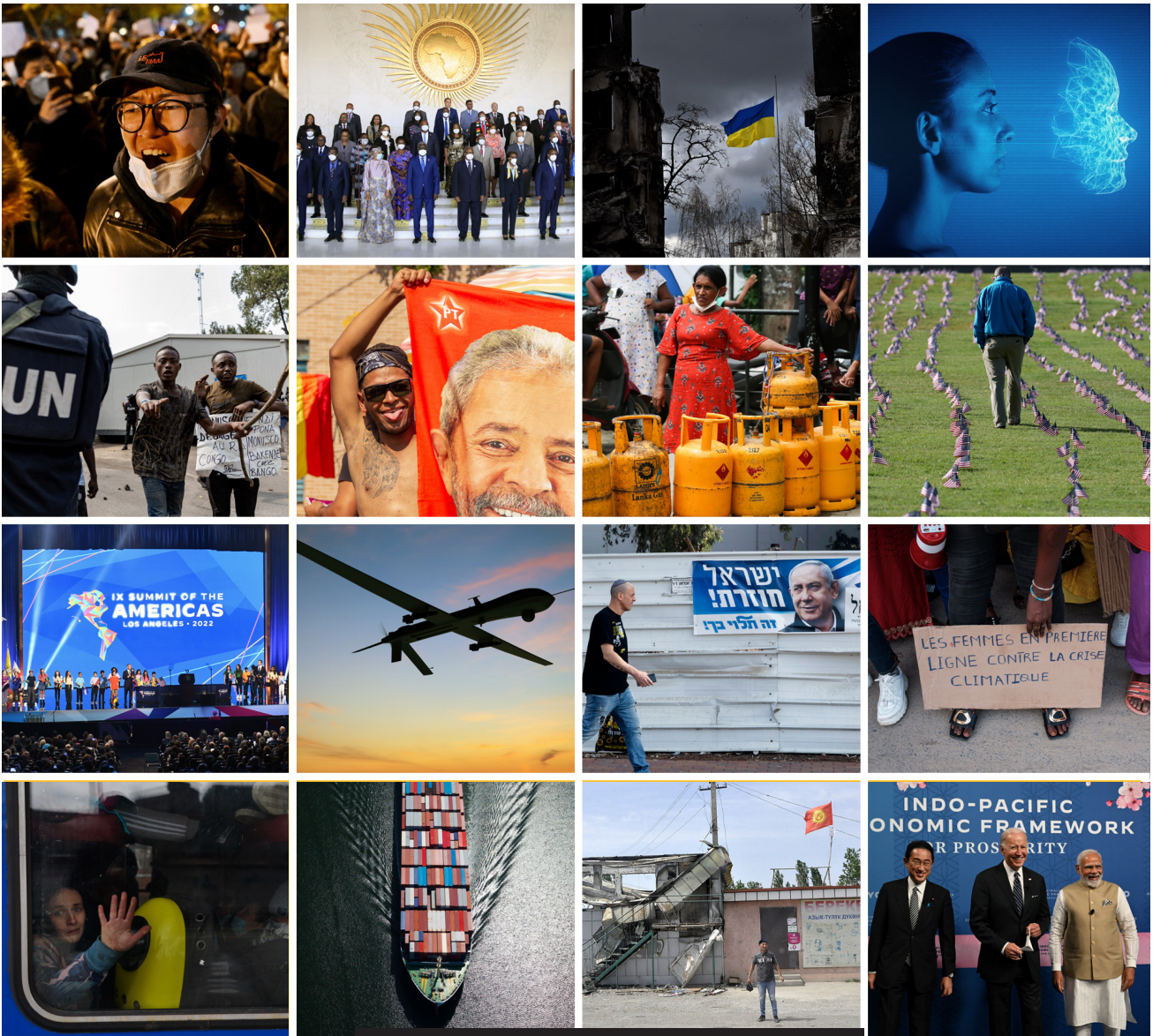


SPECIAL REPORT

no. 203

The World in 2022: An Epilogue

Harsh V Pant
Editor



DECEMBER 2022

Introduction

The year is coming to an end, and if 2022 has shown us anything, it is that the global order as we knew it has been fundamentally altered. Political and economic trends that simmered below the surface in the last few years have erupted, revealing in all their complexities the challenges that extant frameworks and institutions can no longer manage. At the heart of international relations is an intellectual void, and analysts have taken the term ‘disruption’ from the lexicon to try to fill it. Whatever the world cannot seem to come to terms with is being called ‘disruptive’. Yet, even as the end of 2022 might be an inflection point, the underlying forces are not new and have for long threatened to flare up and cause wide-ranging ramifications.

Today the world is grappling with fundamental transformations brought about by shifting power balance, technological overreach, and institutional decay. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine

conflict widened these fault lines, resulting in global inflationary pressures, food and energy crises, and widespread economic fallout. States are frantically scraping their coffers to provide for their citizens’ basic needs, and we are standing farther from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To be sure, some of these fault lines have been drawn long before the Ukraine war or even the pandemic. The rise of China, for one, has been a persistent theme of the past two decades. But it was the failure of the international order in the recent years to respond to China’s rise that has made many of today’s challenges more palpable. After years of living in denial about the China problem, major powers today appear ready to take the issue head-on.

Indeed, the US-China contestation is sharpening by the day and Europe too, is re-evaluating its ties with China. Western powers are claiming bigger stakes in the Indo-Pacific and partnering with states in the region to provide an alternative to Chinese hegemony. They are also making serious attempts at retaining their technological dominance.

While the rise and fall of great powers has historically been a primary driver of global politics, China today presents a more formidable challenge. At the same time, this year revealed the vulnerabilities of the Xi Jinping model of governance. What was once viewed as an exemplary response to COVID-19 has been unmasked as an abysmal failure, and Beijing is battling between the demands of the ordinary Chinese seeking relief from 'zero Covid' and the vulnerable health infrastructure unable to cope with surging infections.

The consequences of China's belligerence, and its own internal vulnerabilities, have certainly created greater space for the democratic world to underscore its primacy; the Chinese model will never be able to match the ability of democracies, despite their weaknesses, to respond to the aspirations of the millions.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is a declining power that has managed to tilt the geopolitical balance in Eurasia. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has forced Europe to reckon with geopolitics once again. The course and the conduct of the war in Ukraine is likely to fundamentally alter European threat perception and has given NATO a new lease in life. Globally, the Russia-China axis has been cemented and global fault lines are more vivid than they have ever been.

“Even as the end of 2022 might be an inflection point, the underlying forces are not new and have for long threatened to flare up and cause wide-ranging ramifications.”

Geopolitics is back in the driving seat as trust becomes an essential factor in shaping economic decisions. As Washington makes policy moves to deny China access to critical technologies and restructure supply chains away from overdependence on China, it recognises the need for new partnerships with like-minded states. But with Washington pushing for supply chain restructuring in critical industries due to foreign policy and national security concerns, this is certainly ushering in a new phase in globalisation. Forces of untrammelled economic globalisation that was once viewed as a panacea for all global problems are now under retreat. Mutual dependencies are being weaponised, further undercutting the foundations of a globalised world. And if emerging technologies are going to determine the next phase of geopolitics, then the polarisation of supply chains is the new reality that policymakers and market forces will have to contend with.

At a time when they are most needed, global institutions have proven to be incapable of responding to the needs of our times. The growing credibility crisis for multilateral institutions is paving the way for various plurilaterals, some of which India itself is part of such as the Quad and the I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE and the United States). From

India's perspective, this crisis of multilateralism is accentuated by the lack of broader representation of developing countries and emerging economies in global multilateral institutions. It has thus advocated for 'reformed multilateralism' to ensure that international organisations reflect the current power balances.

It is at this time of great fragmentation that India has assumed the presidency of the G20. India is keen to play the role of a "leading power"—one that sets rules and shapes outcomes—and this Presidency could not have come at a more opportune time for showcasing India's capabilities and underscoring its leadership credentials.

This 'state of the world' report outlines the key trends that shaped the global landscape in 2022. We asked our researchers to identify three meta trends in their domains. The first section on major powers highlights the impacts of structural changes in the international system. The United States is more focused than ever in reconfiguring its ties with China, even as Beijing is battling domestic challenges. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has redrawn the geopolitical map of Eurasia while spelling the 'end of history' for Europe.

The second section, on key geographies, delineates the consequences of transformative structural changes in different parts of the world. The US-China contestation is forcing various regions to respond and its most serious impact is being felt in the Indo-Pacific. From South Asia and Latin America, to Africa and Central Asia, economic deceleration is shaping politics at a time when regional governance is beset with the same curse of ineffectiveness as global governance platforms.

The final section examines some of the most crucial global issues of the past year. Russia's invasion of Ukraine may have set a template for the future of warfare by bringing to the fore the role of new technologies in shaping the battlefield as well as the diminishing effectiveness of non-military coercive measures. At the United Nations Security Council, the issue of sovereignty and territorial integrity took centre stage in light of the Ukraine crisis. While global trade surged as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic subsided, businesses are moving to diversify their supply chains and mitigate risks where possible. Despite dire warnings from the scientific community of the irreversible impacts of climate change and renewed commitments from

state and non-state actors to accelerate the pace of net-zero transitions, the global climate agenda continues to be hobbled by lack of climate finance. Global technology governance is being shaped by geopolitical contestations with the Ukraine crisis—once again, becoming a testing ground for new ways of targeting the adversaries. On the global health front, there is growing acknowledgement of the need for collaboration to fight pandemics, with emerging economies likely to set the global health narrative of the immediate future.

As 2023 commences, the overarching trends outlined in this report will continue to shape our external environment. It is our aim that the analyses presented here will generate more debate and lead to a more productive policy conversation—not only to understand the world around us but also to navigate it effectively by being more forward-looking.

