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The Future is a newsletter periodically published by The Future Institute.

This newsletter aims to chronicle the significant events and developments in the societies of the emerging nations with the potential of impacting their future.

This publication offers snippets of news analysis that might be advantageous to academics, policymakers, social and political workers, students and various organisations.

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We at the Future Institute express our profound shock and sadness at the news of the catastrophic earthquake that struck Southern Türkiye and neighbouring Syria on February 6, 2023, causing widespread destruction and loss of lives.

Our hearts go out to the victims, those affected, and the brave individuals providing emergency services.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Türkiye and Syria during this difficult time and offer our sincere thoughts and prayers.



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Swedish Parliament

'Vile' Quran burning incident sours Sweden-Türkiye relations

Relations between Sweden and Türkiye have soured in the aftermath of a Quran-burning incident by anti-Islam elements in front of the Turkish embassy in Stockholm, and a series of protests by the officially-designated terror organisation the PKK in Sweden, which Ankara says occurred with the explicit permission and support of the Swedish authorities. In response to the Swedish decision to allow far-right protests, Türkiye summoned the Swedish ambassador over the issue and later cancelled a planned visit by the Swedish defence minister Pal Jonson, which had been aimed at addressing Türkiye's objections to Sweden's bid to join the NATO military alliance.

Slamming Sweden for allowing far-right anti-Islam politician Rasmus Paludan's Quran-burning protest under heavy police protection, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called it a vile act that was an insult to everyone, especially to Muslims. He also cast serious doubts on any Turkish support for the Swedish bid for membership into the military alliance NATO. Türkiye was not alone in condemning the incident – other Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait also denounced the Quran burning as racist, Islamophobic and defamatory. While top officials in Sweden have criticised Paludan's actions as disrespectful and ones they disagree with, they however reiterated that such protests were allowed as part of freedom of expression in Sweden.

On the other hand, Türkiye announced that despite blocking Sweden's application, it would support Finland's NATO application, with the latter making concessions to improve relations with Türkiye, including lifting its nearly three-year-long arms embargo on Türkiye. Whether, however, this will mean much should Finland continue its application to NATO as a joint one with its Nordic neighbour Sweden remains to be seen in the coming days.

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2022: A year in tectonic shifts to a multipolar world

The year 2022 will most likely be remembered as the year that the globe began its rather paradigmatic move from a post-Cold War unipolar order to a yet undefined and unclear multipolar one. Over the last three decades or so, the global order was based on three primary pillars – undisputed US hegemony; globalisation as the US's unspoken economic system; and the US dollar as the undisputed global reserve currency and financial clearing house. Today, they are all being challenged. In fact, one may be bold as to assert that we have reached a point where the problems of Europe and the US are no longer considered to be the problems of the whole world.

Many consider the Russian aggression in Ukraine to be the turning point in this regard, but in reality, the signs were already there for some time – among them, the rise of China and a more independently-minded

global South able to think and act beyond geopolitical bloc interests. On the one hand, the Ukraine war will have thoroughly exposed Russian military weakness and blown away any image Putin was trying to construct of Russia in the glorious image of the mighty Soviet Union. On the other hand, it also exposed the extent of European dependence on Russian oil, proving that a lot of European rhetoric against Russia before the Ukraine war was indeed hollow. At the same time, the war has made it clear that the Global Rest does not follow the logic of the Global West in simplistically branding the war as one between defending democracies and assaulting autocracies –the UN vote regarding sanctions on Russia being a case in point, where many nations of the global South, while strongly opposing the Russian aggression, refused to commit to economic sanctions.

As the Russian power image lies shattered and America’s dominance fades, both regionally and globally, various countries of the Global South are engaging with multiple actors from various ‘blocs’, including among themselves through activities of international organisations such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. An example is the rapprochement drive by the Gulf monarchies, traditionally US allies, with China and increasing their economic ties with China in the past year. The shifting global order is such that the countries of the Gulf feel independent enough to partner with China while understanding that Washington will continue to play the role of security guarantor for the foreseeable future.

Moreover, countries such as Türkiye have also begun to advocate openly for a new world order. As an emerging power, Türkiye is striving to strengthen the Organization of Turkic States and claims that greater reforms in the UN organisation, particularly the Security Council, are required. All this points to a new emerging global order – a kind of multilateralism, and there is a growing list of voices who believe that institutions such as the UN and NATO, designed for a unipolar or bipolar world, are ill-equipped to deal with the realities of this emerging multilateralism.

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Jacinda Arden steps down as NZ PM

Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand Prime Minister and well-known global leader, made the surprise announcement earlier this January that she would step down from the role of Prime Minister after five and a half years in office. The announcement comes as a surprise for her supporters, both local and global, who have lauded her role in dealing with the 2019 Christchurch Mosque massacre, the nation’s worst-ever mass shooting, and her government’s measures during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic. At the age of 37, she was the youngest female leader to come to power in 2017 and left office at the age of 42. In 2018, she became just the second elected world leader to give birth while holding office, and later brought her infant daughter to the UN General Assembly in New York.



