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The Future is a newsletter periodically published by The Future Institute from Marlyon Road, Ilford, United Kingdom.

This newsletter aims to chronicle the major events and developments in the societies of emerging nations with the potential to impact 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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Israel-Gaza war continues into new year

There was little respite for the besieged Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, as Israel prolonged its devastating ground and air military operations over a third month that has killed tens of thousands of innocent Palestinian civilians and prolong the suffering of residents as they grapple with a humanitarian disaster and a looming famine that seems to have no end in sight. Moreover, while large-scale demonstrations calling for an immediate ceasefire have continued to rock major cities in Europe and the US, little has transpired on the part of the international community due to the unequivocal diplomatic and military support that the Biden administration continues to display for Israeli actions in Gaza. In the most recent vote at the UN on December 22, the United Nations Security Council was only able to approve a diluted resolution that called for a boost of humanitarian aid to Gaza, without a mention of an immediate ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, in lieu of threat of the US veto.

The number of Palestinian casualties in Gaza as of December 31 is at least 21,822 dead, including more than 8,800 children and 6,300 women, while the number of Palestinians wounded has reached more than 56,451, including at least 8,663 children and 6,327 women. The number of missing people is more than 7,000. In the Occupied West Bank, there have been at least 319 deaths, of whom at least 83 are children, while more than 3,800 are injured. In Israel, officials revised the earlier death toll from 1,405 to "around 1,200" and then to "1,139 civilians." According to the latest data from the UN, WHO and the Palestinian government, 355,000 residential units (over half of Gaza homes) have been destroyed or damaged, 370 educational facilities damaged, 23 out of 36 hospitals left not functioning, 104 ambulances damaged, while 203 places of worship have been damaged.

Moreover, after Israeli actions that brought an end to the hostage-prisoner swapping between Hamas and Israel, it was reported in mid-December that at least three hostages were killed, at the hands of the Israeli military. According to Daniel Hagari, the IDF spokesperson, the Israeli army executed three hostages in the northern Gaza neighbourhood of Shujaiya on Friday after mistaking them for a "threat." The hostages were shot after escaping their kidnappers, even though they were shirtless and held white flags, an initial probe by the military has found. This occurred as the Israeli military was accused of continuing to indiscriminately bomb hospitals such as al-Shifa, causing many deaths of civilians trapped inside. All this occurs as the Israeli military, the IDF, has failed to achieve any of its objectives on the ground, namely the rooting out of Hamas and establishing any semblance of control in

the Gaza Strip, instead exacerbating a humanitarian disaster that threatens to become a full-blown famine for 2.2 million Palestinians. Commentators have pointed out that the Netanyahu government, as key to its own survival, is keen to prolong the war at the expense of daily loss of men and vehicles, and its gross mismanagement of the military offensive; the Netanyahu govt is expected to fall the day after cessation of hostilities in face of any public scrutiny.

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Israel attacks Palestinian Christians on Christmas Day

Christmas Day in the occupied West Bank began with an attack on the Jenin refugee camp and multiple arrests. The raid followed numerous others across the region, which resulted in dozens of arrests and a 17-year-old teenager being shot in the neck. Bethlehem, holy to Christians, was one of the towns impacted. Later, the Israeli army confirmed that it killed hundreds of Palestinians during a Christmas Eve air raid on the Maghazi refugee camp in Gaza, military regretting that the attack, which killed 70 people, damaged individuals near the intended target. Earlier this month, in solidarity with the besieged people of Gaza, Christian leaders and municipal authorities said they had decided to cancel all public festivities, stating it was "not appropriate." Just a week before Christmas, a mother and daughter were killed by an Israeli sniper inside the Church of the Holy Family in Gaza City, according to the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, Pierbattista Pizzaballa.

On December 25, Palestinian Christian pastor Munther Isaac delivered a Christmas sermon from the besieged city of Bethlehem, calling the ongoing conflict in Gaza "the biggest blow" and saying Christians would not accept words of "delayed remorse." Criticising world inactivity, Isaac stated that Christ was "under the rubble" this year as a result of the airstrikes in Gaza and as Israeli soldiers continued to conduct raids across the occupied West Bank, including Jenin. So far, the Christian community in Gaza has lost at least 21 members. Given that there were only 1,000 Christians in Gaza before the conflict, these killings threaten to wipe out the Christian presence for the first time in nearly 2,000 years. Despite this, the leaders of Christian-majority countries in the West have been deafeningly mute on the misery of Palestinian Christians. Commentators have noted that US President Joe Biden, who self-identifies as a devout Catholic, has said nothing and taken no action to defend fellow Catholics in Gaza, who are also under attack from the Israeli army. Experts note that such attitudes are consistent with decades of persistent Western Christian support for the racist Israeli state, which has for decades threatened Christian presence in the holy regions.