-Harsh V Pant

1

Major Powers

The US: Biden's Imprint at Home and Abroad

Vivek Mishra

The US's global outlook in 2022 remained hooked to geopolitics for various reasons: its ramped-up China policy and continued fears over its diminishing global influence; energy politics; and a prolonged war in Ukraine. There were three crucial trends for the US this year. First, President Joe Biden's political standing at home was symbolically established through the midterm elections, reflecting a degree of political maturity. As such, if 2021 saw a swathe of executive orders by Biden to reform and rework domestic and foreign policies, 2022 sought to build and institutionalise those decisions. Second, much of the Biden administration's foreign policy focus was on repositioning the US's influence in certain key geographies. Third, events over the year have highlighted that US-China competition will increasingly be tied to the technology sector.

Biden's Policy Focus

In 2022, the Biden administration introduced a number of policy documents that redefined the contours of the US's global strategic outlook. In February, the US presented its Indo-Pacific strategy, which underlined the country's 'intensifying focus' in the region. Identifying threats from China as the main reason for this enhanced focus on the Indo-Pacific, the strategy harped on collective efforts to ensure that rules and norms in the region are not violated, and it remains free and open to all.

In the last quarter of the year, the Biden administration presented its own review of its major strategies, such as national defence, nuclear posture, missile defence, and national security. These four documents sought to project an integrated purpose in countering threats to the US's national security interests and a stable and open international system.

China

While the geopolitical and security concerns emanating from China's increasing capability and intent remain consistent in the US's threat perception, there has been a purposive and punitive singling-out of Beijing by the Biden administration in its outlook and policies. Almost all strategic reviews and policy documents brought out in the last year identify China as the only country with the capability and intent to reshape the global order, necessitating the US's desire to "invest, align and compete" at the global level. At the policy level, the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act has placed Beijing at the heart of an emerging tech rivalry with the US, which could be decisive in transforming the geopolitical competition between the two powers. Besides, the growing Chinese threat also led the US to recentre its strategic focus in the Pacific theatre through the AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) deal.

Global Repositioning

On the back of his presidential campaign declaration that 'America is back', Biden's foreign policy focus in 2022 was on the global repositioning of the US through the renewed embrace of regions such as Latin America and Africa, as well as a recalibration in its transatlantic policies ushered by the ongoing war in Ukraine. Mending the eroded political trust in transatlantic ties, driving an intra-European Union (EU) solidarity through external support, and strengthening the NATO remains at the core of the US's EU policy. In June 2022, the 9th Summit of the Americas underscored a new partnership with Latin America through investment and innovation while prioritising health and democratic governance.

In December, the US-Africa Leaders' Summit saw the launch of a new strategic partnership with the African Union, with a focus on food security, health, and the critical Horn of Africa region. These renewed engagements have depicted a desire in Washington to lead a consensus-driven and rules-based multilateral world order.

More importantly, it depicts a conscious scrambling inside the Beltway to prevent China from using its development programmes and financial assistance to take a lead in the Global South. The larger purpose of these new regional engagements by the US seems to be integrated with its strategy for the Indo-Pacific region.

Beyond the strategic outlook, the US under the Biden administration is seeking a domestic strengthening to balance the country's often-interventionist foreign policies while bolstering the Democratic Party's standing at home, especially in the face of a resurgent Right.

“If 2021 saw a number of executive orders by Biden to reform and rework US domestic and foreign policies, 2022 sought to build and institutionalise those decisions.”

China: The Rise of the Citizen

Kalpita A Mankikar and Antara Ghosal Singh

The year 2022 will likely be remembered as the year the Chinese citizen stood up to be counted. It also saw President Xi Jinping begin his third term at China's helm with grand plans for self-reliance. Meanwhile, following the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in October, China has been on a diplomatic overdrive, engaging in high-level engagements with countries around the world.

Protests Rattle Beijing

While the pandemic ravaged through China, forcing the regime to resort to stringent lockdowns in accordance with Xi's zero-COVID policy, its impact was felt most strongly in the realty sector. The curbs impacted labour availability and

construction supply chains, resulting in builders abandoning projects. While the phenomenon of *lanwěilóu* (the Mandarin word to describe unfinished building projects) is not new, Chinese home buyers across nearly 100 cities stopped payments on their mortgages in an act of civil disobedience. The simmering issue came to a boil when a protestor stood atop a bridge in Beijing in October to mark his anguish against the obstructive COVID-19 restrictions, followed by student demonstrations in major cities that were reminiscent of the 1989 Tiananmen uprising against the CCP. The mortgage stir pushed the regime to rejig payment schedules and nudge builders to fast-track construction, while China's youth holding out blank sheets of paper to make their point against the regime forced a climbdown from the tough restrictions.

The difference between previous mobilisations over localised issues and the 2022 demonstrations is that this is the first time since 1989 that protesters have questioned the CCP's political dominance.

Quest for Self-Reliance

The year marked a new chapter in the China-US technology war. The US is making it tougher for China to access semiconductors and constricting money flows into sunshine sectors like telecommunications, with the latest effort being a bipartisan legislation to curb the access of tech majors like Huawei to US financial institutions. US President Joe Biden appears to be taking aim at capital and technology, the two main pillars that propelled China's ascent to the world's second-largest economy. The conflict resonated during the CCP congress, where Xi secured a third term. Xi's work report to the party underscores making supply chains resilient, and has numerous mentions of "self-reliance" and "strength in science and technology". Xi plans to cover up the capital and capacity deficit through greater self-reliance by honing human capital. The strategy involves recalibrating the domestic education system to instill students with a scientific temper, luring

experts working abroad to come home, and getting private equity firms to finance companies associated with semiconductors.

Reaching Out to the World

After a lull during the pandemic years, Chinese diplomacy seems to have entered a hyperactive phase in the last few months. In his first overseas visit since the outbreak of the pandemic, Xi attended the 22nd meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and made a state visit to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in September.

The conclusion of the CCP congress in October marked the beginning of a busy schedule for Chinese diplomacy. Xi held face-to-face meetings with nearly 30 foreign heads of state, government, and international organizations in just over a month. He has received several world leaders in Beijing, including Nguyen Phu Trong, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam's Central Committee; Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan; Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif; German Chancellor Olaf Scholz; and European Council President Charles Michel.

Xi also attended the G20 Summit in Bali, Indonesia, and the 29th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders' Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, in November. In December, he attended the first China-Arab States Summit and the China-Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and made a state visit to Saudi Arabia.

Chinese strategists are of the opinion that such a diplomatic overdrive is aimed at nullifying efforts by “hostile forces” to isolate China at the global stage. Amid the Russia–Ukraine war, a new Cold War environment has arguably emerged with a cohesive western bloc comprising the US and Europe. In Asia, the US is collaborating with countries like Japan, Australia, India, New Zealand, and South Korea to form ‘smaller circles’ like the Quadrilateral Security

Dialogue (or Quad), the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), and the Australia-UK-US (or AUKUS) pact. These come at a time when China’s Belt and Road Initiative is facing challenges such as funding shortfalls, delays due to the pandemic, economic recession in participating countries, bad publicity over issues of neo-colonialism and debt trap, and also competition from rival initiatives. The latter include the Blue Dot Network (a multilateral initiative to support, build, and finance quality infrastructure projects) and Build Back Better World (an initiative by G7 countries to meet “the tremendous infrastructure needs of low and middle-income countries”). Under such circumstances, China finds it imperative to increase its circle of friends so that it does not fall behind in the emerging great-power competition.

“The 2022 demonstrations were the first time since 1989 that protesters have questioned the CCP’s political dominance.”

Russia: Elite Consolidation and a Tense Future

Nandan Unnikrishnan

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has upset global geopolitical equations and significantly complicated foreign policy calculations in most countries across the world. It was aimed at addressing two long-standing Russian grievances: at the regional level, the relentless expansion of a hostile North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) towards Russian borders, and at the global level, the stifling domination of the West and its allies in the post-War international system.

While the Russian move was motivated by its perception of an 'existential threat', the United States-led response suggests a mirror-image perception that any 'Russian success' would upend the carefully crafted Western-led global security and economic architecture.

A cursory glance at the state of play ten months later suggests that, so far, there is only one outright winner in this conflict—the US. The US has managed to expand its list of formal allies, marshalling them in military and economic support against Russia and has consolidated its status as a preeminent global power for several more decades. The rest of the world, including Europe, appear to be on the losing side, amidst the sanctions-induced disruptions in the commodities market and supply chains.

The Economic Fallout of the Ukraine War

The invasion of Ukraine has had a significant impact on Russia's economy, with its gross domestic product (GDP) expected to drop by at least 3.4 percent in the best-case scenario and up to 5.5 percent in the worst case. The country's economy—estimated at US\$ 1.7 trillion before the conflict—is expected to continue contracting in 2023.

From a Russian perspective, these figures are better than anticipated, especially since Russia's Central Bank had painted a far darker picture. One of the reasons for this resilience is that Russia has had to deal with economic sanctions as far back as 2014, after the regime change in Ukraine and the incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation, leading to a significant reorientation of the economy. This reduced dependence on imported goods is particularly evident in food products, which are now primarily produced domestically. Moreover, Moscow has found ways to supply hydrocarbons—its main export—globally, despite the elaborate Western sanctions regime.

However, the real impact of the wide-ranging sanctions enforced against Russia is likely to become evident in 2023. There is also little doubt that the country's manufacturing sector will contract. Additionally, Russia's access to Western finance and technology will be severely restricted, further complicating growth and slowing down efforts to modernise the energy sector and other areas.

Consolidation of the Ruling Elite

Russia also appears to have experienced some upheavals on the internal political front. Initially, after the invasion, there was an exodus of people, including highly qualified experts, business magnates, and members of the upper-middle class. A second spike occurred after the partial mobilisation was announced in September. The outflow, however, appears to have subsided. Tellingly, Russia is yet to impose travel restrictions on people not engaged in strategic sectors.

The political churn, combined with the exodus, has had the effect of consolidating the ruling elites, i.e., the intelligentsia and political, business, and bureaucratic elements. The gap between the elites' vision of Russia and that of the general populace appears to be reducing. Political observers note that if this trend continues, it could lead to a transformation of Russian society. What remains unsaid is that this consolidation is likely to occur around more conservative values without necessarily leading to greater authoritarianism.

