**What to Expect in 2023?**

[Harlan Ullman](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/harlan-ullman/)

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With roughly fifty weeks left in 2023, what can Americans expect about how this year will unfold? To borrow from Dickens, will 2023 be the best or worst of times at home and abroad? Optimists will seize the opportunities that exist to make progress on both fronts no matter the highly divisive and divided character of American politics. However, the broader array of actual and potential crises supports the pessimistic assessment of the likelihood of a much more negative future.

Selectively, history can make a strong case for both prospects. A century ago, following the Spanish Flu pandemic and the end of a world war, in 1923, the US embarked on the greatest economic boom in its history, the “Roaring Twenties.” Pent-up demand during the war found its outlet. Henry Ford and Walter Chrysler were producing automobiles that were affordable to many Americans. With the passage of the National Highway Act during the Harding Administration, there was a surge in demand for steel, rubber, leather, gasoline, roads, gas stations, restaurants, and lodgings. The best of times came to an abrupt end in October 1929. And a decade later, World War II erupted. However, given the potentially revolutionary and transformative technologies that are the 2023 equivalent of Ford and Chrysler, will another economic boom be created? Or will debt, inflation and rising interest rates lead to a recession and a hard economic landing? The worst of times may emerge as the more likely outcome for this critical reason: 2023 will bring an even more broken US government.

Why? The brouhaha over the selection of Kevin McCarthy as House Speaker is endemic and symptomatic of what is wrong with the government. While Republicans now argue the worst is behind them, the profound divisions in that party remain. The fight over the speakership will move to specific issues over rules; roles of committees; and course the debt ceiling and spending. And the few will dominate the many in the House.

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In past Congresses, the few ended up being contained by the many. Today, that condition has been reversed. In the Senate, that is not only manifested in the filibuster whereby one senator can block proceedings. With a 50/50 or even 49/48/3 Senate, one or two senators can make demands that the majority must accept if legislation is to be passed. In the 117th Congress, Senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema possessed huge leverage.

Is the future of majority rule in Congress problematic? If the few in the House can control the many, will that body be able to work with a Democratic Senate? If not, how will or can critical, time-sensitive, and explosive issues be resolved? Perhaps they will not and the government will continue to fail.

The debt ceiling is one such time bomb. Republicans demand a balanced budget to stop deficit spending and increase the $31.4 billion debt. But politically and pragmatically, is that possible? If Congress does not raise the debt ceiling, the government will shut down.

Shutdowns are not uncommon. 1995, 2013 and 2018 were the most recent. But mandatory, non-discretionary transfer payments for social security, interest and health care are increasing. And a majority of Congress does not wish to cut defence spending. So is another shutdown inevitable?

Internationally, Ukraine, Russia, China and Taiwan are among the most obvious dangers. One area of bipartisan agreement is the primacy of the China threat. However, the impact of a zero Covid policy on China has huge international economic, geostrategic and political consequences-mostly all bad.

A slowdown in China’s economy will hurt global economies. Instability challenges the leadership and control of the Chinese Communist party raising a range of unpleasant contingencies. And US strategy so far omits to deal with these realities.

The war between Ukraine and Russia is more uncertain. The Biden administration promises to “do whatever it takes” to support Ukraine. But at some, stage limits must come into play. No president will or could tolerate issuing a blank check to another country that could lead to a wider war. Yet, the White House has not disclosed whether it has or is working on a strategy for ending the conflict in Ukraine.

In the early days of 2023, it would seem Dickens’ worst of times is in the ascendency. But will the best of times rally? That question will be determinant in how 2023 turns out. Unlike Dickens’ book that concludes with the demise of Sydney Carton, can 2023 be saved from a looming metaphorical Damolcean guillotine? The current betting does not suggest a happy ending.

*The writer is a senior advisor at Washington, DC’s Atlantic Council and a published author.*