1. Introduction: International stability and human security in 2021

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The international security horizon at the end of 2021 was dominated by two intensifying confrontations involving nuclear-armed great powers. One was between Russia and Ukraine, with the United States and its allies vocally opposing the Russian military build-up on Ukraine's borders; the other was between China and the USA, as the former intensified its pressure on Taiwan.[1] Although neither confrontation had exploded into open warfare by the end of 2021, Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and full-scale war ensued. In the case of China and Taiwan, the outcome at the time of writing (mid April 2022) remains uncertain, although air incursions continued in 2022.[2]

In recent years, the SIPRI Yearbook, of which this is the 53rd edition, has tracked and analysed deterioration in international peace and security. It now appears the process has reached, if not a culmination—since who knows what may yet ensue?—then at least an important milestone. This justifies and perhaps necessitates a change in focus for this edition's introductory chapter. In general, the Yearbook is largely timebound to the year preceding the year of publication. While this remains the case for all other chapters in this edition, this introduction needs to reflect not only on 2021 but on a much-changed environment that is unfolding at the time of writing—that is, it needs to take into account the war in Ukraine, as well as its impact on the broader security horizon. That is the topic of the first section of this chapter; thereafter, it scans the broader security horizon, looking at the continuing impact of climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic, nuclear arms control, geopolitical tensions, the West's withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan and the problem of conflict management.

To focus on Ukraine in the first section below is not intended to downplay the significance of events that rightly received considerable attention in 2021, such as the storming of the US Capitol on 6 January, the military coup d'état in Myanmar that began on the morning of 1 February, the war in Ethiopia, or the withdrawal of the USA and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies from Afghanistan in July and August. Part I of this Yearbook explores these events and issues (chapters 3–7). The war in Ukraine, however, has

[1] 'Record number of China planes enter Taiwan air defence zone', BBC News, 5 Oct. 2021.
[2] 'Taiwan reports new large-scale Chinese air force incursion', Al Jazeera, 23 Jan. 2022.

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administered a shock to the international system that far outreaches the reverberations of the crises of 2021.

The strength of this effect cannot be explained by the misunderstanding that war has returned to Europe after many years of peace. The truth is that war is no stranger to Europe, even in recent times. There was war in 2020 between Armenia and Azerbaijan; since 2014 in Ukraine itself; in 2008 in Georgia; in the 1990s and around the turn of the century within Russia, in Chechnya; and in the 1990s in former Yugoslavia and all three countries of the South Caucasus.

The disruptive effect of the war in Ukraine is rooted in an act of aggression that constitutes a breach of the United Nations Charter by one of the five permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council. There have previously been actions of, at best, dubious legality, where international laws and agreements have been bent, skirted and broken by others among the P5. However, many observers—especially but not only in the West—regard Russia's invasion of Ukraine as unprecedented in the era since the UN's foundation, attacking the fundamentals of contemporary international relations. This perception is underlined by the repeated warnings given by Russian spokespeople that the use of nuclear weapons has not been ruled out.[3] At the same time, Russia has alleged that there are Western laboratories researching chemical and biological weapons (CBW) in Ukraine.[4] These allegations have been interpreted in the West as a means for Russia to prepare the ground for its own CBW use.[5] Against this background, relations between Russia and the USA reached a new nadir. Taken together, these developments in the first months of 2022 mark a watershed moment in international politics.

All this suggests to many in Europe that existing security arrangements in the region must be fundamentally rethought. Although, as explored below, not all governments worldwide have responded in the same way to the war, decisions about European security do have wider ramifications. These arrangements are part of the framework of relations between two great powers and form a core part of global politics. Changes in the basic terms of European security will likely affect the security set-up in other regions too, not least in North East Asia in the context of poor relations between China

[3] Karmanau, Y. et al., 'Putin puts nuclear forces on high alert, escalating tensions', AP News, 28 Feb. 2022; Sevastopulo, D. and Qinio, A., 'Putin puts world on alert with high-stakes nuclear posturing', *Financial Times*, 7 Mar. 2022; and Faulconbridge, G., 'Putin ally warns of nuclear dystopia due to United States', Reuters, 23 Mar. 2022.

[4] Teslova, E., 'Russia says documents suggests "components of bioweapons were being developed in Ukraine"', Anadolu Agency, 9 Mar. 2022; Finnegan, C., 'Russia escalates false chemical weapons claims about US, Ukraine by bringing them to UN', ABC News, 11 Mar. 2022; and Pilkington, E. and Oladipo, G., 'What are Russia's biological weapons claims and what's actually happening?', *The Guardian*, 22 Mar. 2022.

[5] US Department of State, 'The Kremlin's allegations of chemical and biological weapons laboratories in Ukraine', Press statement, 9 Mar. 2022; and Spinelli, D., 'One more thing to worry about: Putin may be paving the way to use chemical weapons in Ukraine', Mother Jones, 8 Mar. 2022.

and the USA. While the full consequences of the war in Ukraine are not yet known, it is safe to assume that they will be far-reaching.

I. Ukraine and the immediate consequences of the war

The extended consequences of the war will be shaped not only by Russia's action but by the responses of the USA and its allies in Europe and beyond. As well as pure strategic and security considerations, these responses are being shaped by public and political perception and sentiment. It is evident that public and political opinion, especially but not only in Europe, have been shaken by the war. The risk of escalation—whether in terms of conflict spreading more widely across the continent or levels of violence further increasing (or both), with Russia's nuclear forces placed on a higher state of alert—has likewise had an unsettling effect.[6]

The human and social impact of the war is visible in over 5 million people becoming refugees from Ukraine within two months of the invasion, along with harrowing evidence collected by the UN of apparent war crimes.[7] The destruction of Ukrainian cities by Russian forces attacking civilian areas with artillery bombardments has not only left a major physical and economic reconstruction task, but also has potentially devastating health impacts arising from the destruction of hospitals, sewage systems, clean water supplies and other public health infrastructure.[8] In addition, the destruction of buildings releases large volumes of dust, containing cement, metals and industrial compounds—this dust is easily ingested and bears serious health risks.[9] The provinces of Donetsk and Lohansk in eastern Ukraine have already, since 2014, suffered severe disruption and damage to health infrastructure, which further warfare will only compound.[10] Moreover, since both Russia and Ukraine are major food producers, there is a high risk that the war will have severe human consequences further afield. The loss of the planting season in parts of Ukraine and the interruption in normal trading with Russia due to sanctions mean the prospects are bleak for the millions of people worldwide

[6] Karmanau et al. (note 3).

[7] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Operational data portal', accessed 24 Apr. 2022; and UN News, 'UN's Bachelet condemns "horrors" faced by Ukraine's civilians', 22 Apr. 2022.

[8] Roberts, L., 'Surge of HIV, tuberculosis and Covid feared amid war in Ukraine', *Nature*, 15 Mar. 2022.

[9] Garrity, A., 'Conflict rubble: A ubiquitous and under-studied toxic remnant of war', Conflict and Environment Observatory, 10 July 2014.