Restructuring of Global Partnerships

On the foreign policy front, Russia faces a mixed bag. It was roundly criticised for its actions in the United Nations, although some significant countries, such as India and China, abstained in the vote. It is also facing the unprecedented breadth and harshness of Western sanctions but is buoyed by the fact that virtually no country outside the West has joined the sanctions regime.

Meanwhile, maintaining ties with Russia has become an exercise in carefully calibrating policies to protect national interest without attracting sanctions, given the West's significant global economic clout, further enhanced with the weaponisation of the US dollar. India, too, is carefully navigating the churning seas of global geopolitics. The war raised

several questions of concern in India. First, how will the war impact the Sino-Russian relationship? While an increasing closeness appears inevitable, will this necessarily lead to Moscow playing second fiddle to Beijing? Second, how will the performance of Russian arms in the war affect India's defence purchases?

The lack of easy answers does not reduce the validity of India's concerns, which will determine the future of Indo-Russian ties.

“An outright winner in the Russia-Ukraine war is the US, which has managed to expand its list of allies and consolidated its status as a preeminent global power for several more decades.”

Europe: Geopolitics Unbind As Uncertainty Looms

Ankita Dutta

The year 2022 will go down in European history as the year when war returned to the continent. The Russia–Ukraine conflict added geopolitical uncertainty in the region, which was already under stress due to rising energy prices, inflation, and the challenges of post-COVID-19 recovery. The EU also witnessed other events that added to the geopolitical churnings, such as Italy electing its first female prime minister with the most right-wing government in its post-War history; increasing tussles between Hungary and the EU over supranational laws and their diverging outlook towards the Russia–Ukraine conflict; and the UK’s government credibility crisis, with Boris Johnson resigning as prime minister and leader of the Conservative Party in July, followed by Liz Truss resigning in October and being succeeded

by Rishi Sunak. This article outlines three key trends witnessed in the region in the past year: the Russia–Ukraine conflict; spiralling energy crisis; and a re-orientation of security debates.

War Returns to the Continent

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 marked the escalation of an eight-year conflict and was a watershed moment for Europe. Since the beginning of the conflict, the continent has undergone massive strategic re-evaluation. Energy shortages, high inflation, and increasing migration of Ukrainian citizens have been some of the immediate consequences of the conflict. In response to the crisis, the EU has mobilised all available instruments, ranging from sanctions to diplomacy, to military support and humanitarian assistance.

The international sanctions on Russia have been expanded to include the energy sector, expulsion of Russian banks from the SWIFT system, as well as restrictions on the movement and access to the assets of Russian oligarchs and other individuals. The Nord Stream 2 project has also been suspended. The ripple effects of the conflict have been felt globally; as Russia and Ukraine are global suppliers of wheat and fertilisers, the conflict drove up food prices and raised fears of global shortages. It also led to soaring global energy prices as Moscow reduced its supplies to the West in retaliation for the sanctions. Even after ten months, there is yet no end to the conflict in sight.

Spiralling Energy Crisis

The Ukraine crisis revealed Europe's vulnerabilities in energy supply. While there were initial concerns regarding the Kremlin's use of its dominance in the European energy market to restrict energy exports, the EU has acted decisively to diversify its energy basket away from Russia. The EU, in its fifth and sixth rounds of sanctions, included an import ban on all forms of Russian coal and all Russian seaborne crude oil and petroleum products. The EU has also taken two-pronged measures to diversify its energy resources away from Moscow—first, through securing alternative supplies of resources, and second, putting forward various policies

and initiatives, such as the RePowerEU plan; increasing targets under the Renewable Energy Directive; mandatory power savings during peak hours; and national relief packages to cushion the impact of the energy crisis.

Moreover, nuclear energy is again at the forefront of discussions, along with talks regarding increased investments in LNG terminals, renewable energy, and pipeline infrastructure. Although the EU has put mechanisms in place to cope with the situation, these initiatives will take time to bear results. Therefore, there are limited signs of the situation improving soon, and it is a long road ahead for the EU to achieve energy security.

Strengthening Security Architecture

It cannot be denied that the Ukraine crisis has triggered renewed debates on European security architecture. On the one hand, it has led to a unified and strengthened NATO, and on the other, the EU and its member states have taken key policy decisions to further their defence integration.

For NATO, two key outcomes included strengthening its defence under the new Strategic Concept released in June 2022 as well as through increasing enhanced forward presence in the region from four to eight; and expanding towards the north, with both Sweden and Finland foregoing their neutrality and applying for membership to the alliance.

The EU also emerged as a proactive actor during the year, mobilising its resources, including the European Peace Facility, to support Ukrainian armed forces and triggering the Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian refugees. It also released its Strategic Compass for Security and Defence in March 2022, which included the establishment of an EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of up to 5,000 troops. This was complemented by member states

such as Poland, Latvia, and Belgium announcing increases in their respective defence budgets. However, the critical development was Germany shedding its traditional defence inhibitions and reversing some of its key policies, such as the supply of lethal weapons to a conflict zone. While there has been a momentum to push for reforms both at the NATO and EU levels, the question is whether this momentum for further integration will be sustained or if it will just be a knee-jerk reaction to the crisis next door.

“The Ukraine crisis has triggered renewed debates on European security architecture.”

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Key Geographies

The Indo-Pacific: Taking the Centrestage

Premesha Saha

The term ‘Indo-Pacific’ entered global strategic lexicon about a decade ago, but gained importance only in the more recent years. At present, the Indo-Pacific is the most contested maritime zone in the world because of growing strategic rivalry between the US and China, and the security interests of other key players in the region. In 2022, three crucial trends made the region even more significant to global geopolitics.

The Ukraine Conflict and the Challenge to Rules-Based Order

The Ukraine crisis has challenged multilateral efforts at creating a rules-based global order. In the Indo-Pacific, the prospect of territorial aggression has become real in a way that it was not in recent decades. The war has also affected Indo-Pacific states through its disruptive impact on global supplies of energy and other essential commodities.

Even as most countries champion the concept of a free, open, rules-based Indo-Pacific, their positions on the Ukraine war have been divided. US allies and partners have adopted a diverse set of policy reactions. Some, such as India, have hedged their bets to maintain their ties with Russia, while others like Singapore, Japan, and South Korea have joined the US-led effort against Russian aggression. China’s support of Russia has raised speculation about whether Taiwan too, could share the fate of Ukraine. Territorial clashes and disputes have marred the Indo-Pacific region for long, in such areas as the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait. The Russia-Ukraine war has underscored the imperative of giving greater attention to threats to territorial sovereignty and a secure and rules-based global order.

Increased US Activity in the Indo-Pacific

It is often said that the US's Indo-Pacific strategy rests on security concerns alone. However, economic and trade matters are also important to the United States, as the Indo-Pacific accounts for more than 60 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP), and almost 50 percent of global trade passes through its sea lanes. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was at the core of former President Barack Obama's 'Asia Pivot' policy. His successor, Donald Trump, however, walked away from it.

On taking over, President Joe Biden faced the challenge of deepening economic engagement in the region. Instead of joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), he launched a separate grouping called the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) in May 2022 to reassert the US's economic leadership, offering deals in new areas such as the digital economy, ironing out supply chain bottlenecks, and green infrastructure, where the US enjoyed competitive advantage. The IPEF is the US's new vehicle for economic re-engagement in the region, and forms the economic pillar of its Indo-Pacific strategy. Through the IPEF, the US is attempting to counter China's growing economic heft in the region, particularly when China is already the leading trading partner of all IPEF participating countries.

Other Countries Stake Their Claims

Countries such as South Korea and Canada have recently declared their Indo-Pacific policies, while France, in February 2022, updated its own. South Korea's strategy, outlined during the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in November 2022, is committed to the "principles of freedom, peace and prosperity built on a rules-based order" for the region. In practice, it means that after the country's long adherence to a policy of "strategic ambiguity", balancing relations between China and the US, it would now be, as President Yoon Suk-yeol declared, "following Washington's lead on the challenges facing the region" which was "in Seoul's best interest." France's updated policy says it will attempt to "upgrade its military operational capability in the region and increase coordination with important international partners, including India and Japan."

These patterns will shape much of policymaking and developments in the Indo-Pacific region in the coming years.

“The Indo-Pacific is the most contested maritime zone in the world.”

West Asia: Search for Strategic Autonomy

Kabir Taneja

The world has had an unexpected, messy exit from the COVID-19 pandemic, with Russia's war against Ukraine not only taking centre stage in global geopolitics but also having a domino effect on regional politics, from shortages in energy supplies to food insecurity and inflation. West Asia, already a geopolitical tinderbox, navigated a host of issues in 2022 with poise and without military flareups, even as tensions peaked repeatedly, with the looming failure of the Iran nuclear deal between Tehran and the P5+1 group of nations. The Iran question continues to threaten the Arab world and Israel alike, while Tehran seeks to secure its interests and sovereignty by getting closer to the Russia–China axis. For the Arab Gulf, more specifically power centres such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, seeking a level of strategic autonomy is an increasingly attractive proposition, despite being host to some of the largest US military presence in the world.

Saudi Arabia and the US Cold War

Saudi Arabia, under the patronage of heir apparent Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), continued to chart a new economic and political path for the future in the past year. This has included a recalibration of ties between Washington DC and Riyadh and, perhaps more specifically, the House of Saud and the Democrats. For MBS, President Joe Biden posed a challenge, and not an opportunity, to take the bilateral forward, specifically considering Riyadh's reliance on the US on security-related matters.

The slow US response to the 2019 oil refinery attacks undertaken by Iran-backed Houthi rebels was a litmus test which, according to Riyadh, the Americans failed. MBS's reaction has been to hedge Saudi Arabia's security bets. He designed the OPEC+ mechanism in 2018, working more closely with Russia to control both oil production and prices internationally, pushing back on US requests to not cut production during the run-up to mid-term elections, where Biden stood on uneven political ground. Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia in July failed to gain many favours with MBS who, in contrast, garlanded a grand welcome to China's President Xi Jinping a few months later. Saudi Arabia thus left a window open by not signing any security deals with Beijing, but deepening roots in other economic areas such as technology and energy security.

