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The 2022 Global Political Cataclysm: A Critical Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

The impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict can be deeply felt all across the globe. However, it needs to be acknowledged that this conflict, along with other crucial factors such as the socio-economic factors would determine war and peace in the world. The Ukraine-Russia conflict is only one of the many strands presently altering the contours of world governance. Substantial political developments are also taking place all across the globe, which will have similar if not more pertinence and relevance to the future of the international governance system. The entire world has been undergoing several political changes in 2022 but Europe has been the most affected and has undergone several major changes in recent months. The Ukraine-Russia war, political upsurge in Sri Lanka, election of a new Chancellor in Germany, political crisis in United Kingdom, India-China border disputes, etc have largely impacted the global politics. The role of international organisations like NATO, Quad, AUKUS, I2U2, G20, BRICS, G-7, etc is also extremely evident at present times. This research paper tries to analyse the incumbent global political arena amidst the various political churns and turmoils as faced by various nations all across the globe.

Keywords: *Russia-Ukraine war, political upsurge/turmoil, NATO, Quad, nuclear deterrence, AUKUS, Allies*

I. INTRODUCTION

In June 2022, the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz said at the end of a three-day gathering of G7 leaders in the Bavarian Alps, “a time of uncertainty lies ahead of us. We cannot foresee how it will end”². This clearly showcases the current scenario of how the global political arena of 21st century is proving to be highly muddled. These words by the German Chancellor indicate that he was referring only to the fallout from the Ukraine-Russia conflict, for he clearly did not speculate the fact that many other momentous changes were taking place outside Europe, and are already beginning to dictate and influence the new order of things. Geopolitical experts in the West limit their findings exclusively to the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, acknowledging that this alone would determine not only war and peace but also other crucial

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² G7: “A time of uncertainty lies ahead of us”, The International Affairs (June 30, 22, 12:12 PM), <https://en.interaffairs.ru/article/g7-a-time-of-uncertainty-lies-ahead-of-us/>

factors, socio-economic conditions as well. But this seems to be a short-sighted view, for the Ukraine Russia conflict is only one of the many strands currently altering the contours of world governance. Substantial developments are also taking place all across the globe, which will have similar if not more pertinence and relevance to the future of the international governance system. The Western nations have been predominantly occupied with delivering excessive primacy to the Russia- Ukraine war but sadly it is indeed misleading and it is not surprising to see the European leaders tending to look inwards³.

The entire world has been undergoing several political changes in 2022 but Europe has been the most affected and has undergone several major changes in recent months. Germany, which has commanded European politics for 16 years under the aegis of Angela Merkel, now has a Chancellor (Olaf Scholz) who lacks much foreign policy experience. In the absence of Germany's steadying hand, Europe would be practically directionless in agitated waters⁴. Emmanuel Macron, the French President may have been re-elected but his wings have been clipped as the Opposition has now attained a majority in the French National Assembly. This has damaged his image, and thus he can scarcely be expected to provide the kind of leadership that Europe needs at present. For the very first time in 20 years, a newly elected president failed to muster an absolute majority in the National Assembly. It will not grind Mr. Macron's domestic agenda to a complete halt, but will presumably throw a large wrench into his capacity to get bills passed — shifting power back to Parliament after a first term in which his top-down style of governing had mostly marginalized lawmakers⁵. The United Kingdom is also in deep trouble, if not disarray. In early July 2022, 62 of the United Kingdom's 179 government ministers, parliamentary private secretaries, trade envoys, and party chairmen resigned from their positions in the second Johnson ministry, culminating in Conservative Party leader and Prime Minister Boris Johnson's resignation on 7 July⁶. Thus, at a time when actual and moral issues require both agile and firm handling, many countries in Europe appear rudderless.