[10] Buckley, C. J., Clem, R. S. and Herron, E. S., 'An assessment of attributing public healthcare infrastructure damage in the Donbas five years after Euromaidan: Implications for Ukrainian state legitimacy', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 60, no. 1 (2019).

whose diets depend on wheat and other staples from the two countries.[11] This will compound the problem that, worldwide, food insecurity has been increasing since 2015.[12] The same factors will make it harder to meet global humanitarian needs—in recent years, Ukraine has been the source of half the wheat used by the World Food Programme, the world's largest humanitarian agency.[13]

The US and European responses

The response of the USA, the European Union (EU) and other governments opposing the invasion followed three main strands. First, they sought to isolate Russia politically, succeeding with a UN General Assembly resolution opposing the war (although without naming it as a war), which was supported by 141 member states and opposed by only 5, while 35 abstained.[14] Second, they imposed much harsher sanctions than had generally been foreseen, characterized as the most comprehensive set of multilateral economic sanctions ever applied to a major global economy.[15] And, third, within three weeks, 33 states decided to send lethal or non-lethal military aid to Ukraine.[16]

There has been considerable emphasis in the West on not only sending military aid to Ukraine but applying economic sanctions against Russia. Economic sanctions do not have a strong track record of achieving policy goals,

[11] World Food Programme (WFP), 'Ukraine war: More countries will "feel the burn" as food and energy price rises fuel hunger, warns WFP', 11 Mar. 2022; Delgado, C., 'War in the breadbasket: The ripple effects on food insecurity and conflict risk beyond Ukraine', SIPRI WritePeace blog, 1 Apr. 2022; Tschunkert, K. and Bourhrous, A., 'War in the breadbasket: The impacts of the war in Ukraine on food security and stability in Lebanon', SIPRI WritePeace blog, 4 Apr. 2022; and Riquier, M., 'War in the breadbasket: Hunger and the humanitarian fallout from the war in Ukraine', SIPRI WritePeace blog, 6 Apr. 2022.

[12] Delgado, C. and Smith, D., *Global Hunger Index 2021: Hunger and Food Systems in Conflict Settings* (Welthungerhilfe/Concern Worldwide: Bonn/Dublin, 2021).

[13] Beasley, D., 'The Ukraine war could leave hundreds of millions hungry around the world', *Washington Post*, 7 Mar. 2022.

[14] 'General Assembly resolution demands end to Russian offensive in Ukraine', UN News, 2 Mar. 2022.

[15] Anderson, S. R. et al., 'What sanctions has the world put on Russia?', Lawfare, 4 Mar. 2022.

[16] Duthois, T. and AFP, 'Ukraine war: Which countries are sending weapons and aid to forces fighting the Russian invasion?', Euronews, 3 Mar. 2022; Weaver, M., 'What weapons have other countries supplied to Ukraine?', *The Guardian*, 17 Mar. 2022; Al Jazeera, 'Which countries are sending military aid to Ukraine?', 28 Feb. 2022; Roblin, S., 'Putin has a problem: Ukraine is getting an arsenal of weapons from the West', 1945, 4 Mar. 2022; Qalliu, B., 'Albania sent military equipment to Ukraine', Exit News, 18 Mar. 2022; Reuters, 'Australia will fund lethal weapons for Ukraine says PM Morrison', 7 Mar. 2022; *Japan News*, 'Japan to send defense equipment to Ukraine', 4 Mar. 2022; Reuters, 'Spain to send grenade launchers and machine guns to Ukraine, minister says', 2 Mar. 2022; and Collins, K. et al., 'Biden announces hundreds of millions in new security aid for Ukraine following Zelensky's speech', CNN, 17 Mar. 2022.

although they are an effective means of moral signalling.[17] However, the economic instruments mobilized by the states opposing Russia may exact a price from Russia for its actions, even though they also look likely to impose a heavy economic burden on the West, and on the global economy as a whole.[18]

The immediate responses of European states may have significant long-term consequences. The EU quickly decided to finance weaponry for Ukraine, belying its well-earned reputation for being slow and indecisive on security issues.[19] Meanwhile, Germany, which has previously been reluctant to increase military spending, rapidly expanded its military budget for 2022–25.[20] Significantly, Finland openly acted against clearly expressed Russian interests and preferences for the first time in 80 years, and, like Sweden, started a domestic political discussion about joining NATO, despite strongly voiced Russian objections and warnings about potential countermeasures.[21]

Taken together, as they unfolded within the first few weeks of the invasion, these measures began to look like a potential step change in Europe's security concepts and architecture. For several years, Russia has systematically sidelined the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) when it comes to handling key issues such as Russia's seizure of Crimea and occupation of two eastern Ukrainian provinces in 2014, or the reignition of war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020. Now, following the invasion, many observers—including those instinctively sympathetic to the OSCE as expressing a post-cold war aspiration for a comprehensive, cooperative framework for security policies in Europe—are likely to question the organization's practical role. A need will likely remain for a forum where European states, regardless of adversarial relations between them, can benefit from addressing shared problems of strategic instability in a security landscape

[17] Staibano, C. and Wallensteen, P. (eds), *International Sanctions: Between Wars and Words* (Routledge: London, 2005); Alavifar, S. A. and Zaernyuk, V. M., 'Analyzing the success rate of strategic and tactical economic sanctions: A strategy for Russian economic planning', Proceedings of the International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 8–10 Mar. 2016.

[18] Roth, A., '"We're going back to a USSR": Long queues return for Russian shoppers as sanctions bite', *The Guardian*, 23 Mar. 2022; and International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook: War Sets Back the Global Recovery* (IMF: Washington, DC, Apr. 2022).

[19] European Commission, 'Statement by President von der Leyen on further measures to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine', 27 Feb. 2022.

[20] Sheahan, M. and Marsh, S., 'Germany to increase defence spending in response to "Putin's war"—Scholz', Reuters, 27 Feb. 2022; and Marksteiner, A., 'Explainer: The proposed hike in German military spending', SIPRI WritePeace blog, 25 Mar. 2022.

[21] 'Ukraine War: Russia warns Sweden and Finland against NATO membership', BBC News, 11 Apr. 2022; Faulconbridge, G., 'Russia warns of nuclear, hypersonic deployment if Sweden and Finland join NATO', Reuters, 14 Apr. 2022; Erlandger, S. and Lemola, J., 'Despite Russian warnings, Finland and Sweden draw closer to NATO', *New York Times*, 13 Apr. 2022; Yle, 'Yle poll: Support for NATO membership hits record high', 14 Mar. 2022; and Al Jazeera, 'Majority of Swedes in favour of joining NATO', 21 Apr. 2022.

beset by fast unfolding technological change.[22] The OSCE's future role may lie in a return to its origins in the cold war as the *Conference on* Security and Cooperation in Europe, from which the OSCE emerged in the November 1990–December 1994 period.[23]

