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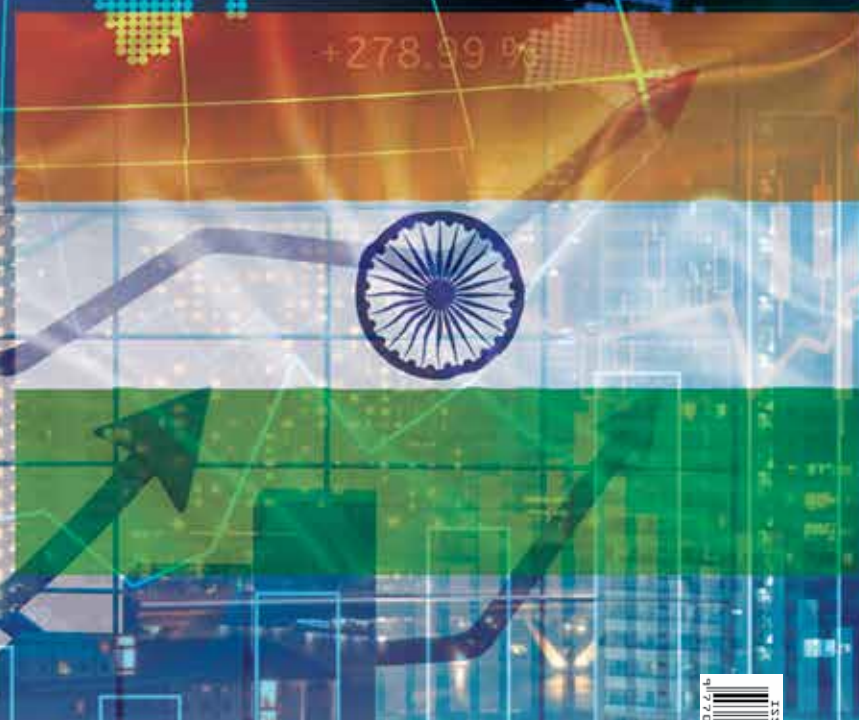
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## GLOBAL TRENDS AND INDIA'S ROLE



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# INDIA AND THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL CHURNINGS

In an interdependent world, India must manage both its internal pressures and external challenges with vision, a sense of balance and determination. The coming years project immense promise for India in diverse fields of human endeavour. Let's capitalize on our innate strengths and an inclusive vision for all in our great nation and be a beacon for humanity.

**“Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow.”**

— Japanese PM Fumio Kishida at the 2022 Shangri La Dialogue

**H**istorically speaking, there usually remains an uneasy consistency in the geopolitical world order as the strategic interests of nations are not given easy alterability. Nevertheless, the traumatic geopolitical churning witnessed by the world in the last three years has no parallels since the end of World War II in 1945. Even by conservative standards, the overall impact on the world—political, economic, social and diplomatic—has been unmistakably tectonic.

As all nations, including the major powers, endeavour to absorb the cataclysmic effects of the events of the last three years, the early months of 2023 also display a susceptibility for this adverse impact continuing



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida delivers the keynote address at the opening dinner of the 19th Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, 10 June 2022.



in relations between nations and severe economic and health challenges remaining to the fore threatening the overall worsening of the established global order. It brooks no elaboration to state that the current and likely continuing geopolitical differences in the world community will drive geo-economic warfare and vastly augment the risk of multi-domain conflicts. By any standards, the future in geopolitical churns across the globe remains steeped in uncertainty!

### Recent Traumatic Events And Geopolitical Churnings

The end of 2019 witnessed a global catastrophe with the outbreak of Covid19 pandemic also known as the coronavirus pandemic. Originating from the Chinese city of Wuhan, it could

not be contained there and quickly spread to other Asian nations and in a few months from early 2020, virtually engulfed the entire globe. Reportedly, till date, this virus has affected 676 million cases causing over 6.88 million deaths. According to the WHO, this virus still exists in many parts of the globe in some form or the other. This Black Swan event affected the global economy, politics, health, ecology and environment besides adversely affecting many other aspects of life as never before. The globe is still reeling under the adverse impact of this virus.