II. IMPACT OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

The war between Russia and Ukraine is broadly because Russia wants to keep Ukraine and

³ M.K. Narayanan, *A global order caught up in a swirl of chaos*, The Hindu, July 26, 2022., <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/a-global-order-caught-up-in-a-swirl-of-chaos/article65682489.ece>

⁴ *EDITORIAL ANALYSIS: A global order caught up in a swirl of chaos*, Insights on India, (July 27, 2022), <https://www.insightsonindia.com/2022/07/27/editorial-analysis-a-global-order-caught-up-in-a-swirl-of-chaos/>

⁵ Aurelien Breden, Constant Meheut, *Macron Loses Absolute Majority as Opposition Surges, a Blow for New Term*, N.Y. Times, June 19, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/19/world/europe/emmanuel-macron-france-parliamentary-election.html>

⁶ *2022 United Kingdom Crisis*, Wikipedia, (July 29, 2022, 07:06AM), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_United_Kingdom_government_crisis

other former Soviet nations out of NATO, suspend weapons deployments near Russian borders and roll back forces from Eastern Europe. If Ukraine joins NATO, it will get eligible to get support from the group's members in case of external attacks. Therefore, Russia believes that Ukraine may attempt to take back Crimea if it joins NATO and hence demands the West to stay out of Ukraine as Russia's President, Vladimir Putin wants to restore Moscow's influence throughout the post-Soviet space. Moreover, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia lost control of 14 former Republics including Ukraine, which Putin considers to be tragic as both countries shared a single "historic and spiritual space". The Russian President demands guarantees from the West and Ukraine that it will not join NATO and that Ukraine demilitarises and becomes a neutral state.

The negative economic impact of the war in Ukraine can be witnessed all across the world. It is already apparent that apart from the soaring cost of energy, food and fertilizers, some countries confront the spectre of food scarcity given that Ukraine and Russia were viewed as the granaries of the world. Asunder from this, countries are facing numerous other problems, including foreign exchange crisis. A large number of these problems may have existed earlier but have been exacerbated by the ongoing conflict. The impact is now being felt all across the world. The World Bank expressed in its Spring 2022 Economic Update for Europe and Central Asia that the war produced a second major shock to the global economy in two years and caused a humanitarian catastrophe. "Even prior to the war, the global recovery had already been decelerating alongside intensifying geopolitical tensions, continued COVID-19 flare-ups, diminishing macroeconomic support, and lingering supply bottlenecks," it noted⁷.

Six months into the Ukraine-Russia conflict, the topology of geopolitics also appears to be under-going major changes. It is transpiring in directions that were not anticipated earlier. The mechanisms employed by the West against Russia, such as sanctions, have not had the desired consequences as far as the latter is concerned. It would be an error of judgment to even imagine that the accord, solidity and the resilience exhibited by the European nations (backed by the United States of America (USA) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on this occasion), has been a win-win situation. The situation in Europe is yet to be decided, but it is becoming conspicuous that outside Europe, the conflict is commencing to take on a distinct dimension, leading to the inception of new patchworks of relationships.

⁷Saptaparno Ghosh, *Explained- The effects of Russia-Ukraine conflict on the global economy*, The Hindu, (April 13, 2022, 11:11 AM), <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/explained-the-effects-of-the-russia-ukraine-conflict-on-the-global-economy/article65312083.ece>

III. RUSSIA-CHINA ASSOCIATIONS

A churn in global politics is evident. Russia and China appear to have further cemented their relationship and the position is fast steering towards the formation of a formal alliance. Russia's increasing closeness to China - further strengthened by the Russia-Ukraine war has revitalized recollections of the 1950s Sino-Soviet Alliance (Alliance to improve political relations, friendship, cooperation, partnership and mutual assistance between the two nations by reproduction of Chinese administrative elite who could serve as a valuable ally in the Soviet bloc's struggle against the United States), and their bonhomie during the 1950s and 1960s⁸. During that time, this had been portrayed as a 'lips and teeth' relationship. Meanwhile, China's growing influence in the Pacific, Indo-Pacific region, further strengthened by the rapprochement with Russia, may hardly be a result of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, but it has generated fresh energy into a probable altercation between two rival power blocs. Not all the efforts of the United States of America, including the AUKUS (Australia, the UK. and the U.S.A.) and the Quad (the U.S.A., India, Australia and Japan), or the lift-off of another Indo-Pacific entity, can hope to efficaciously thwart the winds of change blowing across the Pacific and the Indo-Pacific. It has now become imperative to acknowledge the changing nature of affinities in Asia. Viewing that most Asian nations appear unwilling to take sides in the event of a conflict, is also important. Unlike the conformity and the strength exhibited by the European nations - backed by the U.S.A and NATO - to counter Russia, there is dearth of any such unity in Asia as could be seen when China was to launch a conflict with Taiwan.