The OSCE's distinctive characteristic has been its standing as the only pan-European security institution. Its capacity to act has been weakened over recent years, and a further weakening or possible redirection to a purely forum role—important though that could be—will inevitably strengthen some states' reliance on arrangements covering a smaller geographic area, in particular NATO and the EU. Uncertainties are to be found here too, however. Given the forcible reassertion of core hard security threats and challenges, NATO's renewed prominence and sense of purpose come as no surprise. Yet there are abundant uncertainties about NATO's future if the US presidential election in 2024 returns either Donald J. Trump or a candidate with similar views about the alliance to the White House. Trump expressed repeated scepticism about NATO both before and during his administration, even giving serious consideration to announcing the USA's withdrawal from NATO in 2018.[24] Likewise, it will take more than a month dominated by a single crisis of paramount importance to dispel uncertainty about the EU's capacity to be an international actor. It is not pre-ordained that the EU will retain both its increased focus on security and its greater cohesion once the immediate impetus of the war in Ukraine has dissipated.[25] By the end of the second month of war, some analysts were already noting that the EU's unity was fraying.[26]

Against this background of uncertainty about the big institutions for security and cooperation, developments are unfolding among cooperative security arrangements of less scope and ambition than NATO. Notable here are the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), established in December 2017 with 25 members, including 4 non-members of NATO (Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden); the 13-state European Intervention Initiative, established in 2018 following a proposal by French President Emmanuel Macron; and the German-initiated Framework Nations Concept, launched

[22] Favaro, M., 'Strengthening the OSCE's role in strategic stability', Atlantic Council Strategic Insights memo, 12 Jan. 2022.

[23] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), 'History', accessed 1 Apr. 2022.

[24] Haines, T., 'Trump: NATO is obsolete and expensive: "Doesn't have the right countries in it for terrorism"', Real Clear Politics, 27 Mar. 2016; Pothier, F. and Vershbow, A., *NATO and Trump* (Atlantic Council: Washington, DC, June 2017), pp. 1–2; Barnes, J. E. and Cooper, H., 'Trump discussed pulling US from NATO, aides say amid new concerns over Russia', *New York Times*, 14 Jan. 2019; Crowley, M., 'Allies and former US officials fear Trump could seek NATO exit in a second term', *New York Times*, 3 Sep. 2020; and Alfaro, M., 'Bolton says Trump might have pulled the US out of NATO if he had been reelected', *Washington Post*, 4 Mar. 2022.

[25] Lehne, S., 'Making EU foreign policy for a geopolitical world', Carnegie Europe, 14 Apr. 2022.

[26] Dempsey, J., 'Europe's fading unity over Ukraine', Carnegie Europe, 21 Apr. 2022.

in 2013, aimed at broad intra-European defence cooperation.[27] The United Kingdom-led Joint Expeditionary Force was established in 2014, consisting of two states outside NATO (Finland and Sweden) and three outside the EU (Iceland, Norway and the UK), along with five that are members of both (Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Netherlands).[28] There are also agreements of more limited scope, including the Franco-German Brigade and other arrangements within the Eurocorps framework, a 2018 trilateral Finland–Sweden–USA agreement, a France–Greece agreement concluded in October 2021, and a Poland–UK–Ukraine agreement made in February 2022, just before the war began.[29]

These diverse agreements and arrangements may be understood as compensating for the uncertainty surrounding the future roles of NATO and the EU. However, the fact that there are so many of them suggests that none has managed to carve out an indispensable security role. Indeed, whatever attractions these initiatives may hold for individual governments, their profusion threatens both to absorb resources and contribute to overall uncertainty.[30]

Both the sense of crisis itself and its effects, in terms of hardening positions, clarifying sentiment and overriding divisions, may dissipate relatively quickly once the most intense phase is over. However, the full effects of decisions taken in the immediate period will take years to unfold, and years or even decades to undo if—once the moment of crisis has passed—second thoughts arise. Whatever the outcome, war in Ukraine has raised serious questions both within Europe and beyond about political alignments and strategic preferences.

The broader responses and issues

As the UN General Assembly resolution in March 2022 showed, opposition to Russian actions in Ukraine was widespread. However, it was not all couched in the same terms, nor did it all lead to action such as sanctions.

Some close US allies, such as Japan and South Korea, adopted positions similar to that of the USA in the first months of the war, including providing

[27] Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) website, <https://pesco.europa.eu>; Zandee, D. and Kruyver, K., *The European Intervention Initiative: Developing a Shared Strategic Culture for European Defence* (Clingendael: The Hague, Sep. 2019); and Major, C. and Möller, C., 'The Framework Nations Concept: Germany's contribution to a capable European defence', SWP Comments no. 52, Stiftung Wissenscahaft und Politik, Dec. 2014.

[28] Wharton, J., 'What is the Joint Expeditionary Force?', Forces Net, 16 Mar. 2022; and *The Economist*, 'Boris Johnson tells The Economist about his anti-Russia coalition', 19 Mar. 2022.

[29] Eurocorps, 'History', [n.d.]; 'Greek Parliament approves defence pact with France', Reuters, 7 Oct. 2022; and British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 'United Kingdom, Poland and Ukraine foreign ministers' joint statement, February 2022', Press release, 17 Feb. 2022.

[30] Frisell, E. H. and Sjökvist, E., *Military Cooperation Around Framework Nations: A European Solution to the Problem of Limited Defence Capabilities* (FOI: Stockholm, Feb. 2019).

aid and imposing sanctions.[31] In the Middle East, however, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—both long-standing regional allies of the USA—rebuffed US diplomacy and refused to increase their oil output as a means of restraining the rise in oil prices and helping stabilize the world economy against the disruptive effects of war and sanctions.[32] This may reflect other issues, including the two Gulf states' disagreements with the US administration of Joe Biden about the potential revival of the Iran nuclear deal (see below), discomfort with previous US policy under the administration of Barack Obama, and resentment at a perceived lack of support for their pursuit of war in Yemen since 2015. Against this background, some commentators are discussing a major realignment of policies by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with a much clearer connection to China creating a new balance in their relationship with the USA.[33]

Other states criticized Russia's actions but avoided aligning with the West, opposing the breaching of sovereignty and forceful changing of borders, while insisting that disputes be settled by peaceful means. Such, for example, was India's position.[34]

China's position was similar. In February 2022, China and Russia avowed that their friendship has no limits, with no areas where cooperation is off the table.[35] This built on the 2021 extension of their 2001 treaty of friendship, which was renewed for a further 20 years.[36] Nonetheless, China was one of 35 states abstaining from the UN General Assembly vote condemning the invasion of Ukraine. Its position both respected Ukraine's sovereignty and criticized NATO enlargement, a key reason presented by Russian President Vladimir Putin for the war.[37] China has also stated its support for settling the conflict peacefully. A few weeks into the war, it remained unclear whether China would maintain this carefully nuanced position or opt for a more partisan stance in line with its long-standing relationship with Russia.[38]

[31] Smith, S. A., 'Tokyo condemns Putin's war, aids Ukraine', Council on Foreign Relations, 8 Mar. 2022; and Shin, H. and Kim, C., 'South Korea bans exports of strategic items to Russia, joins SWIFT sanctions', Reuters, 28 Feb. 2022.

[32] Di Paola, A. and Tobben, S., 'Saudi Arabia hikes oil prices as crude surges on Ukraine War', Bloomberg, 4 Mar. 2022; and Gambrell, J., 'Analysis: Oil prices, Ukraine war create Saudi pivot point', AP News, 1 Apr. 2022.