Israel's Elections: Fifth Time the Charm

Israel's fifth general election in four years was almost a non-event, with an exhausted public and international polity alike observing the country's failure to elect a stable government. However, the November 2022 elections saw Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu at the forefront, prepping to become prime minister once again despite corruption charges and strong attempts to keep this political survivor out of power. At the time of writing

this article, Netanyahu, along with his alliance partners from the Israeli far-right, were close to officially forming a government. Interestingly, while many countries, including the US, have raised concerns over far-right candidates overseeing critical security portfolios, neighbours such as Saudi Arabia would probably see it as a favourable outcome as far as a regional response architecture to Iran and its nuclear programme are concerned.

Israel's overt operations against the Iranian nuclear program inside Iran are also privately beneficial by association for Saudi Arabia. Some quarters also suggest that the return of Netanyahu could mean that the Israeli leader may be able to act as a bridge between MBS and Biden and ease tensions between the two countries. The Saudi Foreign Minister recently stated that if Iran got nuclear weapons, all bets were off—a view perhaps shared in far more urgent overtones by Israel, which would prefer to act before such a scenario comes to fruition. (Israel, though, is already widely believed to be a nuclear power).

Iran Remains the Central Issue

On the sidelines of the Russian war against Ukraine, Tehran coming up as a key supplier of certain weapon systems to Moscow was unexpected. While Iran supplied unmanned drones, including kamikaze drones, to a struggling Kremlin, Turkey was providing its infamous Bayraktar TB2 drones to Ukraine. From afar, Iran's strategic aims appear to be spread wide and thin, straining its resources and economy. While Tehran continued to double-down on its nuclear program, local protests strained its domestic political ecosystems. Iran's strategic operational zones in 2022 included Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, its border with Afghanistan with the return of the Taliban, and its border with Azerbaijan.

An increased reliance on Russia and China in the future is expected to play up in 2023 and beyond, as Tehran also became a permanent member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2022. Iran is therefore taking a clearer position, while its Arab neighbours are choosing a more balanced approach (even as they harbour an interest in engaging more with the SCO)—both from a regional perspective and from the viewpoint of a looming great-power competition between the US and China.

“West Asia, a geopolitical tinderbox, navigated a host of issues in 2022 without military flareups, even as tensions peaked repeatedly.”

Central Asia: A Widening of Fault Lines

Ayjaz Wani

A string of protests against the governments in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan deepened the fault lines in the Central Asian Republics (CARs) in 2022. Sporadic border clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan remained unaddressed because of the Russia-Ukraine war, which has impacted the entire region. The crisis has not only made the CARs increasingly worried about their own security and sovereignty, but also led to economic uncertainties. This in turn has made them pursue new foreign policy initiatives seeking regional connectivity.

Societal Pressure for Democratic Rights

Historically, most of the regimes in the CAR have been authoritarian, and dissent and protests against them were rare. However, decades of socioeconomic transformation and the Russia-Ukraine crisis have created unease. Kazakhstan witnessed its biggest public protest since independence on 2 January 2022. It started in the town of Zhanaozen against the revocation of state subsidies on liquefied petroleum gas, a primary vehicle fuel. The fuel price surge bonded people across the country to demand for redressal of their long-pending grievances against corruption, curtailment of civil rights and individual freedoms, and detention of political opponents. Within four days, the protestors had stormed government buildings, airports, and TV

stations. Thousands were injured and dozens killed, including from among the security forces trying to control them. The government imprisoned thousands and imposed a nationwide emergency. The internet was shut down, and foreign troops under the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) were used to quell the protests.

In Uzbekistan, the proposal to downgrade the autonomous status of the ‘republic’ of Karakalpakstan in the northwest was met with widespread protests by the locals. Karakalpakstan covers over 40 percent of Uzbekistan’s territory, where the combined Karakalpaks and Kazaks outnumber the ethnic Uzbeks. The violent protests in the streets of Nukus killed 18 people and injured 243, and the government detained over 500 others. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev proclaimed a state of emergency for a month in the region and curtailed internet services. But he also deferred the decision to reduce regional autonomy, which Karakalpakstan had enjoyed even when it was part of the former Soviet Union. Deteriorating living standards have also affected the region, aggravated by increased salinity of much of the land, which has impacted agriculture and agro-based sectors. Few employment opportunities have also left the people of Karakalpakstan dependent on Uzbekistan even for the basic essentials.

Similarly, after the government of Kyrgyzstan arrested activists, human rights workers, bloggers, and some politicians in October, there were protests in parts of Bishkek and Osh. The protestors demanded their release, and also more transparency on an agreement the government has reached with neighbouring Uzbekistan to transfer an important dam to it as part of a border demarcation deal.

Fragile Bilateral Relations

Since their independence three decades ago, the CARs have faced many interstate issues. Some have been settled, while others continue to hamper relations. Uzbekistan has solved its long-pending border disputes with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and demarcations are in progress, though these face some resistance from activists and politicians from the areas affected. However, the border dispute between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan remains unresolved. Starting with disagreements over the ownership of a water reservoir in 2018, it grew into a large-scale conflict in April 2021. Hundreds were killed, while tens of thousands were displaced. The dispute worsened in 2022. Both countries have accused the other of targeting populated areas with weapons systems such as Grad rockets and Bayraktar armed drones. Ultimately, increased international pressure forced Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to sign a ceasefire agreement on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in September 2022.

Russia-Ukraine Crisis Weakens the CARs

The CARs' economies, driven primarily by exports of fossil fuels, oil and gas, uranium, and coal, were devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing global lockdowns. The region's major economies went into recession, with the price of essentials rising sharply. As the CARs were showing signs of recovery, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and unprecedented sanctions imposed on it by the West triggered a new economic shock. The CARs are heavily dependent on Russia for export routes, infrastructure, and labour markets. Sanctions are preventing goods from reaching the CARs and have also cut their access to export markets in the West, arresting their post-pandemic recovery. Over three million Central Asians work in Russia, and the economies of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan are heavily dependent on these remittances. The economic stagnation due to the Russia-Ukraine war, especially in the poorest countries of the region, will increase instability and heighten unrest.

Previously, the CARs saw Russia as a source of stability, security, and territorial integrity in the region. But the invasion of Ukraine has made them fear for their own sovereignty. Their overt dependence on the Russia-led CSTO has left the CARs in doubt about their security, especially after the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. The growing presence of global terror outfits such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Khorasan within the borders of Afghanistan, along with militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, and Jamaat Ansarullah, have heightened security concerns.

Given such volatility, the leaders of the CARs are now drawing closer on security and connectivity issues with likeminded countries including India. The historical cultural connections between India and Central Asia are now moving towards a strategic partnership. The year 2023 will see more convergence within the CARs on these issues and also with New Delhi.

“Central Asian Republics face issues of security and sovereignty, and economic uncertainty.”

Latin America: Voters Force Political Leaders to Stay the Course

Hari Seshasayee

For many in India and Asia, Latin America may be an unfamiliar place. Most news and analyses that they would read about Latin America tend to be fed by an English-language media network seemingly obsessed with the pitfalls and misadventures in the region; stories are typically centred around illicit drugs, cartels, violent crime, and poverty. Yet, Latin America is much more than that. It is the land of the Andes mountains and the Amazon rainforest, of innovative social and educational concepts like *'buen vivir'* (loosely translated in English, 'good living') and participatory budgeting, of creative startups in 'foodtech' and one of the world's largest digital banks, where millennials and political outsiders are elected as presidents, and where football and salsa reign. The year 2022 has been a mixed bag for most of the world, and it was true for Latin America, too.

To be sure, Latin America is a large and diverse region, bigger than South Asia, China, and Europe combined. Some economies like Panama have a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of US\$36,370 similar to those of European countries like Greece, while Honduras' GDP per capita of US\$6,769 is more comparable to Mauritania in Africa. A trend may therefore be true for one part of the region but not in another. For example, anti-incumbency is a significant challenge for most of the region's leaders, but less so for Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who currently enjoys a 70-percent approval rating—amongst the highest for any head of government in the world. With this caveat in mind, the following paragraphs outline three overarching trends seen in Latin America in 2022.

The Illusion of the ‘Pink Tide’

Many analysts of Latin America have observed a resurgence of another ‘pink tide’ in the region—a string of left-wing and centre-left governments in the region, associated with the colour pink, lighter than the far-left, communist red. Such a generalisation, however, is mostly misplaced. Latin America’s left-wing governments are less of a cabal of likeminded leaders, and more of a diverse set. This includes Gabriel Boric, a 36-year-old millennial president in Chile, and Luiz Ignacio ‘Lula’ da Silva, the 77-year-old president of Brazil re-elected after more than a decade. The region’s left-wing governments have varied positions and policies on contentious issues such as LGBTQ+ rights or abortion.

Latin American politics, therefore, offers the rest of the world a wakeup call: that we need to outgrow old, Cold War-era mindsets of dichotomous left- and right-wing politics. Latin American voters have largely abandoned these mindsets, electing leaders they deem fit based on their reading of current events. These voters are pragmatic and will vote out leaders who fail to perform.

Anti-Incumbency

Perhaps no other region in the world was as adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as Latin America was in 2020 and 2021; in 2022, most leaders in the region have struggled to lead their countries to economic recovery. Lula’s victory and the defeat of incumbent president Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil was the 15th consecutive election in the region that saw the exit of incumbents. Not only is it difficult for sitting elected leaders to win another term, but even those running on similar platforms as incumbents are failing.

This was the case in Colombia, where right-wing president Iván Duque became so unpopular that it made it nearly impossible for another president running on the same right-wing platform to win. In June 2022 the voters elected Gustavo Petro, the first left-wing president in Colombian history. This sentiment of anti-incumbency may continue well through 2023, unless Latin American leaders are able to address serious issues like unemployment, political corruption, and rising levels of violence.