February 2022 witnessed the uncalled-for and unjust invasion of neighbouring Ukraine by mighty Russia—a war which, surprisingly, carries on without any let-up and its duration, trajectory and unpredictability of its

It's indeed a **great pity** that food, **energy**, global financial institutions and **supply chains** have been **weaponised** as never before



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The writer, a distinguished soldier, is a veteran of the 1965 and 1971 Wars, and has served in all theatres of operations in India in his 41 years of service. He has been GOC of the entire Ladakh sector, Chief of Staff of a Corps HQ in J&K, and subsequently commanded a Corps responsible for the defence of Punjab. After a short stint as DG Mech Forces, he was especially selected by the Government of India to raise the Defence Intelligence Agency. As the founder DG DIA, many innovative Intelligence initiatives, both at home and abroad, were taken. After retirement, he writes and lectures on security and strategic subjects. Is also involved with Track 2 initiatives and is widely travelled.



COVID-19 vaccination.

consequences confounds nations and most security analysts all over. That opinions, across the globe, to justify or condemn the Russian actions in Ukraine remain hopelessly divided and rigid will be stating the obvious. After the end of the Cold War in the early 90s, the global geopolitical and geo-economic divide, consequent to the ongoing Russo-Ukraine War, has never been so harshly polarized. Russia, gravely apprehensive of

an ever-increasing in membership NATO creeping towards its western borders, had mounted a surprise offensive into Ukraine in Feb 2022. Ukraine's dogged resistance to it surprised military analysts all over despite millions of ordinary Ukrainians getting displaced with their age-old homes and hearths being devastated beyond repair. The plight of the ordinary Ukrainian is beyond imagination.

However, this avoidable confrontation coupled with the economic after-effects of the pandemic has led to rising and virtually intolerable economic costs on the basic necessities of life, grave inflation and thus political instability across some nations in varying degrees. Where the interdependent world should undertake risk mitigation with cooperation, unfortunately, the reverse is true owing to the Ukraine War. As Russia, after initial military hiccups, has gradually commenced

gaining ground primarily in the bordering eastern portions of Ukraine, it has been predictably presented by the West, especially the US and European Union with nearly 14081 sanctions of various types! Before this war, Iran was the most sanctioned country with 3616 sanctions.

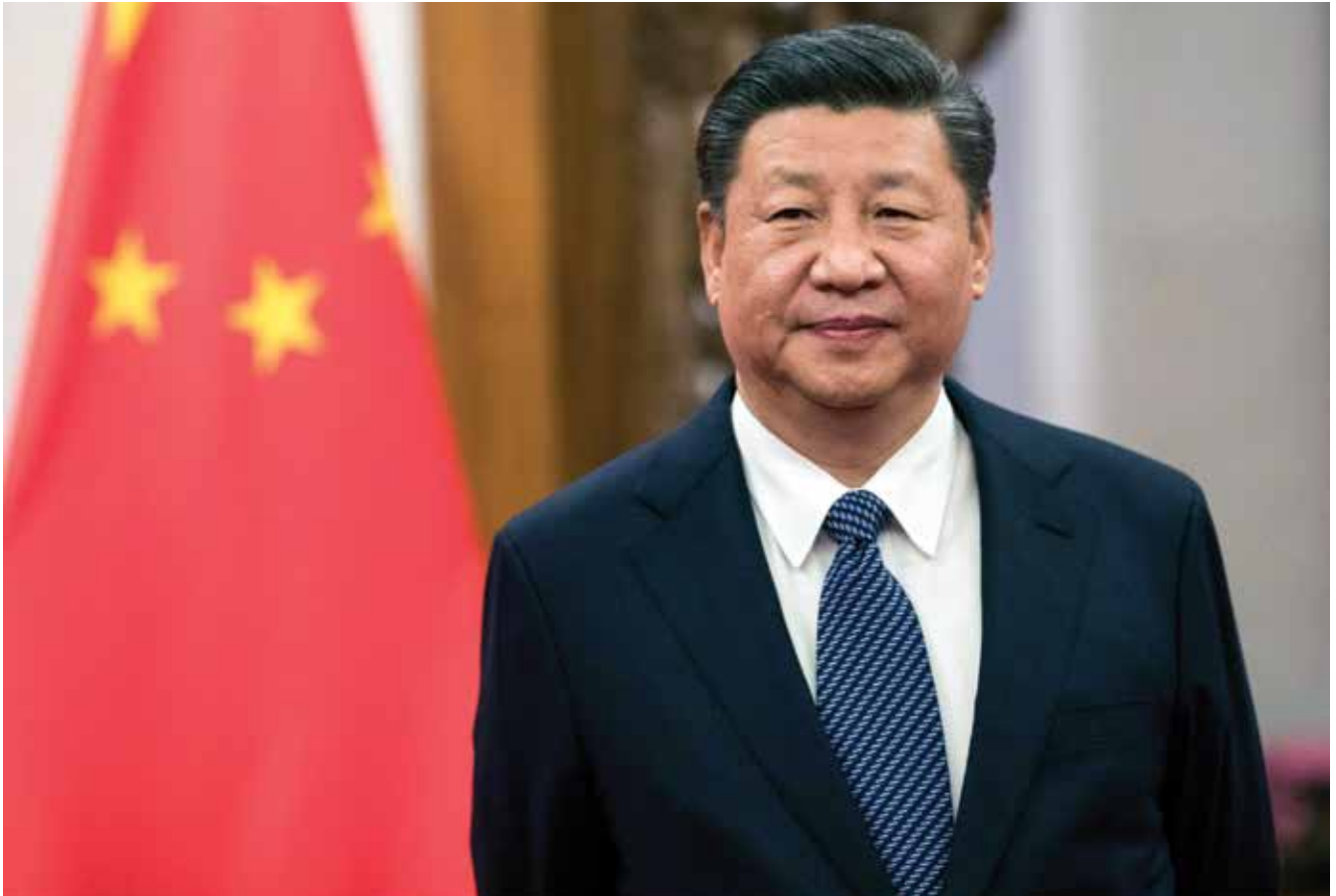
The US and most NATO nations continue to support Ukraine with some financial and military equipment needs and the war continues unabated with no end in sight. Amazingly, the UN and, equally, leading global powers have displayed an uncanny inability to prevent the resurgence of this conflict. It's indeed a great pity that food, energy, global financial institutions and supply chains have been weaponised as never before.