[33] Chulov, M., 'Biden rebuffed as US relations with Saudi Arabia and UAE hit new low', *The Guardian*, 3 Apr. 2022.

[34] Roy, A., 'Japan's Kishida and India's Modi discuss response to Ukraine crisis', Reuters, 19 Mar. 2022.

[35] Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the international relations entering a new era and the global sustainable development, 4 Feb. 2022.

[36] Isachenkov, V., 'Russia, China declare friendship treaty extension, hail ties', AP News, 28 June 2021; and Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, 16 July 2001, PA-X Agreements Database.

[37] Reuters, 'China says it respects Ukraine's sovereignty and Russia's security concerns', 25 Feb. 2022.

[38] Jiangtao, S., 'China has a choice to make on Ukraine, and the world is watching', *South China Morning Post*, 15 Mar. 2022; and Blanchette, J., 'The worse things go for Putin in Ukraine, the more China will back him', *Washington Post*, 24 Mar. 2022.

Around half of African states voted for the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's invasion, with the others either abstaining or absent, apart from Eritrea, which voted against.[39] Responding to Russia's recognition of Donetsk and Lohansk in eastern Ukraine as independent states, Kenya's permanent representative to the UN made a particularly eloquent and widely quoted statement condemning Russian actions during a UN Security Council debate prior to the invasion.[40] The clarity and firmness of the condemnation of Russia was accompanied by equally straightforward criticism of 'the trend in the last few decades of powerful states, including members of this Security Council, breaching international law with little regard'.[41] This is a valuable challenge to the West's assumption of the moral high ground in the Ukraine crisis. While the West may be on the side of international law in this crisis, in the eyes of many it has not always been on such firm ground, leading to criticism of it for double standards and a selective moral approach.[42] The 2020 edition of this Yearbook found reason to decry the tendency in international politics towards not taking the rule of law and the norms accompanying it sufficiently seriously.[43] It is important that the Ukraine crisis becomes a moment when the necessity of rebuilding respect for international law is recognized, and equally important to acknowledge that Western powers have also breached it.

Ukraine is one of the few states to have relinquished ownership of nuclear weapons. Like Belarus and Kazakhstan, it did so in the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet Union and, like them, did not at the time have the capacity for operational control over the thousands of weapons the Soviet Union's dissolution left in its hands. When it decided not to keep them, it received security assurances in the form of the Budapest Memorandum, a 1994 agreement with Russia, the UK and the USA.[44] The signatories bound themselves to 'respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine' (Article 1); 'refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine' (Article 2); and 'seek immediate United Nations Security Council assistance to Ukraine . . . if Ukraine should become a victim of an act of aggression' (Article 4). Thus, Russia's invasion of Ukraine not only violated the UN Charter but also broke its 1994 undertaking of non-aggression against Ukraine. Its occupation of

[39] United Nations, 'General Assembly resolution demands end to Russian offensive in Ukraine', UN News, 2 Mar. 2022.

[40] 'Russia recognizes independence of Ukraine separatist regions', Deutsche Welle, 21 Feb. 2022.

[41] Statement by Ambassador Martin Kimani during the Security Council Urgent Meeting on the Situation in Ukraine, 21 Feb. 2022.

[42] Obadare, E., 'Analyzing the Russia–Ukraine conflict from an African standpoint', Council on Foreign Relations, 3 Mar. 2022.

[43] *SIPRI Yearbook 2020*, pp. 19–23.

[44] Memorandum on security assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 5 Dec. 1994.

Crimea and of the eastern Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014 had already challenged the viability of the Budapest Memorandum, although not its validity.

Whether Ukraine would have faced Russian military action if it had kept nuclear weapons is necessarily speculative. In 1994 it would have been extremely unsafe for Ukraine to retain nuclear weapons, because it could not exert proper command and control over them and the risks of nuclear theft and subsequent terrorism were high; there can be no doubt it was the right decision.[45] Further, nuclear weapon ownership is not a panacea for security against attack: there have been armed clashes between nuclear-armed adversaries—China and the Soviet Union in 1969, and India and Pakistan persistently since 1999. Nonetheless, this speculation may be pertinent for some other governments pondering their choices in the face of nuclear-armed states in their region. Some argue that North Korea may regard the war as justifying its decision to develop nuclear weapons.[46] The crisis may also increase support in South Korea for either the USA redeploying nuclear weapons to the Korean Peninsula, or for developing nuclear weapons autonomously, while Japan has seen discussion of the nuclear option resurface.[47] The vast majority of the world's states have rejected nuclear weapons and embraced the goal of nuclear non-proliferation, because that is a safer and more secure path to take than heading towards a world with many nuclear weapons. War in Ukraine should not alter that underlying judgement.

II. The broader security horizon in 2021

Global trends

By the end of 2021, although Russia was threatening Ukraine, war had not yet begun. Meanwhile, China continued to put pressure on Taiwan.[48] In both cases the USA, supported to varying degrees by its allies, was involved in pushing back against the other two great powers. These confrontations capped a year in which, to the extent that the security situation can be weighed and measured, the overall balance was unchanged. After several years of significant deterioration in international security, the overall situ-

[45] Kelly, J., 'Despite the threat it faces, Ukraine was right to give up its nuclear weapons', German Marshall Fund of the United States, 22 Feb. 2022; and Knopf, J. W., 'Why the Ukraine war does not mean more countries should seek nuclear weapons', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 12 Apr. 2022.

[46] Hong, A., 'Why Ukraine matters for the Korean Peninsula', KEI, 18 Feb. 2022.

[47] Larsen, M. S., 'Talk of a nuclear deterrent in South Korea', *Foreign Policy*, 9 Sep. 2021; Shin, M., 'Nearly three-quarters of South Koreans support nuclear weapons development', *The Diplomat*, 22 Feb. 2022; *The Economist*, 'An uncomfortable debate about nuclear weapons resurfaces in East Asia', 19 Mar. 2022; and Wingfield-Hayes, R., 'Will Ukraine invasion push Japan to go nuclear?', BBC News, 26 Mar. 2022.

[48] *The Economist*, 'China is ratcheting up military pressure on Taiwan', 9 Oct. 2021.

ation neither deteriorated further nor improved in 2020 and 2021.[49] This is the trajectory of risk in international security that the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists also traces.[50] Such assessments necessarily contain an element of subjective judgement but, if conducted transparently, consistently and on the basis of solid evidence, they are worthwhile.

The evidence of persistent insecurity was all around in 2021. The number of armed conflicts was little changed compared to 2020 and, by the end of 2021, no significant new peace process had been launched, nor had there been any breakthrough in the ones that were already underway. In Asia, conflict fatalities—which had fallen by nearly 50 per cent in 2020 compared to the previous year—rose by 59 per cent in 2021, largely due to conflict in Afghanistan and Myanmar.[51] Asia became the region with the most conflict-related fatalities in 2021; however, sub-Saharan Africa was the region with the most armed conflicts (occurring in 18 of 49 states) and estimated conflict fatalities increased by 19 per cent compared to 2020.[52]

Global military spending continued to rise, as it has done every year since 2015, reflecting perceptions among many governments that their security context has deteriorated in a way that requires them to build up their military strength. Whatever the validity of an individual government's decision to increase military spending, an overall increase in global military spending is a sure sign of an increasingly insecure world. The increase in 2021 was 0.7 per cent, considerably less than the 3.1 per cent increase registered in 2020. Despite this relative deceleration, which may be due to the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the global total passed the $2 trillion milestone to stand at $2113 billion.[53] Reflecting the same reading of continuing global and regional insecurity, the nine states that possess nuclear weapons were all engaged in upgrading their nuclear arsenals.[54]

Climate change and Covid-19

The long-term pressure of climate change and the global Covid-19 pandemic both continued in 2021. Both have implications for peace and security.