Slow Post-Covid Economic Recovery

The war in Ukraine and its global impact on rising food and energy prices have been a boon for some countries in Latin America and a disaster for others. Energy exporting countries like Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico and Colombia benefitted from higher oil prices, and food exporters too, like Brazil and Argentina, earned more from agricultural exports in the past year. Yet, energy and food importers in the region, particularly small countries in Central America and the Caribbean, struggled to break even. The year provided some respite for countries

that depend more on tourism revenues. Overall, economies in the region have been surprisingly resilient, with GDP growth forecast at 3.2 percent in 2022, exceeding previous estimates. However, if demand slows in China and the United States increases interest rates, 2023 may yet prove to be more difficult.

“Latin America is showing the world that we need to outgrow old, Cold War-era mindsets of dichotomous left- and right-wing politics.”

Africa: Finding Its Place in the Global Order

Abhishek Mishra

The past year witnessed both positive and adverse developments across the African continent—from Morocco becoming the first African nation to reach the semi-finals of the FIFA World Cup, to some parts of the region reeling from historic drought and widespread food insecurities, to nine African countries experiencing debt distress and 12 other countries falling in the high-risk category.

In a global context marked by a slowdown in economic growth, high inflation, and rising interest rates, African countries made efforts to find their place in the global order. The continent's economic, political, and social resilience was tested as it continued to face unprecedented exogenous shocks in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The year witnessed three overarching trends from Africa.

Pursuit of Multilateralism

For far too long, African leaders and governments' attempts to have their voices heard in international forums have not borne desired results. In an international governance system that is inadequate to face the demographic, political and economic realities of our time, Africa continues to be underrepresented and marginalised—even as the continent is home to more than 16 percent of the global population. It is a welcome development, therefore, that the Common African Position on UN Security Council reforms—which advocates for two permanent and five non-permanent African seats—has received the support of various countries and organisations.

In the past year, amid dealing with issues like economic (debt) relief, global health policy, and the treatment of African nationals in foreign countries, African leaders and countries made sustained and public efforts to assert their demands of more equitable ties with partner countries. United States President Joe Biden voiced his support for the proposal to add African members to the UNSC and incorporate the African Union as a permanent member of the G20 in this year's session of the United Nations General Assembly. This development is important as it comes under India's presidency of the G20. India has ardently advocated for the inclusion of African members in the UNSC and international governing bodies.

Retreat of Democracy

Democracy's global retreat over the past decade has touched Africa as well. While the majority of Africans believe in elections as the best way to select their leaders, popular support for elections has weakened in recent years. For many Africans, there is a direct correlation between rise in corruption in key governing institutions and their dissatisfaction with democracy.

To be sure, certain positive developments for democratic governance did take place in the continent in the past year. For instance, Kenya elected President William Ruto in a narrowly fought election. Meanwhile, Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan has expanded civic space by reversing restrictions imposed by her predecessor. While these are encouraging developments, however, the challenges far outweigh the successes.

The Sahel and Horn of Africa regions continue to face instability and armed conflict. There is a renewed trend of militarisation, which was a trademark of continental African politics in the 1970s. The governments in countries like Sudan, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, have all been overthrown in the last two years. The Guinea Bissau government survived a coup attempt in February 2022. A number of factors, like the entrenchment of political elites, the lack of political pluralism, corruption, and opacity, continue to be crucial barriers to democratic success in Africa.

Chronic Food Insecurity and Climate Change

Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be one of the most food-insecure regions in the world, owing to lack of resilience to climate events and overdependence on food imports. An estimated 140 million people face acute food insecurity across the continent.

Indeed, climate change is intensifying food insecurity in the region. In the past year, Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia endured one of the worst droughts in four decades, leading to widespread displacement and starvation. One of the main aims for African negotiators at the UN COP27 session in November 2022 was to find ways for their countries to mobilise climate finance. Although Africa is the continent most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change—while responsible for only 4 percent of

global greenhouse gas emissions—it is able to mobilise a meagre 3 percent of global climate finance flows. The 2009 commitment of US\$100 billion by developed countries, to support adaptation and mitigation efforts in developing countries, remains unfulfilled. Subsequently, most African countries are working to submit revised Nationally Determined Contributions aimed at transitioning to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy. However, without the financial support of developed countries, Africa’s climate ambitions risk being compromised.

“In an international governance system inadequate for the demographic, political and economic realities of our time, Africa continues to be underrepresented.”

South Asia: Despair and Distress Amidst Great-Power Contestation

Shivam Shekhawat and Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy

In 2022, South Asia experienced no dearth in challenges that threatened the well-being of large populations. While the destruction wrought by the pandemic and consequent lockdowns was still being felt, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the deteriorating state of the international order compounded the challenges. Growing domestic discontent too, has made the past year turbulent, belying any hopes of a swift return to pre-pandemic levels of growth and stability.

The Falling Economic Dominoes

The COVID-19 crisis, followed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, disrupted supply chains, increased inflation, and exposed the region's economic vulnerabilities. Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have all sought assistance from the International Monetary Fund.

Heavy imports, inflation, lack of export diversification, unsustainable external borrowings from China, and white-elephant projects have together contributed to the worst economic crisis in Sri Lanka and an economic catastrophe in Pakistan. Sri Lanka owes China 20 percent of its public external debt; Islamabad owes it over US\$ 30 billion. Both countries have imposed new taxes and slashed subsidies to increase revenues. Failure to generate foreign reserves has exacerbated the crisis—Pakistan generates its forex mainly through external borrowings, while Sri Lanka was heavily reliant on tourism and remittances before COVID-19.

In Bangladesh, massive infrastructure investments, reductions in garment production and exports, and heavy energy imports have impacted foreign reserves and in turn, overall economic outcomes. It is witnessing inflation, power cuts and limited use of foreign currency. As for Nepal, in the last year alone, its foreign exchange reserves fell by US\$ 2.3 billion due to a decline in exports and remittances, and higher import prices. It led to import restrictions and power blackouts.

Bhutan and the Maldives, both of which have a high trade deficit and largely depend on tourism for foreign exchange reserves, have increased tourism-related taxes to raise revenues. Lastly, Afghanistan is struggling to keep itself afloat, as its economy contracts, the Taliban remains a global pariah, and the threat from the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) intensifies. (The ISKP is an affiliate of ISIS which has religious/ideological differences with the Taliban.)

Dissent and Democratic Descent

Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Pakistan are heading to elections in 2023, and Sri Lanka in 2024. The debilitating economic situation in the region combined with political opportunism has sparked public dissatisfaction, manifesting in protests throughout the region. While the protest marches and demands for accountability reflect the

level of popular participation, the response of the governments and their crackdowns signal the region's fragile politics and democracy.

As the economic crisis deepened, both Pakistan and Sri Lanka saw leadership changes and wide calls for reform. Imran Khan was ousted as Pakistan's prime minister as civil-military relations worsened. His successor is struggling to bring stability because of Khan's increasing popularity and the challenges of working with a coalition. In Sri Lanka, the *aragalaya* (Sinhalese for 'struggle') forced the earlier president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to flee the country, while new President Ranil Wickremesinghe—whose party has only one seat in parliament—has shot down calls for early elections and clamped down on protests.

The demonstrations in Bangladesh in December 2022 over its economic difficulties, and the government's crackdown on these protests, place the administration in a bind. The formation of the new government in Nepal based on loose coalitions and political opportunism also indicate that deep factionalism and instability will persist in the country.

In the Maldives and Bhutan, multiple parties are bracing for upcoming elections. Increasing tensions within the Maldivian ruling party, and the conviction of Abdulla Yameen, opposition leader and former president, could create new political alliances and coalitions, in turn leading to more political instability and opportunism.

With international attention focused elsewhere, the Taliban have backtracked on most of their promises, pushing Afghanistan to even more uncertainty as they reneged on commitments to women's rights and freedoms.

Balancing Relations in a Changing External Environment

With the Indo-Pacific emerging as a new theatre of contestation between the US and China, and the Ukraine-Russian war persisting since February 2022, the international order is under great stress. No doubt, despite Western pressure, South Asian countries are exercising their agency. They have made independent policy choices, based on historical relationships, and national and economic interests.

Imran Khan was much criticised after his ill-timed visit to Moscow soon after the invasion in February. Since his ouster, Pakistan has tried to mend fences with the US. Even so, its neutral stance on the war reflects its need to get closer to Russia,

whose support it needs in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The Taliban's global posturing stems from its need for legitimacy in the international community, with the world's attention now on Ukraine. For Sri Lanka as well, its economic situation and debt restructuring has compelled it to balance relations with India, China, the Quad countries, and even Russia. With Russia funding 90 percent of the nuclear power plant to be set up in Bangladesh, Dhaka has refused to blame Russia for the war while officially citing the need for states to respect international law and territorial sovereignty.

Nepal and Bhutan have condemned Russia and expressed concerns about increasing global tensions. While Nepal is currently prioritising its domestic developmental needs, it is also taking advantage of the US to balance between India and China. Maldives is also reorienting its foreign policy as the dynamics in the Indo-Pacific change. It has increasingly supported the West against Russia and has also hesitated to move away from China, despite maintaining an 'India First' policy.

“2022 was turbulent for South Asia, belying hopes of a swift return to pre-pandemic growth.”

3

Global Issues

Warfare: Primeval State Rivalries Fuse With 21st-Century Technology

Sameer Patil

The outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022 marked the first major conflict in Europe since the end of the Second World War. The ramifications of this conflict are being felt globally, with Western tech sanctions against Moscow, disrupted supply chains, and increased cyber sabotage. These factors, combined with ongoing ethnic rivalries, territorial disputes, geopolitical shifts, and technological advances, are shaping the current dynamics of military competition and conflict in many parts of the world.

In this backdrop, this essay examines the trends in warfare in 2022, focusing on inter-state war, emerging technologies, and non-military coercive tools.