The events of the last few years have also witnessed the phenomenal rise of China in many areas of global significance.

China has continued with its past record of brandishing unbridled assertiveness in the region and attempts at global hegemony to equal, if not immediately surpass the USA. It has not taken the responsibility whatsoever for the COVID-19 virus it had unleashed or failed to contain in an unsuspecting world. It continues with its aggressive posture and 'salami slicing' tactics' in India's Eastern Ladakh and also now a fresh display of aggressive behaviour in the Tawang region of Arunachal Pradesh. Its domination of the international sea-lanes in the South China and East China seas, and its reclaiming island chains close to Japan, Philippines and Viet Nam continues with abandon. Importantly, the world with bated breath awaits its more than likely military trespass into neighbouring Taiwan taking a cue from its earlier mentor Russia's invasion of Ukraine. China, however, may await the



*Fire is seen after an attack at a residential area in Mariupol on 03 March 2022.*



*Xi Jinping, Chinese President.*

main opposition party in Taiwan, Kuomintang (KMT) to come back into power next year and assist China in its reunification plans with Taiwan in a peaceful manner. The KMT is considered close to China.

China, especially after its supremo Xi's unprecedented third term extension in Oct 2022, appears to be getting hyperactive in the pursuit of its regional and global ambitions. China is endeavouring to present to the world a multipolar other than a US-dominated unipolar strategic alternative. Though many of its debt-trap activities involving many smaller nations, its genocidal activities in its East Xinjiang province and the display of its unbridled ambitions in the region have also given it a bad name. However, China has indeed scored a major diplomatic victory over the US by brokering a

## **China** is seriously **endeavouring** to shore up its **relations** with nations of **West Asia**

surprise deal between the erstwhile adversaries, Saudi Arabia and Iran to the surprise of many! China is seriously endeavouring to shore up its relations with nations of West Asia which also appear to surmise the lack of adequate US attention to it as hithertofore. China's growing impetus in its relations with the Middle East will also contribute to addressing China's gigantic energy needs.