In August 2021 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) produced the first report in its sixth assessment cycle on the physical science basis for understanding global warming and climate change.[55] The science, like the climate crisis itself, has now developed to the point where it can be

[49] *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, pp. 3–4.
[50] Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Science and Security Board, 'At doom's doorstep: It is 100 seconds to midnight. 2022 Doomsday Clock Statement', 20 Jan. 2022.
[51] See chapter 4, sections III and IV, in this volume.
[52] See chapter 7 in this volume.
[53] See chapter 8 in this volume.
[54] See chapter 10 in this volume.
[55] Allen, R. P. et al., *AR6 Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* (IPCC: Geneva, 7 Aug. 2021).

stated unequivocally that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land, and that widespread and rapid changes—many of them unprecedented over centuries or even millennia—have occurred in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere, affecting climate and weather in every region.

Looking ahead, the IPCC foresees that global surface temperature will continue increasing until at least the middle of the century, exceeding the ceiling set for global warming by the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change unless there are deep reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Of the main GHGs, the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is higher than at any time for at least 2 million years, while the levels of methane and nitrous oxide are higher than for at least 800 000 years. It is of particular concern that many changes caused by past and future GHG emissions will be irreversible for centuries to millennia, especially changes in the ocean, ice sheets and global sea level.

Impacts arising from extreme weather events and sea-level rises feed insecurity and conflict risk via clearly defined pathways.[56] Moreover, the relationship between climate change and insecurity is two-way: not only does the former interact with the socio-economic and political landscape to generate insecurity, but the latter can make it harder to respond to the challenge of climate change. To the degree that international cooperation is required to address the task of mitigating global warming and thus slowing climate change, a hostile international environment characterized by confrontation and distrust does not represent a conducive setting for finding solutions.

The 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) was held in Glasgow in November 2021. While the conference's concluding statement was regarded by many as a step forward compared to previous statements of intent and policy, it fell considerably short of what was needed.[57] Positives included accelerating the process of making national commitments more ambitious.[58] Overall, however, global warming will continue. If all promises are fulfilled, the rise in global average temperature will nonetheless be greater than the 1.5°C limit set by the 2015 Paris Agreement as the desirable goal; policies now in place will push the temperature increase over 2°C.[59]

[56] Mobjörk, M., Krampe, F. and Tarif, K., 'Pathways of climate insecurity: Guidance for policymakers', SIPRI Policy Brief, Nov. 2020.

[57] Åberg, A. et al., *COP26: What Happened, What Does This Mean, and What Happens Next?* (Chatham House: London, 15 Nov. 2021), p. 1; and *New York Times*, '6 takeaways from the UN climate conference', 13 Nov. 2021.

[58] Hoicka, C. et al., 'COP26: Experts react to the UN climate summit and Glasgow Pact', The Conversation, 13 Nov. 2021.

[59] Climate Action Tracker, 'Warming projections global update', Nov. 2021; and Hausfather, Z. and Forster, P., 'Analysis: Do COP26 promises keep global warming below 2C?', Carbon Brief, 10 Nov. 2021. See also Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Mitigation of Climate Change: Summary for Policymakers* (IPCC: Geneva, 2022).

Strikingly, the president of COP26 tearfully apologized at the end of the conference for last-minute changes that watered down the conference statement's green commitments, with an undertaking to 'phase out' coal replaced by an intent to 'phase down'.[60]

At the same time, both the immediate and indirect consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic continued to unfold in 2021. Reported deaths from the disease totalled 4.1 million for the year, reaching a cumulative total of 5.94 million.[61] This data, however, is generally regarded as unreliable for several reasons, including methodological shortcomings and deficiencies in many national reporting systems. To correct for these, estimates of the death toll often take into account excess mortality—how many more people died than normal in a given period. Including excess mortality, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates the Covid-19 death toll to be 60 per cent greater than reported deaths.[62] Other estimates give figures over three times higher than reported deaths: one estimate based on excess mortality suggests 17.1–19.6 million deaths by the end of 2021, while another that also includes prevalence of the disease in its modelling offers a 'best estimate' of 20 million.[63]

Although international scientific efforts to produce vaccines against Covid-19 were remarkably efficient, there was much to question regarding the use and distribution of the vaccines. Inevitably, the richer countries stood first in line, the poorest ones last. The WHO warned of the severe health risks of 'vaccine nationalism'—a me-first approach to immunization.[64] UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres identified these risks in the following terms: '. . . more deaths. More shattered health systems. More economic misery. And a perfect environment for variants to take hold and spread.'[65] The economic consequences of vaccine nationalism are also potentially dire, including for countries stocking up with more vaccine doses than they need.[66]

[60] Reuters, '"Deeply sorry": UK's Sharma offers apology for last-minute changes to climate deal', 13 Nov. 2021.

[61] World Health Organization (WHO), 'The true death toll of Covid-19: Estimating global excess mortality', accessed 29 Mar. 2022; and Wang, H. et al., 'Estimating excess mortality due to the Covid-19 pandemic: A systematic analysis of Covid-19-related mortality, 2020–21', *The Lancet*, 10 Mar. 2022.

[62] WHO (note 61).

[63] Wang et al. (note 61); and *The Economist*, 'The pandemic's true death toll', accessed 23 Mar. 2022.

[64] Eaton, L., 'Covid-19: WHO warns against "vaccine nationalism" or face further virus mutations', *BMJ*, vol. 372, no. 292 (1 Feb. 2021).

[65] United Nations, Secretary-General, 'Vaccine nationalism, hoarding putting us all at risk, Secretary-General tells World Health Summit, warning Covid-19 will not be last global pandemic', Press Release SG/SM/20986, 24 Oct. 2021.

[66] Kretchmer, H., 'Vaccine nationalism—and how it could affect us all', World Economic Forum, 1 June 2021.

Studies of the economic costs of vaccine nationalism suggest figures ranging from $1.2 trillion to $9 trillion a year.[67]

The 2021 edition of this Yearbook traced how the pandemic's wider social, economic and political impacts have raised security concerns because of deepening inequalities and weakening democracy, both of which have been tied to increased risk of conflict.[68] Evidence in 2021 confirmed that the trend of deepening inequalities was continuing—including along economic, gender, racial and ethnic lines, as well as inequalities between countries—with the impact of the pandemic a contributory factor.[69] Likewise, several centres monitoring democracy confirmed a continued deterioration in its quality in 2021.[70] While this trend can partly be attributed to restrictions imposed on political rights for public health reasons, such as limiting public gatherings, a larger part of the problem is opportunistic exploitation of the pandemic to justify anti-democratic measures.

