

Looking Back on 2022: Ukraine and the Rest of the Story

By [Dr. Chandra Muzaffar](#)

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As 2022 draws to a close, the world bears the tragic burden of the war in Ukraine. The war began on the 24th of February of this year with the Russian invasion of its neighbour. It has been 10 months. There is nothing to indicate that it will end any time soon.

Thousands have perished — soldiers on both sides and civilians in Ukraine. A huge number of people have been injured and maimed. Both Russian and Ukrainian prisoners have been subjected to torture.

Accompanying this record of death and suffering is the destruction and devastation of infrastructure, both civilian and military. A nuclear facility in Ukraine is caught in this crossfire thus enhancing the danger of a nuclear conflagration. It has been exacerbated by reckless threats about the deployment of nuclear weapons by combatants themselves. Indeed, since the end of the Cold War in 1991, the world has not been this close to such a confrontation.

The Ukraine war has also been a huge boon to arms merchants. Billions of dollars of weapons have been rushed to Ukraine by the US and other NATO members. In some instances they help to advertise new varieties of combat tools that have yet to prove their effectiveness in battle.

The war has also had a severe impact upon certain dimensions of the global food supply chain brought about largely by the sanctions imposed upon Russia by the United States and some of its allies as a way of punishing the former. The actual victims of these sanctions however have sometimes been the poor in countries of the Global South.

The Ukraine war has also aggravated global inflationary trends — already evident before the war. Global inflation is now affecting millions of people all over the world. Economies are stagnating also because investment flows are slowing down, yet another consequence of the war. This affects the generation of jobs and the general employment pattern even in countries far from the war zone.

The war's impact upon both longstanding and more recent political crises has also been telling. Kashmir is still under occupation and the occupied continue to resist and yet it is receiving even less attention from the media because of another war more closely linked to powerful global actors. Likewise, Palestine erupts every other day because of harsh Israeli aggression but the world is preoccupied with Ukraine mainly because it is the present epicentre of the struggle for global hegemony. Then there is Somalia, Eritrea and Peru, among other conflicts. Each is significant in its own way. But they have been pushed to the margins by the tragedy in Ukraine.

Image is from [Andrew Korybko](#)



I shall end this section of my analysis by highlighting three other major events in 2022, each of which should have received much more attention from the people. The first is the popular uprising in Pakistan following the ouster of Prime Minister Imran Khan in April 2022 by a segment of the military core working hand in glove with political leaders backed to the hilt by specific elites in Washington. The Pakistani people know that this is a blatant regime change operation because Imran was more inclined towards pursuing an independent foreign policy for his country with even stronger ties to Beijing and Moscow. The US ruling elite is against such a policy because it is convinced that it would not jive with US geopolitical goals in the region.

The hundreds of thousands perhaps millions of ordinary Pakistanis who have come out into the streets to protest against the US backed regime, and for Imran, since April represent the mass expression of democratic aspirations seldom seen in any society anywhere in the world. This outpouring of sentiment was further reinforced by sweeping by-election victories by Imran's party, the Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) in July. Imran and his party are demanding that free and fair elections be held immediately to allow the people to decide on who should rule Pakistan.

While there has been some coverage of the people's uprising in the Western and Eastern media, its underlying significance has not been given the focus it deserves for an obvious reason. The uprising represents a direct challenge to the politics of regime change which is one of the primary weapons in the arsenal of those who seek to run the world. For them—the advocates of global hegemony led by the US elite — the courage and determination of the Pakistani masses is the ultimate nightmare!

Let us now turn to yet another event this time involving Pakistan's neighbour, Afghanistan. When the Taliban regained power in Kabul in August 2021 after 20 years of US misrule, the

defeated American elite retaliated by freezing financial assets belonging to the Afghan people kept in the country's Central Bank. Worth at least 7 billion dollars, the US government placed this money in September this year under the authority of a so-called independent panel over which the Taliban or the Afghan people have no say. In reality, it is still the US government that will decide how or when the money will be unfrozen and for what purpose it would be used. This is a terrible travesty of justice. Even UN officials in Kabul have criticised the move. They feel that part of the money should be used immediately to feed millions of Afghans who are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. According to some sources, mass famine is a real possibility in parts of the country. It is highly immoral to manipulate money belonging to the Afghan people in this manner in order to avenge one's defeat and to fulfil a larger hegemonic agenda in the region.

This brings us to the third event in 2022 that should be high on our radar. This is mass hunger and suffering in parts of East Africa, a region that covers Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan. Oxfam estimates that one person is likely to die every 36 seconds in that region partly because of acute hunger and extreme poverty. Across East Africa, 6 million children suffer from malnutrition.