IV. INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBOURS

In the current atmosphere, India does find itself wedged into a difficult position but it also cannot overlook the situation created by the more robust bonds between Russia and China. While India's relations with China may persist to stay sceptical and unsatisfactory (for some time at least), India ought to demarcate whether Russia can be anticipated to be India's 'trusted friend'. Furthermore, it would be too much to expect that while India deals with China, 'Quad' would also provide the same sort of backing. Regardless of all this, China seems intent to establish its dominance and supremacy. It also aims to sideline India in Asia, which New Delhi would have discerned in the course of the virtual BRICS Summit hosted by China in June. China's newfound confidence and its attempt to hijack the situation as part of its preparations for new world order were very much evident at that event. By engaging with India and other

⁸ North, Robert C. "The Sino-Soviet Alliance." *The China Quarterly*, no. 1, 1960, pp. 51-60. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/763344>. Accessed 28 Jul. 2022.

BRICS countries and claiming to be the global power in the grouping, China plans to dictate terms to India and to retain the territory it has seized because it sees itself as having the economic and military vantage point over India⁹. A meeting was held between Foreign Ministers Wang Yi and S. Jaishankar on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Bali on July 7, 2022. Although Mr. Wang urged both countries “to light up the bright future of bilateral relations”, he spoke nothing about the disengagement of Chinese troops from the disputed areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh since the border standoff in the summer of 2020.

Apart from China, India also requires to come to terms with a Taliban Afghanistan. India’s endeavour to develop a functional and operational relationship with Taliban Afghanistan without having to compromise with its previous policies with Taliban is as yet in a very nascent stage. But time is of the essence and at this time India is also presented with a new set of problems with the democratic upsurge in Sri Lanka which has resulted in the removal of the Rajapaksas from power. India’s ties with the earlier regime could be termed correct, rather than cordial, but in a situation where outrage, fury and anger are the dominant sentiments, there is every ground for concern that even governments that have harboured a ‘hands-off’ relationship could become targets of the new forces materializing in Sri Lanka. A humanitarian, as well as a refugee crisis, is inevitable in the present situation in Sri Lanka. While India has already sent help by extending a line of credit for life-saving medicines, food, and fuel, it might just not be adequate and India might find itself in a moral situation and the position of responsibility to assist its neighbour. On the other hand, history has been a witness to the fact that whenever a political emergency brew in Sri Lanka, India has witnessed an influx of the Tamil ethnic refugees from the Sinhala-dominated island taking the route of Palk Strait and Gulf of Mannar. If the crisis persists in its current state, it might force a large number of people to escape Sri Lanka and take refuge in India. It would be challenging for India both socially and economically to manage such a scale of refugee influx to its land¹⁰.

V. POLITICAL TURMOIL IN WEST ASIA

Among other major evolutions taking place in the 21st century, is the churn in politics that is persisting in West Asia. The Abraham Accords in 2020, which was successful in fetching the entente between the United Arab Emirates and Israel, has been the harbinger of some new trends

⁹ Anita Inder Singh, *From BRICS to G20 – clear China policy needed*, (July 11, 2022, 5:36AM), <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/from-brics-to-g-20-clear-china-policy-needed-411198>