Arms control and nuclear non-proliferation

The year 2021 began with three pressing, unanswered questions about arms control. The first was whether the Russian–US Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) would be renewed for a further five years by the 5 February deadline. The second question was whether the twice-deferred review conference (RevCon) of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), originally scheduled for April 2020, would proceed as planned in April 2021. And the third question was whether the USA under the new Biden administration would rejoin the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal.

In the event, the new US administration made clear it wanted to extend New START and Russia stood by its long-held commitment to doing so. The Trump administration had delayed action, seeking at one point to make it conditional on Chinese participation, which the Chinese government con-

[67] Hafner, M. et al., *Covid-19 and the Cost of Vaccine Nationalism* (RAND Corporation: Santa Monica, CA, 2020); and United Nations, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General* (UN: New York, 2021), p. 53.

[68] *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, pp. 17–19.

[69] Ahmed, N. et al., *Inequality Kills: The Unparalleled Action Needed to Combat Unprecedented Inequality in the Wake of Covid-19* (Oxfam: Oxford, Jan. 2022).

[70] International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *The Global State of Democracy 2021: Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era* (International IDEA: Stockholm, Nov. 2021); *The Economist*, 'A new low for global democracy: More pandemic restrictions damaged freedoms in 2021', 9 Feb. 2022; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2022: The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule* (Freedom House: Washington, DC, 2022); and Boese, V. A., *Democracy Report 2022: Autocratization Changing Nature?* (V-Dem Institute: Gothenburg, Mar. 2022).

sistently ruled out, and then proposing an extension limited to just one year.[71] The full five-year extension was swiftly agreed two days before the deadline.[72] Preserving the one remaining bilateral nuclear arms control treaty between Russia and the USA kept open the opportunity to breathe new life into bilateral arms control. At the same time, it placed the spotlight on unresolved questions, such as whether (and how) to include China in the framework of negotiations—something that has been argued for by some US critics of New START.[73] This logically raises the question of whether to include the other six states that own nuclear weapons—the UK, France, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea—in arms control talks.[74] Given the parlous state of relations between the three great powers, however, this would seem out of the question, meaning that these states' nuclear weapons remain outside any agreed framework of limitation.

The NPT RevCon was deferred again until January 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, before, late in 2021, being further postponed to August 2022.[75] The context in which it will convene in 2022 is characterized not only by nuclear concerns surrounding the crisis in Ukraine, but also by problems that go further back. In contrast to the plethora of arms control, reduction and disarmament treaties and agreements achieved in the 1990s, the 2010s were characterized by a crumbling arms control architecture, the arrival of North Korea among the small group of states that own nuclear weapons (probably in 2017 according to leaked US intelligence assessments) and the eight other nuclear-armed states all taking steps to enhance their arsenals.[76] The crisis in nuclear arms control and continued nuclear weapon possession by the nine states named above has long since led to frustration with the NPT by a number of states seeking quicker progress towards full nuclear disarmament, and formed part of the backdrop against which the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was opened for signature in 2017.[77]

[71] Reif, K. and Bugos, S., 'US, Russia extend new START for five years', *Arms Control Today*, Mar. 2021.

[72] 'New Start: US and Russia extend nuclear treaty', BBC News, 3 Feb. 2021. See also chapter 11, section I, in this volume.

[73] Reif, K., 'Bolton renews new START criticism', *Arms Control Today*, Sep. 2019.

[74] *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, pp. 6–9. See also chapter 11, section I, in this volume.

[75] Zlauvinen, G., Letter from President-designate regarding the Tenth Review Conference of the Parties on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 21 July 2021; and Zlauvinen, G., Letter from President-designate regarding the Tenth Review Conference of the Parties on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 30 Dec. 2021.

[76] *SIPRI Yearbook 2019*, pp. 10–16; and Pollack, J. D., 'What do intelligence leaks about North Korea tell us?', Brookings, 9 Aug. 2017. See also chapter 11, section III, in this volume. Note that the phrase 'states that own nuclear weapons' is used instead of the shorter and more obvious term 'nuclear weapon states', as the latter is also used to designate those states permitted under the NPT to own nuclear weapons (i.e. the five permanent members of the UN Security Council).

[77] *SIPRI Yearbook 2019*, pp. 13–15; and Thakur, R. (ed.), *The Nuclear Ban Treaty* (Routledge: London, 2022).

Having been ratified by 50 states, the TPNW entered into force in January 2021.[78]

Iran's development of nuclear technology has long been controversial in the West and the Middle East. The country does not possess nuclear weapons and is a party to the NPT, meaning it has forsworn developing, producing or owning them. It has never acknowledged having a programme to develop nuclear weapons, nor has it ever been proven that the country has one, although there are indications of a possible programme before 2003 and further programme-relevant activities continuing until 2009.[79] Suspicions of Iran's intentions were widespread, however, and between 2006 and 2010 the UN Security Council passed six resolutions demanding an end to its uranium enrichment programme, five of which had sanctions attached.[80] The JCPOA blocked the country's path to developing nuclear weapons until at least 2030.[81] Under the Trump administration, however, the USA announced in 2018 that it would withdraw from its obligations under the deal, which it proceeded to do the following year despite the International Atomic Energy Agency's confirmation that Iran was fully implementing its own obligations.[82] Like other critics of the agreement, the administration's case for pulling out was based on Iran's actions in regional conflicts and its missile programme, as well as the 15-year time limit on the JCPOA. After the US withdrawal, Iran started breaching the JCPOA limits. Negotiations on restoring the deal began in 2021 but had not been completed by the end of the year.[83]

During 2021 the P5 of the UN Security Council—China, France, Russia, the UK and the USA—worked together in an informal group, with the rotating chair held by France, on a joint statement about nuclear war. Harking back to an epochal statement by the Soviet and US leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan following a 1985 meeting in Geneva, the P5 statement, issued on 3 January 2022, affirms that 'nuclear war cannot be won and must never be

[78] Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, opened for signature 20 Sep. 2017, entered into force 22 Jan. 2021, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs.

[79] Quevenco, R., 'IAEA board adopts landmark resolution on Iran PMD case', International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), 15 Dec. 2015; and Kerr, P. K., *Iran's Nuclear Program: Status*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress RL34544 (US Congress, CRS: Washington, DC, 20 Dec. 2019).

[80] Arms Control Association, 'UN Security Council Resolutions on Iran', Jan. 2022.

[81] *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 673–88; and *SIPRI Yearbook 2017*, pp. 505–510.

[82] IAEA, 'Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015)', Report by the Director General, GOV/2018/24, 24 May 2018.

