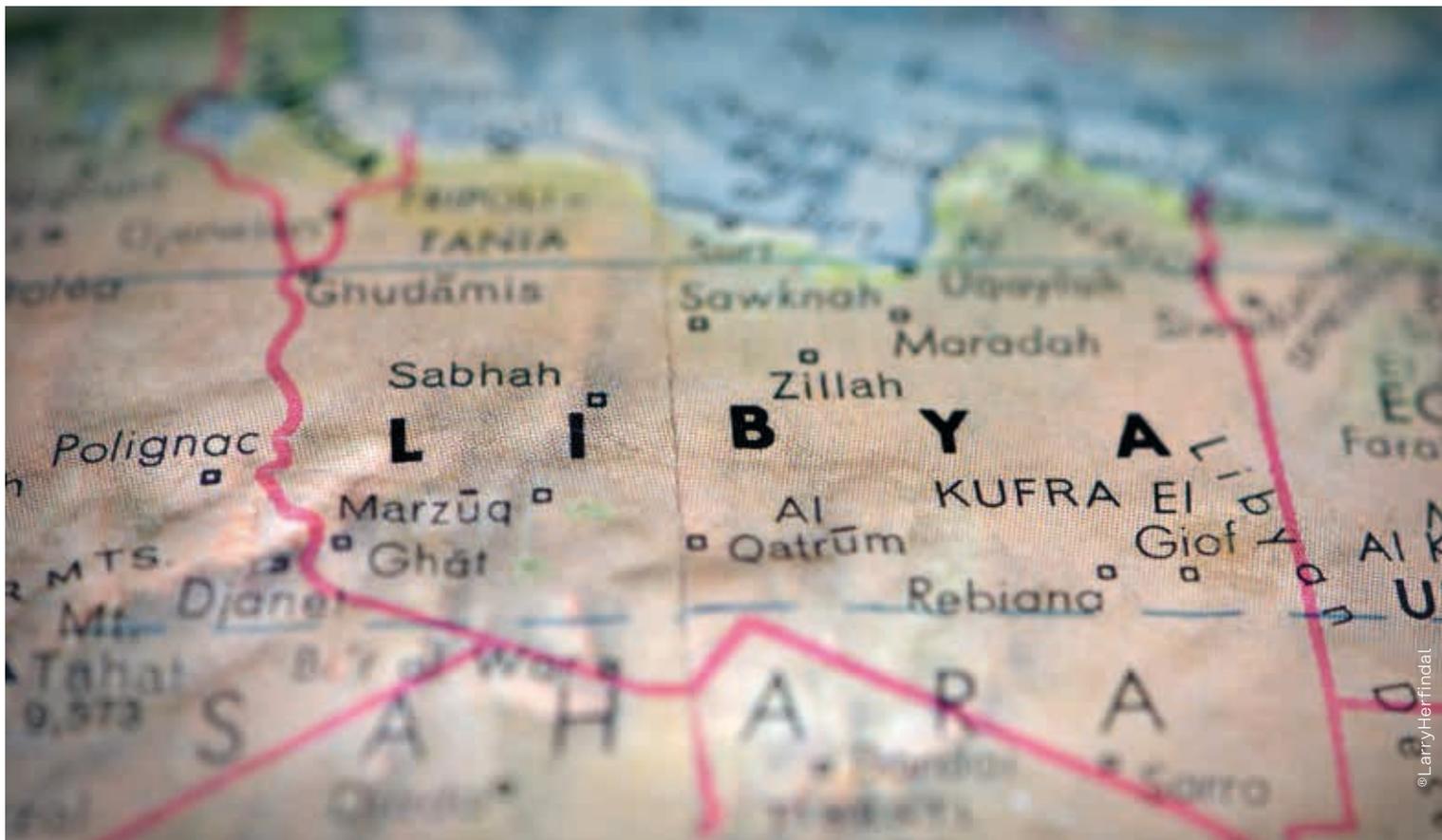
Moving on to other topics, September saw us examine a moment of serious difficulty in Sino-American relations, as a consequence of the visit to Taiwan which