¹⁰Anurakti Sharma, *How the Sri Lankan crisis will affect India and how it is standing up to it*, Times Now News, (July 13, 2022, 07:32PM), <https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/in-focus/how-the-sri-lankan-crisis-will-affect-india-and-how-is-it-standing-up-to-it-article-92856739>

in the tangled web of relationships among the nations of West Asia. But as the U.S.A's relations with Arab nations in West Asia emerge to weaken, Russia and China are initiating to play pivotal roles, with Iran as the fulcrum for founding contemporary relationships. Russia's forays into West Asia have also taken a quantum leap. China is persistent in slowly and steadily building its connections with the region, and with Iran in particular. India also has been making imperturbable improvement in broadening its contacts and impact in West Asia. While the India-Israel relationship dates back to the 1990s, the India-UAE relationship has blossomed in the past few years when the visit of India's Prime Minister to the UAE in August 2015 marked the beginning of a new strategic partnership between the two countries. However, India-Iran relations appear to have acquired a stale-mate off late. India has, nonetheless, been inveigled into entering a U.S.A based group, the I2U2, comprising India, Israel, UAE and the U.S.A. The U.S.A has indicated that this body possesses the potential to evolve into a "feature" of the West Asian region, just as the Quad was for the Indo-Pacific. Its stated aim is to discuss "common areas of mutual interest, to strengthen the economic partnership in trade and investment in our respective regions and beyond". Six areas of cooperation have been recognised by the countries mutually, and its purpose is to foster joint investments in water, energy, transportation, space, health and food security¹¹. Particulars of this nascent arrangements are unclear, but it is obvious that the target is Iran, as China is for the Quad, insinuating yet another element of uncertainty into an already troubled territory.

VI. NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

Ultimately, in the wake of western allegations about the potential use of tactical/battlefield nuclear weapons by Russia, concerns are starting to be depicted and represented by several U.S.A academics - many with close connections to the establishment - of an existing gap between India and China in terms of India's nuclear deterrent capability¹². The argument being adduced is that a vast gap exists today in respect of China and India's nuclear deterrent capabilities. India is being implicitly blamed for its voluntary ban on testing and its 'no-first-use' doctrine from making headway in this arena. Something which is also evident is that India could overcome the lacuna by seeking the assistance of western nations which have such capabilities and knowledge. At present it is ambiguous whether this has any traction among officials in the West, but it is imperative for India to guard against such pernicious endeavours

¹¹ Rishika Singh, Explained: *What is I2U2 that is holding its first ever leader's summit today ?*, Indian Express, (July 14, 2022, 9:13 AM), <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/everyday-explainers/what-is-i2u2-holding-first-ever-leaders-summit-8027574/>

¹² M.K. Narayanan, *A global order caught up in a swirl of chaos*, The Hindu, July 26, 2022., <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/a-global-order-caught-up-in-a-swirl-of-chaos/article65682489.ece>

at this time to undo its carefully negotiated and structured nuclear policy and doctrine, and be inveigled into any anti-China western move on this front.

Some changes are necessary in the current nuclear policy of India. Primarily, India ought to upgrade the operationalization procedures for the strategic nuclear deterrence, and requires thorough researches by the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) in conjunction with the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and the three Chiefs in attendance. This can permit management of the crisis by a more consensual approach by integrating and melding the overall strategy with nuclear thresholds on the ground. India should not feel shy in doing an “Operationalization Exercise” of its nuclear assets. India’s nuclear strategy should be reanalysed in light of the blatant Chinese threats. Bolstering conventional war fighting capacity will make the nuclear deterrence more credible. India will have to recreate more central army reserves in order to react better and will also need to build a better counter-riposte punch in the form of more regrouped strike brigades integrated with para-SF (this is over and above the already raised 17 Strike Corps)¹³. Just as Russia and Western Europe know that they have too much to lose in a nuclear exchange by militarily challenging Russia in Ukraine, China needs to be convinced that the situation on the LAC has changed, and that India will henceforth not fight China on Chinese terms by limiting its actions to the conventional military field¹⁴.

¹³ Dr. Anil Kumar Lal, *Can India’s slender nuclear deterrence prevent a Chinese misadventure in the coming years?*, The Times Of India, (April 6, 2022, 3:52PM), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/rakshakindia/can-indias-slender-nuclear-deterrence-prevent-a-chinese-misadventure-in-the-coming-years/>

¹⁴ Bharat Karnad, *India’s nuclear doctrine is useless. Discard no-first-use, say nukes are for China threat*, The Print, (March 25, 2022, 8:45AM), <https://theprint.in/opinion/indias-nuclear-doctrine-is-useless-discard-no-first-use-say-nukes-are-for-china-threat/886866/>