The underlying causes for the plight of the people are varied. Drought linked to climate change is undoubtedly a major factor. Local-level conflicts are also responsible. Prices for food have also escalated in the course of the year brought about by a number of reasons, one of them being the war in Ukraine. The war also explains to an extent why humanitarian funding for the region is far below the target. There is a gap of more than 3 billion dollars.

There have been other important happenings in 2022 which have been given the emphasis they deserve by the mainstream media. The climate crisis is an example. Freezing winter storms in the US this December have come as a shock to many people. The mainstream media should have also given as much attention to yet another climate change disaster — the massive flooding in Pakistan from June to October 2022 that resulted in one-third of the country being submerged in water.

The mainstream media continues to accord appropriate attention to the Covid 19 pandemic. Though its overall impact is much less in 2022, many people in the global North and the global South remain deeply concerned about a disease whose origin remains a mystery. People ask, is it linked in some way to unfolding geopolitical challenges?

When we reflect upon all that has happened in 2022, the various happenings can be classified into two categories. One, those that are directly linked to the war in Ukraine and two those that have been overshadowed by the war and yet call for resolution in the larger interest of humanity. There are also a couple of events that fall outside the two categories. Everything considered, Ukraine remains at the vortex of humanity's concerns in 2022.

The world realises why it is so urgent to bring the fighting to an end and to work out a diplomatic solution to the conflict. There have been attempts in that direction. In the early months of the conflict, Pope Francis of the Catholic Church tried to mediate. He was followed by Indonesian President, Joko Widodo in his capacity as the then Chair of G20. Widodo met with the main protagonists on both sides of the divide and pleaded for the cessation of the conflict on the ground that it was having an adverse impact upon countries of the Global South.

Civil society groups have also offered ideas on ending the war. Code Pink and Common

Dreams have articulated their thoughts on a peace initiative. Two of my friends (Richard Falk and Joseph Camilleri) and I also launched a call to end the war in Ukraine through a public document entitled “*To all Who Care About Humanity’s and the Planet’s Future.*”

The document not only discusses the perilous situation the world is in but also analyses the underlying causes of global friction and tension. It suggests solutions to both the Ukraine war and the conflict over Taiwan and proposes concrete steps that can be taken to create a world that is not burdened by hegemonic politics, a world distinguished by just and equitable relations between nations and communities. Towards this end it advocates the reversal of the militarisation of the international system and espouses far-reaching reforms of international institutions. The document recognises that for all these changes to take place there has to be “a massive global awakening of human wisdom and energy.”

Image: CODEPINK “No War with Russia Rally, Negotiate Ukraine, Don’t Escalate.” (2022)



Richard, Joe and I then invited a number of individuals we were familiar with to endorse the document on the 27th of August 2022. 44 of them responded positively. They comprise some of the world’s leading civil society personalities, public intellectuals and activists. With their endorsement, the document went public. The citizens of the world were now invited to join the effort to stop wars, reduce global tensions and build a world committed to justice and compassion in which the dignity of all creation is the primary goal of all human endeavour. To date, 3,646 women and men have signed up on *Change.org*.

In spite of our effort and the endeavours of others, peace moves have not made a dent so far. While there are many reasons that explain the continuance of the Ukraine war, the absolutist position adopted by the antagonists appears to be a formidable obstacle. For the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, his initial aim was to dissuade Ukraine from joining NATO which would have brought NATO to his country’s doorstep and perhaps threatened its security. But as the fighting in Ukraine became more complicated with massive Western and NATO military assistance to Ukraine, he seems more determined now to emasculate his neighbour completely. Similarly, Ukraine and its backers were concerned in the earlier phase of the war with defending Ukraine’s sovereignty and nothing more but as Ukraine began to repel the Russian invasion, its backers began to feel that they would be able to confront and defeat the Russian armed forces and should therefore seize the opportunity to destroy Russia’s military might once and for all.

The extreme positions adopted by both sides are unrealistic — and dangerous. Ukraine is not going to disappear from the map. Neither is it possible to crush the Russian nation. A prolonged war will only increase the suffering of both Ukrainians and Russians, and other Europeans. Indeed, with winter setting in and the energy crisis looming large on the horizon, the toll upon lives and lifestyles could become unbearable.

This is the time for both sides to concede and compromise. They should move away from hard-line positions. They should work towards a negotiated settlement.

The world, especially civil society groups should convey this message to all the parties involved. There is no way that anyone can score a decisive victory in this conflict. This is why it is better to sue for peace NOW.

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Dr Chandra Muzaffar is the president of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST). He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG).

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