On explaining the reason behind her leaving office, Ardern said, “I know what this job takes, and I know that I no longer have enough in the tank to do it justice. It is that simple.” Experts have further pointed out that her government has faced mounting local criticism for pandemic measures and lacklustre economic growth, which could have played a part in her decision to resign. Despite these concerns, her government is credited for charting out an independent course for New Zealand on the world stage, especially regarding relations with China, and enhancing its global image. Arden’s time in office has been hailed as that of a dedicated public servant, and her resignation as one bearing signs of humility and empathy. In the aftermath of her resignation, lawmakers from the ruling Labour Party confirmed Chris Hipkins as New Zealand’s next prime minister. Hipkins then went on to make history when he chose Carmel Sepuloni to act as his deputy, marking the first time a person with Pacific Island heritage has been chosen for the position.

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New US House speaker elected after 'historic' 15 rounds of voting

Despite a predicted 'red wave' in November 2022's midterm elections, Republicans only managed to win the House by a lower-than-expected margin of 222 to 212 and were unable to make any gains in the Senate, where the Democrats retained control. To add to their misery, the House Republican ranks appeared divided and disunited, as seen during the voting process for Speaker of the US House of Representatives Kevin McCarthy, whose election process spanned a record fifteen rounds of voting, despite being the representative of the majority party. Experts say that this happened due to the machinations of a rebel group of ultra-conservative Republicans known as the House Freedom Caucus led by the likes of Matt Gaetz and Marjorie Taylor Greene.

It was the contention of members of the House Freedom Caucus that McCarthy was not conservative enough to lead them in their efforts to defeat Democratic President Joe Biden's agenda, hence their holding out of support from the beginning. In an effort to get their support, McCarthy made a number of concessions, including promising a place on the powerful rules committee, which determines the parameters for legislative debate in the House. He also agreed to decrease the threshold for calling a vote on whether to remove the Speaker to just one House member, a move which could undermine his very own footing in the House. Observers have voiced concern over the oversized influence of the extreme wing on the Republican party during the process and the direction towards which these developments could steer the party in the future. The 2022 House speaker election was observed to be "historic" because not since 1860 did the lower chamber of Congress vote this many times to pick a speaker.

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Far-right Israeli politician condemned for provocative Al-Aqsa visit

Israeli far-right national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir caused controversy after storming the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem, defying warnings that his presence at the holy site would inflame tensions. The provocative visit drew worldwide condemnation, mainly from Arab and Muslim states in the Middle East. The Palestinian foreign ministry called the storming an unprecedented provocation and a dangerous escalation of the conflict, while Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem told Al Jazeera that Ben-Gvir's storming of Al-Aqsa was "a continuation of the Zionist occupation's aggression against our sanctities and its war on their Arab identity." However, while there have been general calls for a Palestinian retaliation, no group has expressly advocated for assaults on Israeli targets, and observers believe both Hamas and Fatah are determined to avoid an armed confrontation with Israel. This also appears to be the case with the Israeli PM Netanyahu, who is his first trip abroad since becoming the PM made a surprise trip to Jordan, where he reportedly promised Jordan's King Abdullah that he would maintain the status quo on Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem.

Nonetheless, the incident was condemned by Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, who have all criticised Ben-Gvir's "storming" of Al-Aqsa. The visit was also denounced as "provocative" by Türkiye, which just recently resolved a long-running diplomatic rupture with Israel. The affairs of the mosque are meant to be solely responsible of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian Islamic trust, or waqf, as part of a decades-old understanding between Israel and Jordan. According to the agreement, Muslims should be allowed to access the mosque without restriction, while non-Muslims can visit with waqf consent. However, Israeli authorities have routinely broken the agreement's conditions, allowing settlers and ultranationalists to visit without the waqf's permission, and recently, Israeli police have been accused of turning a blind eye to Jewish prayer in mosque courtyards, which is considered a serious violation of the status quo. Experts have opined that while the measure is viewed as a danger to Muslims' religious liberties, the agenda pursued by Israel's national security minister and his far-right allies would violate the rights of all religious communities in Israel-Palestine, including many Jews themselves.

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Afghanistan and China sign 25-year oil extraction deal

According to the BBC, Afghanistan's Taliban leadership will sign an agreement with a Chinese company to drill for oil in the country's north. It would be Afghanistan's first big energy extraction agreement with a foreign corporation since the Taliban took control in 2021. According to Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid, the oil extraction agreement would see Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas Company (CAPEIC) dig for oil in the Amu Darya basin. A Chinese state-owned business is also negotiating the operation of a copper mine in the country's east. Afghanistan is thought to be sitting on natural resources worth more than \$1 trillion, including natural gas, copper, and rare earth minerals.