Inter-state Warfare with Hybrid Tactics

After the Cold War ended, the world began to experience more low-intensity conflicts and civil wars rather than high-intensity disputes between states. However, the Azerbaijan-Armenia war in late 2020, China's continuing aggressive actions against its neighbours, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 have signalled a return to inter-state warfare in international relations. This shift towards inter-state warfare is especially significant for Europe, which up until now had largely focused on expeditionary military capabilities. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has forced them to raise their defence spending and strengthen their military. The most notable is Germany, which has significantly boosted its defence budget, putting its armed forces on the path of rearmament not seen since the end of the Second World War.

Although full-scale conflicts such as those between Azerbaijan and Armenia, or Ukraine and Russia are relatively rare, many inter-state hostilities have taken the form of hybrid warfare. In this type of conflict where threats are often diffused, it can be difficult to distinguish between state and non-state actors, or between combatants and civilians. The use of advanced technologies also makes attribution challenging, and coercion occurs beyond traditional battlefields. For example, Russia's so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine exemplified the use of hybrid warfare tactics, including using Ukrainian civilian volunteers as proxies in separatist regions, disseminating disinformation and propaganda, and cyber attacks against Ukrainian computer networks. Indeed, cyber attacks and disinformation campaigns against Ukraine played a crucial role in preparing the ground for Russian military operations.

Yet, Russia is not the only country that has significantly increased the use of hybrid warfare or 'grey zone' tactics against its adversaries. China has also used these tactics extensively against states with whom it has disputes, such as Taiwan, India, and Japan. In the past year, it stepped up its offensive cyber operations campaign against adversaries.

Tech-Powered Battlefields

The return to inter-state warfare may seem reminiscent of the 'trench and tank warfare' of the 20th century. These conventional rivalries, however, are now being fought on technologically advanced battlefields. The Ukraine conflict demonstrated that the age of drone warfare is upon us. Russia deployed KUB-BLA drones, which could identify targets using artificial intelligence, while Ukraine armed its drones with anti-tank weapons that used satellite feed for aerial reconnaissance. With no risk of human casualties, drones and other autonomous systems have become a preferred platform for deployment in high-risk environments. This will pose more ethical and logistical questions in the coming years.

Major militaries worldwide have also intensified the pursuit of high-end conventional capabilities and weapons like air and missile defences, strategic airlift and mid-air refuelling capabilities, long-range artillery, long-range bombers, anti-ship weapons, hypersonic weapons, and electronic warfare capabilities. In December 2022, for instance, the US military unveiled B-21 Raider, a new bomber that will reportedly combine several high-end conventional capabilities.

Blunted Edge of Non-Military Coercive Tools

Beyond the battlefields, non-military coercive tools like sanctions and trade restrictions have emerged as the preferred instrument for states to deal with the rogue behaviour of individuals, organisations, or states. In recent years, the West has used sanctions against its adversaries—China, Iran, North Korea and Russia—for multiple destabilising actions like nuclear proliferation, human rights violations, support for terrorist activities, and military coups.

Similarly, the United States and other Western countries have imposed unprecedented sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine. To be sure, despite being in place for almost a year, these sanctions have failed to cause significant damage to the Russian economy nor serve as a deterrent to its military campaign in Ukraine. Nor

have they diminished Russia's military capabilities in the short term. However, the use of sanctions as a policy instrument is likely to continue.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the resurgence of inter-state warfare, the use of hybrid tactics to support conventional military operations, and the crucial role of new technologies in warfare. It has also shown the diminishing effectiveness of non-military coercive measures. Russia may have just drawn a blueprint for future wars.

“The Ukraine war, along with ethnic rivalries, territorial disputes, geopolitical shifts, and technological advances, are reshaping military competition in many parts of the world.”

The UNSC: Security, Territorial Integrity, and Peacekeeping

Kartik Bommakanti

In several ways, 2022 was a watershed year for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), with meta-trends evident in three key areas: the non-proliferation resolution of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, which could otherwise present threats to international security; sovereignty and territorial integrity, which assumed salience in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine; and peacekeeping developments.

UNSC Resolutions on WMD

The dominant trend at the UNSC pertains to discussions that eventually resulted in the passage of resolutions over Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Resolution 2622, dated 25 February

2022, recalled and reaffirmed Resolution 1540, which was passed by the UNSC in 2004 under Article VII of the United Nations (UN) Charter, whose provisions require that resolutions passed by the UNSC "...maintain international peace and security." The UNSC had passed several additional resolutions in the intervening years reaffirming Resolution 1540. Resolution 1540, as well as the 1540 Committee, continue to hold a prominent place in the UNSC's annual agenda.

The February 2022 Resolution extended the 1540 Committee's mandate as well as its term, calling on member states to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and their means of delivery, as they constitute a threat to international peace and

security. The Council revisited the issue in the process of passing Resolution 2663 on 30 November 2022, calling for the non-proliferation of WMD, obliging states to comply with Resolution 1540 and act in accordance with Article VII of the UN Charter.

Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity

The second crucial trend was the emergence of threats to the sanctity of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the UNSC failed to pass a resolution condemning the invasion due to Russia's status as a permanent veto-wielding member of the UNSC. However, on 27 February 2022, through Resolution 2623, the UNSC recalled the contents of S/2014/136—an official letter dated 28 February 2014 addressed to the UN from Ukraine's Permanent Representative. The letter focused on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, which was violated by Russia's annexation of Crimea. Consequently, the Council decided to convene an emergency special session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) under Resolution 2623 that examined the question under document S/Agenda/8979 which, in turn, cited S/2014/136. On 2 March 2022, the UNGA discussed

the Russian invasion of Ukraine and demanded that it end. On 2 March 2022 at the UNGA's Eleventh Emergency Special Session, 141 of the 193 member states supported a resolution calling for the Russian Federation to “immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.”

UN Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping has been a pillar of the UN and the UN Charter. The UNSC has recalled resolutions on several situations and countries involving UN peacekeeping mandates, such as the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), along the border between Sudan and South Sudan. The UNSC extended the mandate of UNISFA to November 2023. In addition, four UNSC resolutions were passed on Somalia, with the Council recalling previous resolutions. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) were particularly commended for their efforts to stabilise the restive country plagued by terrorist violence and civil strife.

The situation in Libya also attracted the attention of the UNSC, with several resolutions being passed that recalled past Council resolutions. The Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which witnessed turmoil during the past year, were also on the Council's agenda, and resolutions were passed in the regions. Libya too, received attention from the Council by way of resolutions, with the UNSC recalling several prior resolutions on the country.

THE BROAD TRENDS that characterised the UNSC's agenda involved vital issues surrounding WMD proliferation, violations of state sovereignty

and territorial integrity, and peacekeeping. Each of these areas impinge not only on global peace, security and stability, but also on regional security and stability. For obvious reasons, cooperation and general unanimity among member states proved elusive, specifically with regard to Ukraine, since Russia is a permanent veto-wielding member of the UNSC. However, there was strong consensus among Council members on the other questions and issues on the agenda, such as WMD proliferation and UN peacekeeping.

“Peacekeeping is a pillar of the UN and the UN Charter, and in 2022, the UNSC kept it firmly in its agenda.”

Global Trade: Cautious Optimism As Supply Chain Restructuring Gets a Push

Urvi Tembey

Defying predictions of increasing post-pandemic self-reliance and the end of globalisation, the year 2022 witnessed record levels of global trade and even the adoption of a new agreement at the World Trade Organization (WTO). While the 2022 trends highlight the continued interdependence between countries and the appetite for multilateral trade cooperation, it is also evident that businesses are increasingly diversifying their supply chains to make them more resilient to external shocks.

Value of Global Trade Set to Reach Record Level

Global trade was expected to reach a record level of approximately US\$ 32 trillion in 2022. A United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) [report](#) highlighted that, while growth was subdued during the second half of 2022, strong growth in the first half of the year helped achieve these record numbers. Increases in the value of energy product trade largely contributed to this growth. Overall, while COVID-19 sparked the “steepest decline in international trade on record”, it was also “followed by the fastest [recovery](#)”.

Trade volumes increased by 3 percent, reflecting the sustained demand for foreign goods throughout [2022](#). In value, trade in goods is “expected to total almost US\$ 25 trillion (an increase of about 10 per cent from 2021)”, while “trade in services is expected to total almost US\$ 7 trillion (an increase of about 15 per cent from [2021](#)).”

Negative global economic spillovers from geopolitical frictions, rise in prices of intermediate inputs and consumer goods, and high levels of global debt are expected to dampen economic growth in 2023. However, improvements in the logistics of global trade, decreasing freight and cargo rates, and possible fruition of trade agreements are expected to provide momentum to international trade.

Reshaping of Global Supply Chains

The logistical hurdles caused by the COVID-19 pandemic compelled companies to make their supply chains more secure and robust. While it is anticipated that “risk mitigation strategies, such as the diversification of suppliers, reshoring, near-shoring and friend-shoring, will likely affect international trade patterns in the coming [year](#),” 2022 witnessed companies diversifying parts of their supply chains and investing in manufacturing units in different countries. For example, Foxconn,

Apple’s largest contract manufacturer, “recently signed a \$300 million deal to expand in northern Vietnam with a new factory that will generate 30,000 [jobs](#).” This was “in addition to \$1.5 billion that the Vietnamese government had said Foxconn had already invested in the [country](#).” Similarly, India is set to get the biggest Apple iPhone manufacturing unit in Hosur, [Bengaluru](#). It was also reported that Foxconn is planning to expand their workforce in India by at least [four times](#) in the next two years. European retail chain C&A “intends to produce 800,000 jeans per year in a German factory, and Walmart has committed to spending an additional USD 350 billion through 2030 on items made, grown, or assembled in the [U.S.](#)”

The risk of trade wars, lockdowns, geopolitical tensions, and climate change are compelling businesses to diversify their supply chains and mitigate risks where possible. While supply chains are highly intertwined and relocation is tedious, 2022 saw businesses investing in alternative manufacturing units with a view to making their supply chains more resilient to external shocks.