Almost 10 months after the invasion of Ukraine, the time for settling the crisis is stretching painfully

ch was stubbornly prepared and implemented even against the advice of the White House, by the then Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi. If the all-out military provocations concocted by Beijing as a sign of protest have worn out over time, the "passage" dedicated by President Xi Jinping to the "rebel province" in the opening speech at the National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party did certainly not go unnoticed. Members of the party met last October to decree an unprecedented, third term in his favour (only as a formality, since everything had already been written in substance). In fact, he presented very harsh affirmations («reunification will be obtained by all available means»), tending to leave no doubts on the final objective of the People's Republic of China to annex the island, considered (wrongly in this case) as an integral component of the national territory. Such affirmations, moreover, do not seem to know any kind of "brake" internally, especially if we consider the fact that the XX Congress was skilfully exploited by Xi to eliminate any possible form of opposition, replacing all the high offices of the state, except his own of course, with loyalists. The forced removal from the meeting room in front of the media and world public opinion of former President Hu Jintao represented the unequivocal signal of a power devoid not only of moral inhibitions but, by now, also of operational limits or counterweights.

On the opposite side we have the United States where the recent mid-term elections have given new vigour to the administration in office which has managed to maintain the vital control of the Senate, reducing the losses, however obvious, in the lower house. The first bilateral meeting between Presidents Biden and Xi Jinping, which took place in Bali on the sidelines of the G20 meeting, had the merit of establishing a dialogue at the highest level that has been absent for too long. However, in terms of content it may be considered little more than a "kick off". One of the few aspects of convergence in the positions of Beijing and Washington is represented by the shared, explicit and firm condemnation of a possible "atomic hazard" by Moscow, a hypothesis defined in no uncertain terms



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as «irresponsible» by Xi Jinping and, in similar terms, also from the Indian Modi. On closer inspection, it is a convergence so important as to make it possible to reopen a discussion on decidedly more problematic aspects, such as the well-known economic disputes, the very distant existing visions on democracy, human rights, environmental issues or the fight against the pandemic and food supply, without evoking opposing global geo-strategic plans, especially on the future of the Asian continent where Beijing makes no secret of pursuing a status of unchallenged hegemony.

Instead, in March, we analysed the political situation in Libya, a country of enormous importance in relation to the stability of the Mediterranean basin and the continuity of our energy supplies. Some time later, it must be recognized that we are dealing with one of the many geo-political dossiers that the Russian aggression against Ukraine has relegated to a few newspaper headlines and a few vague television reports. The country continues to be deeply divided between the government in Tripoli which is recognized by the UN, and the eastern part, the domain of the strong man of Benghazi, General Haftar, who has certainly not given up on the plan to unite the country under his leadership. Of the "free elections", which should have taken place at the end of 2021 under the supervision of the international community, no one - due to the absence of any prospect of peace and perhaps also out of modesty - now dares to make even the slightest mention.

During the year we also focused on two important political personalities, one in the process of retiring (German Chancellor Merkel), the other reconfirmed in office (French President Macron). Even if the political relations between Berlin and Paris have probably known better times the two capitals have always constituted the backbone of the European construction, the further strengthening of which passes, inescapably, from their shared desire to "modernize" the Treaties, accentuating the community component to the detriment of the intergovernmental one (in practice, a more extensive application of decisions by majority rather than unanimity). Such an important objective should be pursued with convinced determination, also by the third largest member country of the EU, Italy, independently - it should be specified - from the governmental structure in place.

Finally, the topics addressed by the most recent editorials remain, Brazil and Iran.

Beijing makes no secret of pursuing a status of unchallenged hegemony over the Asian continent

With regard to the first, the narrow election win of Luí



edom” have continued without interruption since mid-September, involving not only the big cities but also the smaller towns, where the control of the pasdaran is easier and, consequently, more rigorous. The by now evident incapacity of the regime to block the new demonstrations despite the

In Iran, anti-government demonstrations have continued unabated since mid-September despite brutal repression measures

deployment of massive police forces clearly shows how the theocratic system of President Raisi and Ayatollah Khamenei is facing a potentially explosive situation, likely with time to put its very survival in danger.

If, wholly or only in part, Iran was able to free itself from the perverse and suffocating grip that prevents the country’s great potential from emerging, forcing it into absurd international isolation, the outgoing 2022 would redeem a budget which, over the span of the last 12 months, has turned out to be extremely worrying overall, and would deliver the prospect of at least one decidedly positive geopolitical development to the incoming 2023.

A Peaceful Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our readers!

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President

HAPPENING AT THE UNITED NATIONS

The forbidden armband

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY AND THE WORLD CUP IN QATAR

It would have been nice if all the captains of all the football teams participating in the World Cup in Qatar had been warned about wearing the rainbow armband. It would have been very good indeed and instead prudence prevailed, which oftentimes borders on cowardice. Especially for those who can afford to break an unjust rule without risking their lives or those of their family members.