China is also helping Russia tide over some of the ill effects of US sanctions and has also grandiosely issued a 12-point peace plan to end the Ukrainian conflict. Its propaganda agencies are on an

over-drive to present China as an exponent and global leader of peaceful intentions! Nevertheless, it is pertinent to note what President Xi had spoken recently in the National People's Congress stating that he will endeavour to "more quickly elevating the armed forces to world-class standards..... and make it a great wall of steel." China's ambitions have willy-nilly also spurred other Asian nations to improve their defence preparedness. Japan has doubled its defence spending and will be purchasing long-range weapons from the US while South Korea has espoused stability in the Taiwan Strait as



Delegates ride in a buggy at G20 finance officials meeting venue near Bengaluru, India, 22 February 2023.

critical to its security. Meanwhile, the Philippines has granted new basing rights to the US armed forces. Additionally, AUKUS and the QUAD are also gearing up their cooperation and inter-operability in the Indo-Pacific region. India too has, accordingly, a vital role to play in this newly evolving joint strategy to counter China's myriad ambitions in this region.

### Implications And Options For India

By all standards, India has a unique standing in today's world. As one of the world's leading markets for imports—both defence and non-defence materials and goods—India for purely commercial reasons can never be ignored by any power or combination of the world. Importantly, for decades, India does carry some moral authority with itself with its foreign policy

based on the Nehruvian concept of non-alignment now aptly called 'strategic autonomy' which has been long respected by the 'third world' now referred to as the 'global south'. Importantly, India's adherence to democratic ideals and overall secular orientation gives it a tremendous ethical position in today's hatred and sectarian-driven world—that it must remain faithful to its roots if India strives for the much heralded 'Vishwa Guru' symbol is sine-qua-non. Nevertheless, India has its task cut out for making it as PM Narendra Modi envisioned "The India Moment".

For India, 2023 is indeed a year of great promise with the nation presiding over the much-coveted G-20 and even the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) groupings. India can truly rise to be a beacon of hope for the Global

South and also strive for making the world more peaceful and harmonious.

As regards combating any resurgence of the COVID-19 or any of its variants, India, after a sluggish start, has done well to manufacture and even assist many nations across the world in the supply of vaccines to neutralize the deadly virus. This area must continue to remain a priority for the nation and wherever we can assist the poorer nations to fight this malady we should do so.

As regards China is concerned, India will have to be more than wary of China's unending efforts to keep India boxed into the South Asian region. China sees India as its major competitor in Asia, also now getting closer to the US and thus will keep up the pressure on India militarily by



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi attend a meeting on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan 16 September 2022.

**India's** adherence to **democratic ideals** and overall secular orientation gives it a **tremendous ethical** position in today's **hatred and sectarian-driven** world

off-and-on efforts at encroaching on Indian territory. Its recent action at renaming 13 places in India's Arunachal Pradesh (which it calls Southern Tibet) is fraught with Chinese malafide intentions. Simultaneously, it will keep mouthing peaceful plaudits to fox the Indians. India must never let down its guard against the wily Chinese and ensure adequate military preparedness to thwart Chinese intentions towards us. India must also remain on guard as regards China trying to wean away Russia from its traditional friendship with India. No matter how close India-US cooperation may ensue, Russia remains a strategic partner for

India and defence cooperation and energy relationships with it must be continued quantitatively and qualitatively. As regards the Indo-Pacific strategic region, India must play a greater role both economically and militarily. The China threat, both on our land borders and in the larger Indo-Pacific region, has to be factored in with the seriousness it deserves.

India, especially, now chairing the G-20 is concerned, must play a much greater role in trying to bring about peace in the Ukraine War. As PM Narendra Modi had opined to Russian President Vladimir Putin last year that "this is not an era of war", India must

redouble its efforts to seek an amicable and just solution to the Ukrainian crisis, however difficult it may appear now.

### Conclusion

With the presidency of the G-20 and SCO this year and India going out of its way to make both organisations achieve something substantial, 2023 can be truly India's pivotal year. But for the government, as it reaches out to the Global South and also to the US and Russia, the current times, notwithstanding the many geopolitical churning taking place across the globe, 2023 is India's year of reckoning. In an interdependent world, India must manage both its internal pressures and external challenges with vision, a sense of balance and determination. The coming years project immense promise for India in diverse fields of human endeavour. Let's capitalize on our innate strengths and an inclusive vision for all in our great nation and be a beacon for humanity. 