A New Agreement at the WTO

In June 2022, the WTO hosted the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in Geneva, Switzerland. Countries deliberated on a wide range of topics, including the WTO's response to the pandemic, food security, and e-commerce, to decide the way forward. One of the most important outcomes of the Geneva Package was the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS) adopted at MC12 on 17 June 2022. The Agreement delivers on Target 14.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and is the “first broadly-focused binding multilateral agreement on ocean sustainability.” The AFS—which was concluded after more than two decades of negotiations and is only the second agreement arrived at in the WTO since its inception—represents a step forward in multilateral trade cooperation.

As part of the ‘second wave’ of negotiations, WTO members have agreed to continue negotiating on certain outstanding issues concerning harmful fisheries subsidies “with a view to making recommendations to the Thirteenth WTO Ministerial Conference for additional provisions that would achieve a comprehensive agreement on fisheries subsidies.”

IT IS EVIDENT from the trends that global trade has shown to be resilient in the face of geopolitical tensions and challenges posed by the pandemic. Going forward, multilateral efforts in different fora, as well as India's G20 Presidency, will focus on resolving impending issues in international trade with a view to creating an inclusive, functional, and resilient global trading system.

“Global trade showed resilience in the face of geopolitical tensions and challenges posed by the pandemic.”

Climate Change: Solidarity Reborn

Aparna Roy

2022 was a year of crucial developments in the global effort to confront the climate crisis. Of particular importance was the resurgence of climate solidarity with the adoption of the ‘Loss and Damage Fund’ at the 27th session of the Conference of Parties (COP27) held towards the end of year. The year also coincided with the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) and the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Climate warnings contained in seminal reports published by various groups like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the UNEP, and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), continued to shape the climate discourse. These warnings provide essential impetus to climate action as they guide the course of future actions, while highlighting the critical gaps that are appearing in the ongoing discourse around climate change.

The Beginning of ‘Irreversible’ Climate Impacts

The first trend that shaped the climate discourse in the past year was the certainty in dire warnings from the scientific community of the ‘irreversible’ impacts of climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 6th Assessment Report (AR6) reiterated that the current world is little equipped to face the brunt of large-scale extreme weather events. Heat waves in South Asia that disrupted already stressed food systems, followed by untimely rainfall, cyclones, forest fires incidents across the globe and worst-ever floods and drought both in Europe and Pakistan—all highlighted the lack of resilience of nations and communities in dealing with uncertain risks.

The [Adaptation Gap Report, 2022](#) by UNEP, meanwhile, highlighted that international adaptation finance flows to developing nations are ten times lower than the amounts required for vulnerable regions to adapt to climate change. Recognising the current inadequacies in the global climate early warning systems, the United Nations Secretary-General called for a new targeted investment of US\$ 3.1 trillion between 2023 and 2027 to aid in preventing the worst climate impacts.

The scientific community also stressed on the need to explore the intricate climate-nature nexus. They called for urgent action to avoid damages and irreversible losses across ecosystems and biodiversity. These warnings resonated with the youth and climate activists, who spilled to the streets to demand governments and private companies to act quickly, before we cross tipping points at the global scale. This bolstered the trend of stakeholders or non-government actors, pressing for stronger and immediate climate action.

Renewed Commitment to Net-Zero Transitions

The second trend that shaped the climate discourse in 2022 was renewed commitments from government and non-state actors to accelerate the pace of net-zero transitions. Demonstrating

ambitious net-zero commitments, India, Germany and other nations have prepared or revised long-term low-carbon development strategies (LT-LEDS), providing pathways for achieving the net-zero target by 2050 or 2070.

The AR6 report reiterated that sound policies, infrastructure, and technology that can enable lifestyle and behavioural shifts, can reduce about 40-70 per cent of emissions by 2050. India's newly launched Global Mission 'Lifestyle for Environment' (LiFE) is aligned with this aim—to encourage the behavioural shift of every individual from wasteful and high-emission lifestyles to leading sustainable, pro-planet lives.

States and corporations are showing the will to limit all major greenhouse gases such as CO₂, methane, and nitrous oxides, through alliances and pledges. One such bilateral alliance is the US-India Forest initiative to increase trees outside forests and reduce land-based emissions.

Too Little and Too Slow

In 2022, the principle of ‘Loss and Damage’ was adopted into the agenda at COP27 after a struggle of almost three decades. The breakthrough agreement determined a way forward for addressing the impacts on most vulnerable countries and communities that are worst hit by climate disasters. Even though establishing an L&D fund has been a historic decision, questions remain regarding the operationalisation, accountability and accessibility of the fund.

While the pledges are welcome and have paved a pathway to show solidarity for climate reparations, they are still insufficient to meet the global need of US\$200-400 billion by 2030. In South Asia alone, it is estimated that climate change-induced losses and damages will surpass the amount of US\$518 billion by 2050, and by 2070, this figure could reach US\$997 billion. Climate finance, therefore, continues to remain a bottleneck towards effective climate action.

While L&D gained attention during the past year, mobilising climate finance is still a challenge. The final adopted text of the ‘Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan’ highlighted that the world is in critical need of more than US\$6 trillion per

year to transform into a low-carbon economy by 2050. Heeding climate warnings, the fund allocation towards the Adaptation Fund (totalling US\$211.58 million), the Least Developed Countries Fund (US\$70.6 million), the Special Climate Change Fund (US\$35.0 million), and the eighth replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (US\$ 5.33 billion) in 2022 will help realise adaptation and resilience actions and achieve the ‘Sharm el-Sheikh Adaptation agenda’.

The global stocktake is expected to be out in 2023, which puts much attention on actual progress achieved through Nationally Determined Contributions and LT-LEDS in reaching ‘net zero’ and keeping temperatures below 2°C. The said trends must determine the future course of global climate action. With the rising frequency and intensity of climate impacts, growing emission trends, degrading ecosystems and biodiversity loss, the window of hope for collective climate action is fast closing.

“2022 saw stakeholders pressing for stronger and immediate climate action.”

Tech and Geopolitics: Bracing for Turbulence

Trisha Ray

Layoffs are rippling through the tech industry amidst a looming recession, prominent cryptocurrency exchanges are in crisis, and supply chain security vulnerabilities and breaches traced to basic gaps in access control are becoming more frequent. Indeed, 2022 was a turbulent year in tech. This turbulence should not, however, be mistaken for uncertainty. We have never had a clearer picture of the problem than now. As geopolitical fissures deepen, however—the fractures creating a web of consequences in the sphere of emerging technology—partnerships of ‘likeminded’ nations have flourished but have been slow in providing concrete solutions to *seemingly* intractable challenges.

The three trends highlighted in this piece demonstrate both the steady march of technological progress as well as the need for institutions to be agile, not just in action but in looking over the horizon and catching signals.

Offsets and Upsets: How A.I. is Changing Warfare

AI faces the curious problem of overblown expectations, be they from war-loving world leaders saying that nations that lead in AI will control the world, or (former) Google engineers claiming their chatbot had gained sentience. AI to many is like a magician’s hat, a black-box that produces decidedly “human” things like art, music, and even sophistry. Just like these stunts that Twitter is often abuzz about, AI is being used in a variety of ways to supplement rather than replace humans, including for military applications like advanced weapons systems, surveillance technologies, logistics, and planning systems that can help military commanders make more informed decisions.

In West Asia and North Africa, the use of drones has become increasingly common in conflicts. Drones have given militaries the ability to conduct targeted strikes with a high degree of precision, reducing the need for large-scale ground invasions. This has led to a shift in the balance of power in the region, as smaller, more technologically advanced militaries are able to, at least theoretically, challenge the traditional dominance of larger, more established powers. In Libya and Syria last year, we saw the apparent use of Turkish-made AI-enabled drones to select and engage targets. The UN report on these drones has labelled them a lethal autonomous weapon (LAW), making these incidents the first known use of LAWs.

The Stability-Instability Paradox in Cyberspace

Cyber operations are seeing more takers in geopolitical conflicts. During Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan earlier this year, the volume of cyberattacks on the Taiwan government surpassed 15,000 gigabits, the highest recorded in Taiwan's

history. Before the Russian invasion began in February, Russian threat actors launched a malware operation against Ukrainian government agencies, non-profits, and IT organisations. Countries are also beginning to invest heavily in AI and cyberwarfare, both for defence and offence, which could potentially increase the scope and depth of such attacks. That said, at present, cyber operations are being used to signal and demoralise, rather than destroy. That is, wars are still being fought in the old-fashioned way—whether that is a weakness of the technology or a consequence of slow organisational change in militaries remains to be seen.

Cyber is in a curious state of flux, with some countries declaring that they would consider disruptive cyber operations on their assets and infrastructure a 'use of force' and a 'violation of sovereignty'. The year 2019 saw the first instantiation of this with the Israeli Defense Forces responding to an alleged cyber attack by Hamas with a physical strike, though it was not a precedent per se because of the larger context of a persistent ongoing conflict. The floodgates remained firmly closed. Then, in 2022, Albania

severed diplomatic relations with Iran over a cyber attack on its government websites. The attack was not, however, explicitly branded as a violation of state sovereignty. While we are yet to see a *true* instance of cyber operations that affect being met with force, we may well be moving in that direction.

Are Platforms Essential Services?

In general, critical information infrastructure refers to the networks, systems, and technologies that are essential for the functioning of a society, such as communication systems, financial networks, and power grids. While online platforms do provide a valuable service and are an important part of the modern information landscape, they are not (yet) considered critical infrastructure in the same way that these other systems are.

This distinction dissolved this year, when in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, US-based tech companies exited en masse from Russian markets, including both giants like Google, Netflix

and Microsoft, as well as online service providers like PayPal, Coursera, Ubisoft and Blizzard. Smaller and emerging economies took this as a troubling precedent, with Minister of State for ICT of Bangladesh, Zunaid Ahmad Palak calling for countries to band together to create consistent rules and standards to hold tech companies accountable.

