

The way 2023 can redefine world order

Nur Ahmed



When the world was hit by a common threat to humankind, it was thought to generate a unified response across the globe. It has been more than three years since the onset of the pandemic. It is safe to say that the world is more divided than ever before. Vaccines had become a political tool, and the world was far from seeing a political consensus on fighting against the pandemic. When the world was recovering from the pandemic-induced economic distress, global geopolitics took a defining turn which might be the most significant one in the 21st century. February 24, 2022, will be a defining date in rewriting the geopolitical history of Europe when Russia decided to conduct military operations in Ukraine. It is historically proven that when Europe is at the center of a conflict, the whole world feels the brunt of it. The conflict in Ukraine has had cascading impacts across the globe. It has destabilized the food and energy market, disrupted the global supply chain, and caused staggering inflation worldwide. Suppose countries across the globe could not be united at the time of a global pandemic. In that case, it is unrealistic to expect political cooperation during a century-defining conflict.

The year 2022 was obviously not just about the conflict in Ukraine. But the conflict has certainly overshadowed and impacted other regional and global issues. The tension in the Korean peninsula and the South China Sea has gotten newer dimensions in this year. These tensions derive from the renewed mistrust between the West and China, which will continue to define global politics in 2023. There have also been dramatic escalations of humanitarian crises in Yemen, Ethiopia, Iran, Palestine, Venezuela, and Myanmar in 2022. But the Ukraine conflict has undoubtedly shifted the media coverage of these events. The global political outlook in the new year will be defined by five outstanding global issues: the conflict in Ukraine; the tensions between the West and China, economic turbulence; the

domestic political trajectory of the US, and the natural disasters being caused by climate change.

It is no brainer that the Ukraine conflict will shape the global political outlook in 2023. The call for the cessation of violence has been growing, especially in the global south. These countries are the most affected due to the disruptions in wheat exports from Ukraine and rising fuel prices. However, it is not likely that the conflict will dramatically be halted in 2023, at least not in the first half of the year. Adverse weather conditions might slow the pace in winter, but a formal ceasefire will not likely happen soon. The western military-industrial complex will remain the only gainer out of this conflict. Continued violence will also cause both massive internal displacement of people in Ukraine and refugee movement in Europe.

While the Ukraine conflict will continue to be the most important issue in global politics, the growing mistrust between China and the West will equally be significant, if not more. Economic prowess and geopolitical tension lie at the heart of this mistrust. Western countries are gradually lessening the dependence of their economies on China, and the latter sees it as a deliberate conspiracy to contain its rise. In response, Chinese President Xi Jinping, who will be in his 11th year in power in 2023, has vouched to develop a 'fortress economy' which is not dependent on Western capital and investment. It has led to forming an 'axis of the aggrieved,' especially in the Ukraine conflict, where China and Russia seek to mitigate Western dominance. In addition to the economic dimension, there is a tension of military escalation out of this mistrust. The disputes over Taiwan's status are at the center of this escalation. Recent commitment from the US to the defense of Taiwan has aggravated the Chinese reaction. The aftermath of the Ukraine conflict will cause Beijing to be more prudent, overtaking any decision to escalate the tension to military conflict. However, the rising tension is always taking the world closer to a military conflict.

The two aforementioned issues are primarily responsible for the global economic slowdown in the post-pandemic era. Rising inflation rates have become common problems around the globe, and central banks are facing dilemmas over appropriate responses. The instability in the food and energy market is likely to continue in 2023. Europe's energy crisis in the winter will be a test case for the future trajectory of the political conflict. The rising cost of living might be acute in 2023 due to economic turbulence.

Foreign policy is often dubbed as the extension of domestic policy. Considering the 2024 presidential election, the trajectory of the American political landscape in 2023 will eventually shape many global issues. There is a growing divide between Democrats and Republicans, and the electoral rhetoric and public opinion during the build-up of the 2024 election will influence US foreign policy. Issues like the political unrest in Iran will be an interesting case for US foreign policy in 2023. The political establishments of the US might be inclined towards making some bold postures on different foreign policy issues to mobilize public opinion in favour of them.

The aforementioned geopolitical tussles will only downgrade the global efforts in mitigating and adapting to the adverse impacts of climate change. The energy crisis has already made the countries increasingly dependent on fossil fuels to ensure

energy security. We might see some devastating natural disasters in 2023. But one thing is sure the environment will be damaged due to the lack of political consensus on tackling climate change. The rise in geopolitical tension naturally diverts global attention from environmental issues. And we have seen the failure to reach a concrete outcome in global forums like the UN Conference of Parties (COPs). From a Realist perspective, countries around the globe are expected to concentrate more on national security at the time of heightened geopolitical tension. So, a tough year awaits for us ♦ the people around the globe.

Author: Nur Ahmed, Research Officer, Bangladesh Institute of Maritime Research and Development (BIMRAD)

The article was published in [the daily observer](#) newspaper on January 5, 2023