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Israel fulfilling dreams of Western leaders as Gaza on the verge of famine

In attempting to explain why Western countries have been continuously supporting Israel despite its horrific massacres killing more than 20,000 Palestinian women, children and men, Ermin Sinanovic argues that Western leaders' support for Israel's actions towards Palestinians stems from a shared desire for revenge and vindication against historical grievances. For Western elites, Israel's aggression against Palestinians fulfils their desire to retaliate against both their own "immigrant problem" and the historical horror of the Holocaust. On the other hand, Israelis perceive the violence as a chance to exorcise the demons of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust by acting out against Palestinians who are used as scapegoats for historical European anti-Jewish feelings. Western support for Israel may also be motivated by a greater desire for vengeance against Arabs and Muslims, as a result of events such as the 9/11 attacks. Sadly, however, the Palestinians, who bear no historical blame for either the Holocaust or 9/11, are caught in the crossfire of these intricate historical delusions, enduring the repercussions of a conflict in which they have no say.

A recent UN Security Council passing of a resolution on the recent Gaza war illustrates the above point. While the original resolution urged for an immediate ceasefire and increased humanitarian aid to Gaza, it was weakened and any reference to a ceasefire was removed to avoid a potential US veto. Notably, both the US and Russia abstained from the vote. Previous attempts at UN resolutions on the conflict have failed due to US vetoes, drawing criticism towards the US for its support of Israel's actions in Gaza. This comes at a time when according to a UN study, Gaza's whole population is facing extreme food shortages, putting the beleaguered enclave at risk of famine if Israel's offensive continues until February. According to numbers published by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the percentage of families in Gaza facing extreme acute food insecurity is the highest ever observed worldwide, surpassing Afghanistan and Sudan. According to the UN's hunger monitoring agency, "virtually all" Gaza Strip homes skip meals on a daily basis, with four out of every five houses in the north and half of displaced households in the south going complete days without eating.

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COP28 another failed opportunity to address climate change?

COP28, the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in December in Dubai, marked another milestone in the fight against climate change. For the first time, all 200 participating nations signed on to transition away from fossil fuels, marking a major step forward in the global fight against climate change. However, the language used in the agreement was somewhat ambiguous, with countries agreeing to "phase down" rather than "phase out" fossil fuels. This vagueness has left many environmentalists concerned about the level of commitment from nations, particularly when it comes to phasing out the most polluting fossil fuel, coal. China, followed by India leads the world in coal power consumption, accounting together for more than 60 per cent of global fossil fuel coal usage.

Another key development at COP28 was the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund, established at COP27. This fund aims to provide financial support to developing countries bearing the brunt of climate change impacts, despite having contributed the least to the problem. Although the initial funding, including pledges of up to \$792 million falls far short of the estimated need, it represents a crucial first step in acknowledging the historical responsibility of developed nations for climate injustice. Despite being two years late, developed countries finally met the \$100 billion annual target for climate finance to developing nations, a critical step in supporting adaptation and mitigation efforts in vulnerable countries. A shift in focus at COP28 was the increased emphasis on adaptation, emphasizing the need for investment in measures to help countries cope with rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and other climate-related challenges.