In the past year, all eyes were on the prolonged conflict in Ukraine that has had worrying implications for a world already crippled by COVID-19. As the three meta-trends highlighted in this piece have illustrated, even as we declare that this is not the era for war, we are already living with its consequences.

“As geopolitical fissures deepen, affecting the sphere of emerging tech, partnerships of nations have flourished but have been slow in providing solutions.”

Global Healthcare: Adversity, Disruption, and Hope

Oommen C Kurian

Much of contemporary discussions may have shifted focus to post-pandemic concerns, yet more than 5,000 people still die of COVID-19 every week across the world. More than 500 sub-lineages of the Omicron variant continue to circulate and the virus is continuing to evolve. And COVID-19 is not the only Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) that the world is dealing with; there is also Monkeypox, and Polio—and this is a first in history.

This piece highlights three trends in global health in the past year: a clearer understanding of the quantum of reversals of global health and nutrition goals in the larger context of fiscal

constraints; an acknowledgement of the need to move from competition to collaboration to fight pandemics; and the clear possibility of emerging economies setting the global health narrative in the immediate future.

Assessing the True Impact of the Pandemic

In 2022, it became clear that substantial health and nutrition gains that the world has recorded in the past had been reversed during the pandemic, and global progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had slowed down. Even in wealthy countries like the United States, the pandemic has wiped out more than a quarter century's worth of progress in life expectancy at birth.

From children's vaccinations to cancer screening and treatment, a range of healthcare services were disrupted during the pandemic, contributing to higher morbidity and mortality burden. Economic concerns as well as an improved understanding about the protection offered by natural immunity have made health systems move away from 'zero Covid' strategies.

With the pandemic exposing the weakest links in national health systems across the world, there is an enhanced focus on access to healthcare. This includes efforts to expand forms of health insurance coverage, including in India where the middle class is planned to be enrolled as part of the national public health insurance scheme (PMJAY) as well as initiatives to reduce barriers to care, such as high co-payments and deductibles. There are also efforts to strengthen public hospitals and resolve gaps in the health workforce. However, the ongoing global economic crisis has impacted governments' capacity to invest more in the health sector, and we may therefore see a high number of new public-private partnerships in health.

From Competition to Collaboration

It was also in 2022 that the world increasingly realised that we need to move from competition to collaboration while responding to a pandemic. Blatant individualism that countries practised in their effort to procure vaccines and medical supplies led to chaos in the market and negatively impacted the global effort to control the devastation caused by COVID-19. Till date, 30 percent of the world population has not received a single dose of COVID-19 vaccine. At the same time, the pandemic saw some highly effective international research collaborations and the call to recognise science as a global public good is stronger than ever.

With the world moving towards a new pandemic treaty, initiatives to improve surveillance and reporting of diseases, as well as efforts to develop and distribute vaccines and other medical countermeasures will have to be collective in nature, with involvement of all stakeholders including the private sector. Despite some failures in distributing the outputs, the pandemic highlighted the importance of international scientific collaboration in addressing global health crises. By working together, scientists around the world were able to share knowledge, resources, and expertise, and make faster progress in finding solutions to the pandemic. The lessons from the pandemic are bound to give policy pointers to the future.

An Emerging Global Health Leadership

Starting with Indonesia in 2022 and followed by India in 2023, developing nations will be holding the G20 presidency continuously for four years, till South Africa in 2025. This era of Southern leadership, given the disruption of the pandemic and the weaknesses demonstrated by the traditional solutions, could potentially also be the moment for a new global health leadership that will focus on cooperation, equity, and inclusion. Interestingly, it was a joint proposal for global patent waivers introduced by South Africa and India before the World Trade Organization (WTO) that led to an emerging consensus among many developed countries and powerful global foundations of a narrow waiver on intellectual property protections.

G20 expressed its intent to provide global health leadership when G20 health and finance ministers launched the US\$1.4-billion Pandemic Fund in November 2022. The fund aims to address critical health system gaps in low and middle-income countries. As the world hopes to end at least two of the three ongoing PHEICs in 2023 and prepare for future pandemics amidst economic crises across many regions, a new global consensus towards balancing the interests of innovators and technology holders, as well as ensuring quality and affordable access of medical care to people, is a policy imperative. India, Brazil and South Africa must leverage their global leadership role to move beyond the status quo towards innovative and ambitious solutions.

“This era of Southern leadership could potentially be the moment for a new global health leadership that will focus on cooperation, equity, and inclusion.”

About the Authors

Kartik Bommakanti is a Senior Fellow with ORF's Strategic Studies Programme.

Ankita Dutta is a Fellow with ORF's Strategic Studies Programme.

Antara Ghosal Singh is a Fellow with ORF's Strategic Studies Programme.

Oommen C Kurian is Senior Fellow and Head of ORF's Health Initiative.

Kalpita Mankikar is a Fellow with ORF's Strategic Studies Programme.

Abhishek Mishra is an Associate Fellow with ORF's Strategic Studies Programme.

Vivek Mishra is a Fellow with ORF's Strategic Studies Programme.

Harsh V Pant is Vice President for Studies and Foreign Policy at ORF.

Sameer Patil is Senior Fellow at ORF, Mumbai.

Trisha Ray is Deputy Director of ORF's Centre for Security, Strategy and Technology.

Aparna Roy is a Fellow and Lead, Climate Change and Energy, at ORF's Centre for New Economic Diplomacy (CNED).

Premesha Saha is a Fellow with ORF's Strategic Studies Programme.

Hari Seshasayee advises the Colombian government and is a former Global Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center.

Shivam Shekhawat is a Research Assistant with ORF's Strategic Studies Programme.

Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy is a Junior Fellow with ORF's Strategic Studies Programme.

Kabir Taneja is a Fellow with ORF's Strategic Studies Programme.

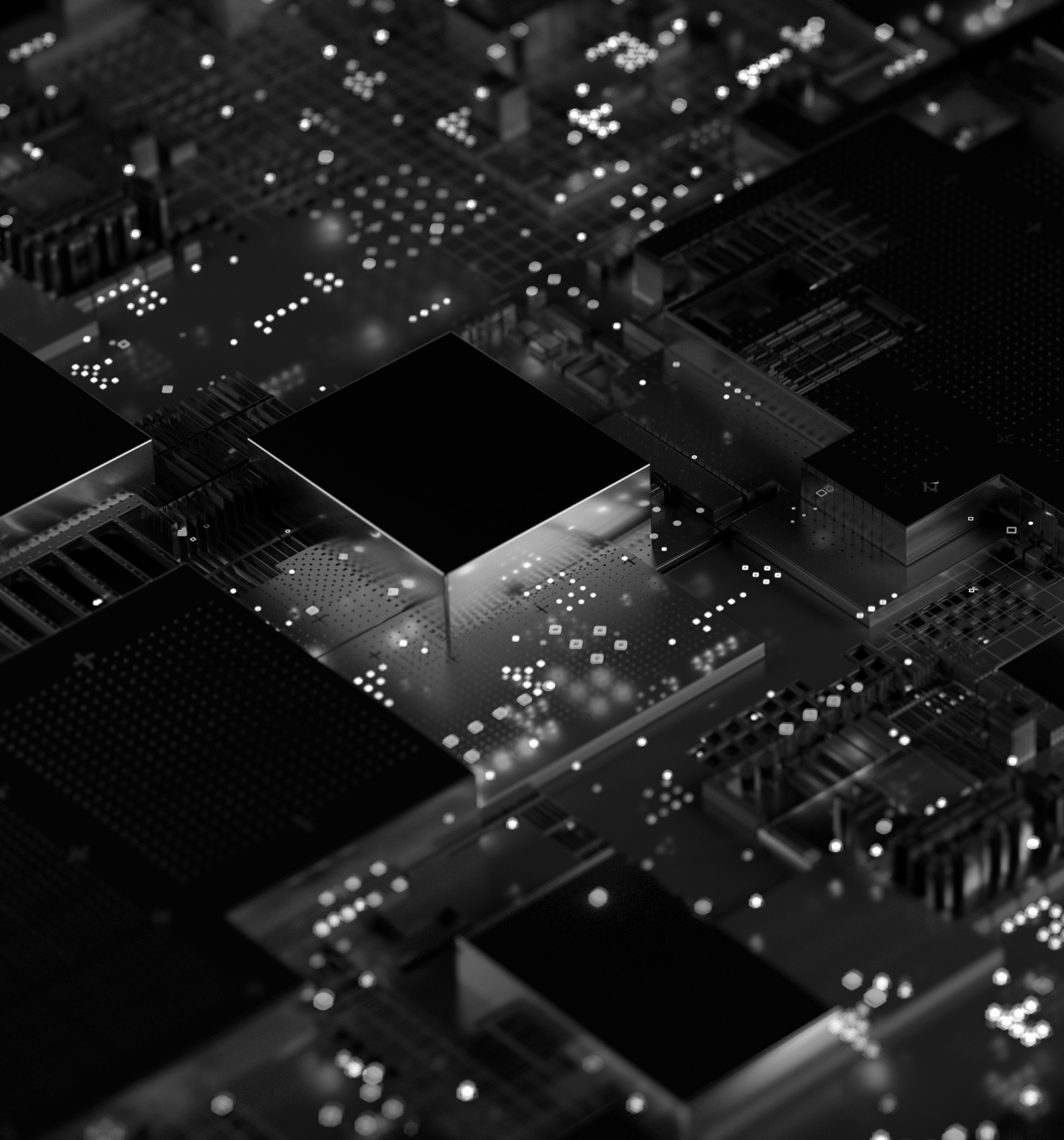
Urvi Tembey is an Associate Fellow with ORF's Geoeconomics Programme.

Nandan Unnikrishnan is a Distinguished Fellow at ORF.

Ayyaz Wani is a Research Fellow at ORF, Mumbai.

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**20, Rouse Avenue Institutional Area,
New Delhi - 110 002, INDIA
Ph. : +91-11-35332000. Fax : +91-11-35332005
E-mail: contactus@orfonline.org
Website: www.orfonline.org**