The announcement comes at a time when fragile internal security in Afghanistan has been a challenge to Chinese investment, as clear in the latest ISIS attack in December 2022 on a Kabul hotel popular with Chinese nationals. China, however, seems determined to continue its investments in the country, and although Beijing has not yet publicly recognised the Taliban leadership in Afghanistan, it has considerable interests in the nation, which is important to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Experts believe that access to Afghanistan's natural resources would assist in relieving China's growing energy demand.

Moreover, a stronger Chinese presence in Afghanistan will allow China to increase its regional power and influence, possibly contributing to Afghanistan's stability in the longer run.

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Economic woes pile as Egypt on the brink of social unrest

Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, is experiencing a currency crisis and the highest inflation in five years. As a result of several financial crises in the last decade, analysts say that the country has become trapped in an unsustainable cycle of borrowing from the IMF and the Gulf monarchies. In fact, according to the IMF, its debt this year amounts to 85.6% of its GDP. The key factor contributing to Egypt's failing economy is the military's disproportionate role, which is a result of the deep state that both benefits from and sustains Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's dictatorial regime, which came to power through an orchestrated coup in 2013 that toppled the democratically elected Morsi government and has remained in power since, largely through the support of the Us and the Gulf monarchies.

While this disproportionate role of the military in the economy weakens the private sector on the one hand, while on the other hand it there is allocation of large sums of money to unrealistic and wasteful mega projects such as Africa's tallest tower and a new expensive capital city away from Cairo in the desert, instead of state spending on education, healthcare and welfare of the population. As per analysts, these are telltale signs of a regime that thrives on grand-scale repression and lives in fear of another public uprising in the

fashion of the popular 2011 protests that might seek to topple it. Moreover, the consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak and the Ukraine crisis have severely affected the Egyptian economy, depleting its foreign currency reserves and pushing up inflationary pressures. These events have contributed to Egypt's current currency crisis - the Egyptian pound has lost over half its value in the last year, and its current exchange rate to the US dollar is the lowest in its history.

The Egyptian pound's depreciation has resulted in staggering increases in import prices, which has contributed to rising inflation, leaving many average Egyptians unable to make ends meet. According to analysts, the situation, if not remedied, could lead to the collapse of the economy, which could trigger mass unrest and protests, not unlike the revolution around a decade ago in January 2011, which felled the Mubarak era regime whilst calling for "bread, freedom and social justice." The threat of another uprising is very real for the country's dictatorial regime, as it tries to balance response to calls by international actors such as the IMF for economic reforms such as downsizing the role of the military in the economy, reviving the economy, and also acquiescence to the demands of the very military that helps maintain its hold on power.

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Hamline University firing incident in response to showing depictions of Prophet Muhammad generates debate and controversy

A battle over free speech, academic freedom, and claims of Islamophobia at Hamline University has garnered international attention, putting the school at the centre of a debate over how to include controversial material in college courses while respecting students' personal relationships with the material. According to media reports and advocacy groups, the issue began in October when adjunct professor Erika López Prater included a 14th-century painting depicting the Prophet Muhammad in a session on Islamic art, prompting a Muslim student in the class to protest to the university. In light of the protest, the university authorities announced that the professor's contract was not renewed following the fall semester.

There was, however, pushback from a number of organisations and art history academics, who banked on the issue of academic freedom and noted that the image was not akin to Charlie Hebdo cartoons mocking the Holy Prophet of Islam. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest civil rights organisation for Muslims in the US, also took a cautionary approach in their statement on the incident, saying, "Although we strongly discourage showing visual depictions of the Prophet, we recognise that professors who analyse ancient paintings for an academic purpose are not the same as Islamophobes who show such images to cause offence. Based on what we know up to this point, we see no evidence that Professor Erika López Prater acted with Islamophobic intent or engaged in conduct that meets our definition of Islamophobia." In effect, two sides have emerged in the debate: academic freedom proponents, who have decried the 'firing' of the adjunct professor, and equity advocates, who have emphasised the significance of

fostering friendly and inclusive educational environments for America's diverse student groups, especially Muslims.



While it is unlikely this debate will die down anytime soon, some have called attention to still bigger problems. According to Sahar Aziz, the Hamline incident should not be seen as a standoff between academic freedom and equity, for the two principles need not be incompatible. Instead, it should be seen as a manifestation of the commercialisation of higher education to the detriment of students and faculty alike – where adjunct professors lack job security in poorly funded schools and can be hired and fired at will, and students, upon whose fees-paying ability the adjunct professor's livelihood depends on, are able to dictate what can be or cannot be taught. Aziz argues that instead of blaming the Muslim students, who critically and validly exercised their academic freedom through expressing protest and disagreement, one should look to ask how the systematic evisceration of tenure-track lines since the 1970s allowed Hamline to fire the adjunct professor without any consequences. This, according to Aziz, will be the death of academic freedom, and not Muslim students expressing their discomfort at a painting they believed violated their beliefs.

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