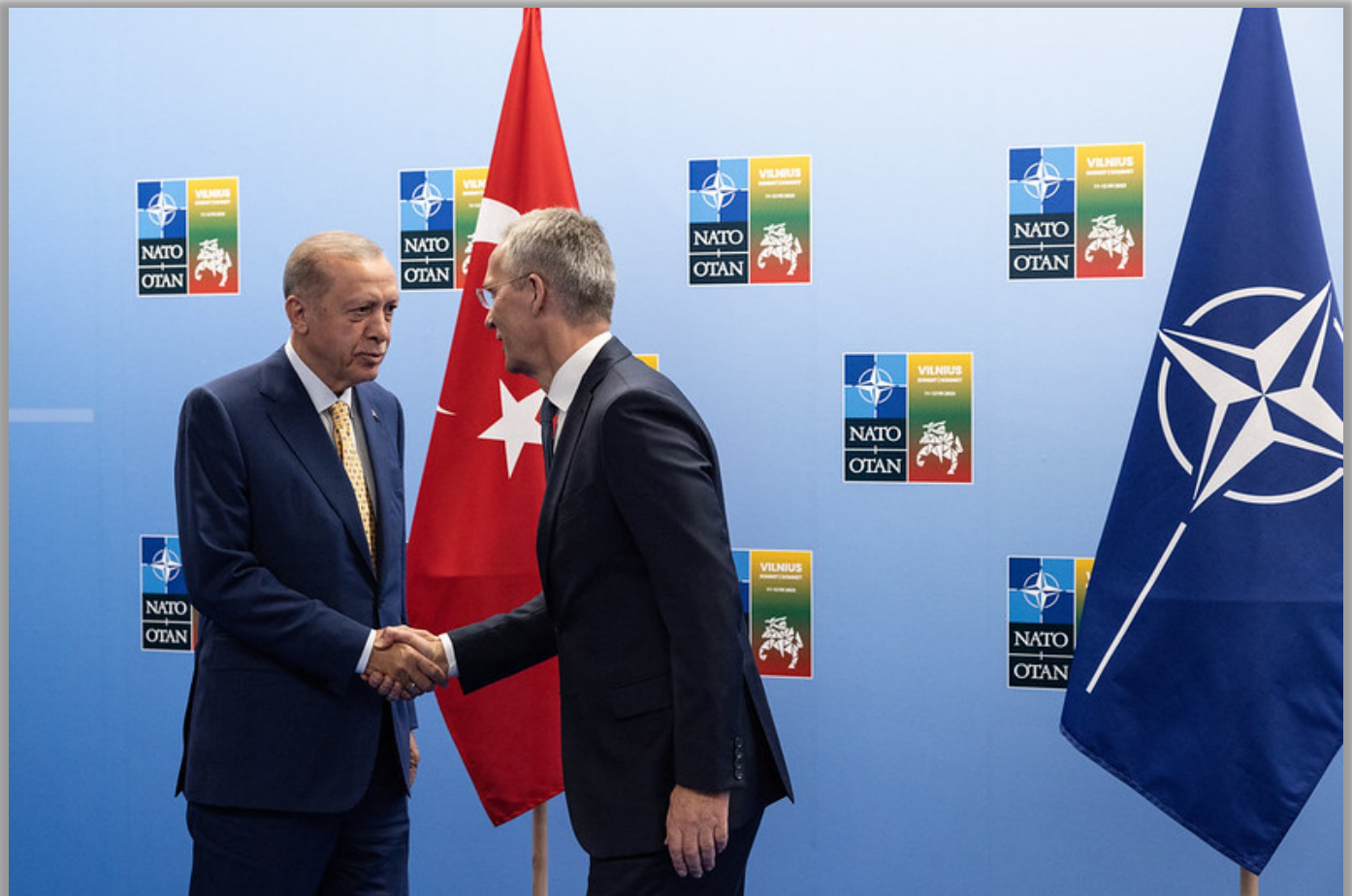
Despite the progress made in several areas, COP28 was not without its shortcomings. One of the most glaring failures was the lack of a specific commitment to phasing out coal, which remains the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions globally. The strong presence of fossil fuel lobbyists at the conference raised concerns about undue influence on negotiations, highlighting the ongoing challenge of balancing economic interests with the urgent need for climate action. Although some experts were disappointed by the disparity between COP28 rhetoric and reality, and others blamed it on the COP28 presidency being held by a major oil producer, the reality is that the COP28 outcomes are no different than those of previous COP accords, from Kyoto in 1997 to Glasgow in 2021, where pledges were made only to be breached later.

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Turkey advances Sweden's bid while being plagued by PKK attacks

After nearly two years of political wrangling and internal debate, Turkey appears closer to greenlighting Sweden's accession to NATO. On Tuesday, December 26, the Turkish parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee voted in favour of the Nordic nation's membership, a crucial step towards final approval. However, this development comes amidst a chilling backdrop of renewed attacks by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), as twin attacks by the PKK in northern Iraq in late December left 12 Turkish soldiers dead. PKK is also well-known for carrying out terrorist attacks against civilians, due to which it is designated by Turkey, the US and the European Union as a terrorist organization. Last year, a PKK-organized bombing at İstiklal Avenue in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul, Turkey, on 13 November 2022, led to the killing of 6 people and injuring 81 others. Apart from this, there is also the spectre of strained ties between the West and Turkey over the war on Gaza and Russia ties.

While the Foreign Affairs Committee's approval is a significant hurdle cleared, the final green light still rests with the full Turkish parliament. No date has been set for the vote, and analysts warn that renewed PKK attacks or domestic political considerations could further delay the process. Sweden's NATO aspirations were initially derailed by Turkey's strong objections. Ankara accused Stockholm of harbouring individuals and groups it considers terrorists, primarily members of the PKK, which is designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the EU, and the US. After

months of intense negotiations, a trilateral agreement brokered by Finland and NATO in June seemingly paved the way for Sweden's membership. Stockholm agreed to take concrete steps against the PKK and lift arms restrictions on Turkey. At the same time, US President Joe Biden had also signalled that he would back Turkey's request to purchase F-16 fighter jets. However, the US Congress has yet to be notified of any F-16 sales, and Erdogan stated in December that he expected the US to make a "simultaneous" action to push the sale through with Sweden's admission.