To be clear: Iran's players who do not sing the national anthem before the match are risking their own existence, the future of their relatives, and are thus performing an extremely brave act. If at the next meeting they don't feel like repeating the experience, if the threats coming from Tehran convince them to backtrack, they cannot be convicted. Being a hero is not necessary. They, in any case, have made an important gesture reminding everyone of what is happening in their country.

But if the captain of Germany talks about wearing the rainbow armband to protest against the lack of respect for human rights in the country hosting the tournament, then refrains from doing so, things are a little different. What was the champion risking? A warning.

And maybe another in the next game that would have prevented him from participating in a match. On a sporting level it is important, even serious, especially for an athlete who prepares for that moment all his life. But how many cups did he deserve to raise for such a gesture? More than a sportsman can conquer in a successful life. Gestures are just as important as words. It is true that the entire German team covered their mouths with their hands in the traditional photo before the match that inaugurated their world career. That too is a historical photo, but something more could have been expected.

The World Cup is taking place without any particular protests in a country where human rights are not fully guaranteed



Not only from them but from other teams, and above all from those who organize Fifa, which not only allowed Qatar to host the event, but also threatened those who announced any kind of protest in favour of human rights with sanctions.

As we know, a lot of money is involved and nobody wants to risk repercussions, even if only economic, for a symbolic gesture. But it wasn't always so. In the past, others have put themselves on the line and paid the consequences. It was October 16, 1968, in the Mexico City stadium, the US sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos finished first and third in the 200m final at the Olympics. Smith had set a new world record, even though he had a loose tendon and ran the last 10 meters with his arms up. Carlos had finished behind his compatriot and Australian Peter Norman. The Americans took to the awards podium, received the medals they deserved, waited for the national anthem to play, then lowered their heads and raised their clenched fists while wearing black gloves. Norman sympathized with his American colleagues by wearing a pin on his chest from the Olympic Project for Human Rights, the association that inspired the gesture of Smith and Carlos. A few dozen meters away, photographer John Dominis took a photo that would become one of the most famous of the twentieth century, a symbol of a decade of protests for black civil rights.

At the 1968 Olympic Games, two American sprinters blatantly claimed the civil rights of blacks

These things have costs, both human and professional. The International Olympic Committee immediately demanded the exclusion of Smith and Carlos from the Olympic village and their suspension from the US team. Upon their return to their homeland, the two gained some recognition from the community they had represented but also suffered criticism and intimidation as well as receiving threats. Norman was also threatened and insulted once he returned to Australia, and according to some was barred from the 1972 Olympics as a result of that episode. At his funeral in 2006, Smith and Carlos carried his coffin on their shoulders.

54 years have passed since 1968, and everyone still knows who won the 200m final, as well as who finished second and who crossed the finish line third.



In 54 years, in 2076, who will remember what happened between Spain and Germany or who lifted the cup at the end of this year's final? The team that wins the current World Cup will have accomplished a sporting feat, will be idolized for a time and will then enter the list of teams that have won the most important national team tournament in existence. One team every 4 years. It is very important, but not as much as the gesture of Smith and Carlos.

From another point of view, it is interesting to note that this year the World Human Rights Day organized by the UN on 10 December took place, for the first time in history, during the soccer World Cup. It would have been nice, between one feat and another, for people from all over the world, meeting in one point of the planet, to have enjoyed the guarantees provided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed in 1948, twenty years before the gesture of Carlos and Smith. It didn't go quite like this: there are those to whom respect for human rights does not apply. If we consider that the text of the United Nations declaration is available in over 500 languages, no one can pretend not to have understood the undisputable rights that everyone possesses as human beings, without distinction of race, colour, religion, sex, language, origin, birth or opinion of any kind.

It is composed of a preamble and 30 articles and was written with the collaboration of representatives of every religion and legal background, becoming globally accepted over time as a "contract" between governments and citizens of the world. Between the declarations and their application, however, there is a gap that oftentimes seems unbridgeable. However, it is certain that the principles are timeless, current today as always. But values are part and parcel of man. Many adhere to these principles, but often they don't even make the newspapers, let alone the rest of the world. It would have been nice if someone had considered them more important than a simple warning.

IT HAPPENED TODAY

Unveiling of the bust

3 December 1955: Father Eusebio Iori unveils a bust of the founder, Don Antonio Rossaro, on the Malipiero bastion



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