[83] Abadi, C., 'The Iran nuclear deal's long year of negotiations and uncertainty', *Foreign Policy*, 24 Dec. 2021; Lynch, C., 'A last-ditch effort to save the Iran deal', *Foreign Policy*, 28 Dec. 2022; Al Jazeera, 'Iran says nuclear agreement can be reached if US sanctions lifted', 6 Jan. 2022; and Fassihi, F. and Jakes, L., 'Trading threats, the US and Iran inch closer to a nuclear pact', *New York Times*, 12 Jan. 2022. See also chapter 11, section II, in this volume.

fought'.[84] While the Gorbachev–Reagan declaration was followed by historic talks on nuclear disarmament, the new statement is unlikely to have such an impact. Nonetheless, it is valuable not only due to its recognition of the risks posed by the existence of nuclear weapons, but because, taken at face value, it offers a logic for constraint in the behaviour of great powers and other states owning nuclear weapons. There is a clear disjuncture between forswearing nuclear war and being willing to start one—yet only China among the P5 has a nuclear 'no-first-use' policy. Equally, it raises questions about continuing down the nuclear modernization path on which all members of the P5 are set.[85] Indeed, the statement recognizes this by stating the wish to avoid a nuclear arms race among signatories. Moreover, the desire to prevent a nuclear war logically implies avoiding any conflictual and confrontational behaviour that might lead to nuclear weapon use by design or accident.

The P5 statement was aimed at the NPT RevCon that had been planned for January 2022. The further postponement of the RevCon until August 2022 ostensibly offered breathing space during which the P5 could work towards outlining the practical measures they could take to act on the logic of their joint statement. The mounting crisis over Russia–Ukraine relations and the eventual war mean that possibility is unlikely to be fulfilled.

Geopolitics

The departure of the Trump administration in the USA and its replacement by the Biden administration was widely expected to lead to a less turbulent and more peaceful period in international relations. The 2021 edition of SIPRI Yearbook warned that such expectations were likely misplaced. On the one hand, the USA is no longer the sole hegemon on the global stage as it was in the 1990s and, on the other hand, there remained many areas of potential friction with both China and Russia.[86]

The Biden administration has been more critical and abrasive of Russia than the Trump administration was. In March 2021 the US president infuriated Russian media and diplomats by agreeing when an interviewer asked if he regarded the Russian president as a killer.[87] From the start, the Biden

[84] Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, 'Joint Soviet–United States statement on the summit meeting in Geneva', 21 Nov. 1985; and French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 'Joint statement of the leaders of the five nuclear-weapon states on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races', 3 Jan. 2022.

[85] Gibbons, R. D., 'Five nuclear weapon states vow to prevent nuclear war while modernizing arsenals', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 17 Jan. 2022.

[86] *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, p. 22.

[87] CNN, 'Biden: I think Putin is a killer', 17 Mar. 2021; Gessen, M., 'How Biden rattled Putin', *New Yorker*, 19 Mar. 2021; Chernova, A., Ullah, Z. and Picheta, R., 'Russia reacts angrily after Biden calls Putin a "killer"', CNN, 18 Mar. 2021; and Troianovski, A., 'Russia erupts in fury over Biden's calling Putin a killer', *New York Times*, 18 Mar. 2021.

administration's approach has included trying to strengthen US alliances and undoing divisions sown by the Trump administration's policies and rhetoric.[88] Despite visible tension among allies over the lack of consultation by the US administration in handling the withdrawal from Afghanistan, there were signs that the public view of the USA among allies improved over the course of 2021.[89] It was always likely that this would be unwelcome to Russia, given the possibility that its government would see such efforts as a process of building unity against it. The summit meeting between presidents Biden and Putin in June 2021 was described by both parties as polite but marked by clearly stated disagreements.[90] Agreement was limited to the setting up of working groups of officials to tackle several key issues, including cybersecurity, and initiating a dialogue on strategic stability.[91] Overall, some commentators formed the impression that, aside from nuclear arms control, the Biden administration viewed Russia as having little role to play in key issues, suggesting that, while the USA is central to how Russia understands the world, for US policymakers, Russia is a distraction.[92] With the war in Ukraine, however, Russia has returned to the centre of US attention.

Relations between China and the USA are also in a long-term process of deterioration, characterized by political competition, strategic confrontation and economic rivalry. China's annual economic growth over the past four decades has averaged close to 10 per cent for most of that time.[93] Although growth was much slower during 2020, the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, China's was the only major economy that grew *at all* that year.[94] Some analysts argue that China's economy is already larger than the USA's by one measure and will likely outstrip it by all measures during the 2020s, although a contrary analysis suggests that will happen much later, if ever.[95] As the rising power of the current period, China chafes at the US assumption of superiority, at the global military reach the USA continues to display, and at an international system that it sees as unfairly shaped to US advantage.

[88] Blinken, A. J., 'Reaffirming and reimagining America's alliances', Speech at NATO headquarters, Brussels, by US Secretary of State, 24 Mar. 2021.

[89] Karnitschnig, M., 'Disbelief and betrayal: Europe reacts to Biden's Afghanistan "miscalculation"', Politico, 17 Aug. 2021; Walt, S. M., 'The real reason US allies are upset about Afghanistan', *Foreign Policy*, 27 Aug. 2021; Wike, R. et al,. 'America's image abroad rebounds with transition from Trump to Biden', Pew Research Center, 10 June 2021; and Griffiths, B. D., 'Global approval of the US shot up 15 points during Biden's first year after crashing under Trump, new polling finds', Insider, 12 Apr. 2022.

[90] Sanger, D. E., Shear, M. D. and Troianovski, A., 'Biden and Putin express desire for better relations at summit shaped by disputes', *New York Times*, 16 June 2021 (updated 31 Oct. 2021).

[91] White House, 'US–Russia presidential joint statement on strategic stability', 16 June 2021.

[92] Greene, S., 'How to speak with Moscow when there's nothing to talk about', *Moscow Times*; and Hill, F., 'The Kremlin's strange victory', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 100, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 2021), p. 44.

[93] Hirst, T., 'A brief history of China's economic growth', World Economic Forum, 30 July 2015.

[94] Jones, L., Palumbo, D. and Brown, D., 'Coronavirus: How the pandemic has changed the world economy', BBC News, 24 Jan. 2021.

[95] Farley, R., 'Can China's economy overtake the United States?', *The Diplomat*, 23 July 2021; and Zhu, E. and Orlik, T., 'When will China rule the world? Maybe never', Bloomberg, 5 July 2021.

In the USA, the bipartisan consensus on opposition to China's rise is reminiscent of the consensus that existed regarding the Soviet threat. One aspect of the US response is the 'trade war' initiated in 2018, which has been fought out by each side imposing high trade tariffs on the other.[96] By the first quarter of 2021, the higher tariffs had become the new normal, although commerce between the two countries continued to flourish despite this.[97] Even so, the atmosphere between China and the USA remains sour. The trilateral security pact launched in September 2021 between Australia, the UK and the USA—known as AUKUS—sent a clear political message of alliance against China.[98] Whether this should be regarded as a rerun of the US–Soviet cold war, with a change in the cast of characters, is hotly debated. One line of thinking in the USA treats confrontation between two great powers as inevitable, while another points to the economic and commercial links that tie China and the USA together in a way that was never true of the cold war rivals.[99]

Against this difficult background, the joint Chinese and US statement on enhancing climate action issued at COP26 in November 2021 was a welcome sign that, despite division on other challenges, cooperation is possible on this global issue.[100] Although the two countries offered strong statements of intent rather than binding commitments, their coming together over climate change augured well. Pragmatic cooperation may well be possible even in such a seemingly unfavourable international context.