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Bangladesh on the verge of another farcical election

Bangladesh's largest opposition party the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has opted to boycott the general elections next month, claiming that it cannot take part in a "sham vote." The same has been declared by other political opposition groups such as Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI), which have joined the call to boycott elections and join public strikes. Pro-democracy organizations and analysts have expressed fear that the elections will not be free and fair. In light of this boycott by Bangladesh's major opposition parties, analysts estimate that Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League (AL) will again "win" in the January 7, 2024 elections. Moreover, this will not be the first time such a farce occurs. The United States, the European Union, and others condemned the previous two elections in 2014 and 2018 for severe irregularities, including stuffed ballot boxes and thousands of phantom voters (AL received 84% of the vote and 82% of the vote, respectively.)

Among the demands by the opposition parties for taking part in any elections are the resignation of Hasina's government and reinstatement of the caretaker government system. The caretaker government system, which oversaw four elections - 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008, was abolished in 2011. Using its two-thirds majority in parliament, the Awami League government abolished the system by amending the constitution, following a Supreme

Court ruling in favour of the amendment. Throughout this time, the AL has also exacerbated the very conditions that had required the caretaker system in the first place – the rampant politicization of the bureaucracy. This has created conditions of mistrust in the ability of the bureaucracy to be the guarantors of free and fair elections, since all appointments are done on partisan lines in the first place, to the extent that election presiding officers often act and speak as AL spokespersons, and local police work closely with AL party members.

Bangladesh has become increasingly autocratic and corrupt under Hasina's AL party. Khaleda Zia, the two-time former Premier and BNP leader, is currently under house arrest on questionable corruption charges. Meanwhile, BNP supporters have faced a whopping 4 million legal cases, while independent journalists and civil society have also complained of vengeful harassment. Despite all the talk of economic emancipation under Hasina's rule, Bangladesh is ranked 147 out of 180 nations in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, equal with Iran and one spot above Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. In light of the above, according to Time magazine, critics claim the January election is tantamount to a coronation of Hasina the tyrant.

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Indian government targets journalists using Israeli software

A recent investigation by Amnesty International and The Washington Post has revealed the use of the Israeli Pegasus spyware, likely by the Indian government, to surveil high-profile Indian journalists. The report identified over 300 numbers in India, including those belonging to journalists working for renowned publications like The Wire, The Hindu, and Hindustan Times, who had reported on sensitive issues ranging from national security to government corruption. It comes after Apple's October 31 notification to iPhone users worldwide who might have been the target of "state-sponsored" attacks. Over 20 of the users who were cautioned were opposition leaders and journalists in India. Among them are the founding editor of The Wire, Siddharth Varadarajan, South Asia editor at the Organized Crime and Corruption Report Project (OCCRP), Anand Mangnale, and opposition legislator Mahua Moitra, all of whom were targeted with spyware on their iPhones.

This explosive revelation has sparked concerns about press freedom and state surveillance within India, raising questions about the repeated government involvement in such surveillance activity and the potential chilling effect on investigative journalism. The Indian government, along with NSO Group, faces mounting pressure to provide transparency and address the concerns raised by the Pegasus scandal. In 2021, New Delhi was accused of employing Pegasus spyware to spy on journalists, opposition lawmakers, and activists, with leaked data revealing that the spyware was deployed on over 1,000 Indian phone numbers. According to activists, press freedom in the world's largest democracy has worsened under Modi's leadership. Since his election in 2014, India has dropped 21 places to 161 out of 180 in Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index.

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What is happening in Ukraine Russian front?

As the two-year anniversary of Russia's invasion approaches, the world appears to have lost interest in Ukraine. The year 2022 has been uneasy and somewhat disappointing to many Ukrainians. The long-awaited counteroffensive in the eastern and southern regions came to a halt when Russian bombing of metropolitan areas resumed in order to cause panic and damage power plants and central heating facilities. The counteroffensive's debacle, however, appears sobering in comparison to last year's emotional rollercoaster, when Russian troops shocked Ukraine by advancing from three directions, only to withdraw from around Kyiv and northern regions and suffer a run of humiliating setbacks in the east and south. The tables, however, appear to have turned this winter.

According to several leading Ukrainian military analysts, Kyiv's troops and arsenals are too depleted to go on the offensive next year. This has much to do with Western interests in supporting Israel on an urgent basis in the Israel-Gaza war, due to which aid to Ukraine has diminished or been discontinued, leaving the Russia-Ukraine conflict to slide out of the spotlight. Moreover, concerns have also been raised with allegations of military corruption by the Ukrainian government regarding war aid to Ukraine. The funding has been keeping Kyiv afloat since the war began in February 2022, and experts say it will be a critical component in shaping Ukraine's economic destiny and stability in the future. A cause of cautious optimism for the country in this regard is the likelihood of Ukraine joining NATO and the European Union, which would protect the country politically and economically from Russia. NATO member nations agreed in July this year to streamline Ukraine's road to membership, although they did not specify when it could join.

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