The Western withdrawal from Afghanistan

In August 2021 the 20-year Western intervention in Afghanistan ended in failure, with many Afghans who had supported or participated in the Western presence in their country left stranded as forces pulled out. Under the Trump administration, the USA made an agreement with the Taliban in February 2020 to withdraw all US and allied forces from Afghanistan within 14 months—before 1 May 2021.[101] President Biden's decision to largely respect and implement this agreement confirmed that Western intervention in

[96] Wong, D. and Koty, A. C., 'The US–China trade war: A timeline', China Briefing, 25 Aug. 2020.

[97] Bown, C. P., 'US–China trade war tariffs: An up-to-date chart', Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE), 16 Mar. 2021; and Gordon, N., 'For all the "decoupling" rhetoric, US–China trade is booming', *Fortune*, 23 July 2021.

[98] Wintour, P., 'What is the Aukus alliance and what are its implications?', *The Guardian*, 16 Sep. 2021.

[99] Mearsheimer, J. J., 'The inevitable rivalry: America, China, and the tragedy of great-power politics', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 100, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 2021); and Brands, H. and Gaddis, J. L., 'The new Cold War: America, China, and the echoes of history', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 100, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 2021).

[100] US Department of State, 'US–China Joint Glasgow Declaration on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s', Media note, 10 Nov. 2021.

[101] Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America, 29 Feb. 2020.

Afghanistan would end. In April 2021 the administration decided to delay the withdrawal until September.[102] The withdrawal then went ahead, descending into chaos as it became clear that the Taliban's victory would be swift and comprehensive. Amid the cacophony of recrimination that followed in the USA, the plain facts were that its war was over and the Taliban returned to power.[103]

In addition to the consequences suffered by the people of Afghanistan, there seemed likely to be several levels of geopolitical impact. US and Western influence would clearly be much diminished in the region, leaving space for both China and Russia to assert their interests. Some critics argued that the failure in Afghanistan drew a line under the 'global war on terrorism' launched by President George W. Bush after the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the USA of 11 September 2001—a war, they argued, which had likewise failed.[104] This, however, was strongly contested, despite acknowledgement of the costs of the campaign against terrorism.[105] A clearer if—for the USA and its allies—even more uncomfortable consequence of the withdrawal and its immediate aftermath is the impact of defeat on US prestige. This holds the possibility of simultaneously encouraging adversaries, demoralizing allies, weakening alliances, and discouraging states sitting on the fence from coming down on the US side.

Conflict management and risk

Beyond the calculation of advantage and disadvantage arising from intensified rivalry between the great powers, one problem highlighted in the previous two editions of this Yearbook is that contentiousness in global geopolitics diminishes the capacity for managing and helping resolve local and regional conflicts. This issue was again conspicuous in 2021.

Warfare in Ethiopia continued with no effective international conflict management stepping up to curtail the violence. No joint international action took place over the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which had erupted into open warfare in 2020. Similarly, there was an apparent incapacity to address what UN Secretary-General Guterres referred to

[102] Holland, S., Ali, I. and Stewart, P., 'Biden set to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan by Sept. 11', Reuters, 13 Apr. 2021.

[103] Axios, 'Pence says Biden solely responsible for Afghanistan crisis', 18 Aug. 2021; and *The Guardian*, 'Top US general says Afghan collapse can be traced to Trump–Taliban deal', 29 Sep. 2021. See also chapter 4, section III, in this volume.

[104] O'Donnell, L., 'The failed War on Terror', Friedrich Neumann Foundation for Freedom, 7 Oct. 2021; and France 24, '"Total Failure": The war on terror 20 years on', 26 Aug. 2021.

[105] Brands, H. and O'Hanlon, M., 'The War on Terror has not yet failed: A net assessment after 20 years', *Survival*, vol. 63, no. 4 (2021); and Ackerman, E., 'Winning ugly', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 100, no. 5 (Sep./Oct. 2021).

as an 'epidemic of coup d'etats' in 2021.[106] This was not only evident in the UN Security Council, which generally does not take action aimed at reversing coups, but seemingly among regional organizations and other potential actors.[107]

The course of 2021 saw armed conflicts, terrorism and violence in many countries and regions, covered in part I of this Yearbook. In many of the affected countries, the conflict is protracted and violence endemic; in some cases, what can be seen is a re-emergence of conflicts that were thought to be over. The risk in these countries and regions is that war in Ukraine and a need to address other crises detracts from the energy and focus that international actors—not least the UN—need to draw on to address these conflicts. Accepting these levels of conflict and violence as a new normal would potentially consign many of the countries whose conflicts are described in part I to years of strife, immiseration and suffering.

A way forward?

The scale of human need in the face of the security, health and environmental challenges outlined above is daunting. The international system is not managing to cope and the great powers are not focused on responding.[108] In recent years, the same challenge has been identified in successive editions of the Yearbook: can energy and a sense of direction in the UN compensate for the lack of global leadership from the great powers? How might it be possible to achieve a balance in world affairs when the great powers are focused on their rivalries with each other? Now, as the international system reels under the impact of the war in Ukraine, is there space for anything else on the international agenda?

To the degree that it is possible to identify a way forward, the answer may lie in politics rather than in policies. The UN secretary-general's 2021 report, 'Our Common Agenda', maps out the approach and policies required to navigate the maze of current dilemmas and crises and so reach a prosperous, secure and sustainable future.[109] It has been estimated that some 400 reports a year are issued in the secretary-general's name—this one stands out from the rest not only because of the scope of the topic and its level of ambition, but because it was based on a mandate from the UN General Assembly's declaration to mark the UN's 75th anniversary.[110] There are also, it should be

[106] Nichols, M., '"An epidemic" of coups, UN chief laments, urging Security Council to act', Reuters, 26 Oct. 2021.

[107] Gowan, R. and Pradhan, A., 'Why the UN Security Council stumbles in responding to coups', International Crisis Group, 24 Jan. 2022.

[108] Tisdall, S., 'The world is ablaze: Xi, Putin and Biden must join the firefighters', *The Guardian*, 19 Dec. 2021.

[109] United Nations (note 67).

[110] UN Association–UK, 'UN briefing: Our common agenda', 10 Sep. 2021.

added, many other important reports—both recently produced and currently being composed—that set out crucial components of a way forward on the interrelated challenges faced by humanity.

If the vision set out in the UN secretary-general's report for a more effective, inclusive and networked multilateralism is to get policy traction, it cannot rely solely on the clarity of its ideas. This is the problem faced by all such reports. Impact is defined not merely by quality but by timing and the readiness of (at least some of) the audience to band together as a constituency to drive policies forward. Thus, to be implemented, 'Our Common Agenda' needs political support from a large, diverse and sufficiently effective coalition of states. If the supposition that the great powers are currently too distracted, lack the bandwidth or have other priorities is correct, then such a coalition must have three components. First, it must include middle and lesser powers to provide financing, energy, focus, foresight and political muscle. Second, it must include the UN system and regional multilateral organizations for the purposes of conflict resolution and violence prevention. And, third, it must include civil society organizations to mobilize public energy and engagement.