

ON THE HORIZON

What to Watch in 2022

Wilson Experts Weigh In





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*The world in 2021 continued to roil with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, intensifying competition between the world's major powers, questions of trust inside many of the world's leading democracies, and natural disasters made more intense by the effects of climate extremes. As we look to what is on the horizon in 2022, we contend with a geopolitical situation of greater uncertainty than at any time since the end of the Cold War. The Wilson Center strives to provide policymakers with industry-leading expertise that is trustworthy, nonpartisan, and rooted in the values expressed in our congressional charter: "symbolizing and strengthening the fruitful relation between the world of learning and the world of public affairs." In this spirit, we present *On the Horizon – What to Watch in 2022*.*

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3 Stubborn Things

A BLOG SERIES BY AMBASSADOR MARK GREEN



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1

Now for the hard part: In order to keep pace with the requirements of transitioning to “green energy,” mining of critical minerals like lithium and cobalt will need to *quadruple* in less than 20 years.

The COP26 climate summit was an impressive gathering of world leaders around an issue of shared concern. Yet, in many ways, the agreement among nearly 200 countries papers over some of the significant challenges that lie ahead.

One of these is the near insatiable global demand for energy. Led by economic growth in low- and middle-income countries, the Energy Information Agency, or EIA, expects global energy demand to increase by nearly 50% in the next [thirty years](#). While renewable energy output is expected to almost double during that time, it will still make up less than 30% of the world’s [energy consumption](#) by 2050. Underscoring this reality, the EIA expects coal consumption to [increase](#) in the United States by 18% this year – the first increase since 2014 – and 2021 global coal consumption to [surpass](#) that of 2019.

A second challenge is the current shortfall in the mining and industrial capacity required to meet the demands of the green energy transition. When compared to its fossil fuel-based counterpart, each electric vehicle typically requires [six times](#) the inputs of minerals such as copper, nickel, or graphite. The production of these and other minerals collectively will need to increase by [four times](#) by 2040. Some of the minerals most important to electric vehicle technology are concentrated in regions suffering chronic instability: for example about 70% of the world’s [cobalt](#) is mined in the conflict-torn Democratic Republic of Congo. To make things even more complicated, the vast majority of the [processing](#) for some of these minerals is currently located in or controlled by mainland China.

The vulnerabilities suggested by these numbers are largely a product of U.S. policies and priorities. A recent Wilson Center [analysis](#) showed consistent underinvestment in minerals extraction in the U.S. due to political and regulatory challenges.

2

Moving in the wrong direction: every year since 2013 has seen a new record in the number of people displaced around the world.

In 2012, the world began to reverse its decade-and-a-half long trend of falling numbers in human displacement, and unfortunately, *it has not looked back* since. As 2021 came to a close, the United Nations reported that approximately **84 million people** were forcibly displaced from their homes by conflict, insecurity, and climate change — more than double the number from just ten years ago.

No region has evaded this challenge. Civil war in Syria has displaced more than 60% of its pre-war population; economic collapse and deep political oppression have pushed more than five million Venezuelans abroad; and a record **32 million** Africans are displaced by conflict and repression. Most of the world’s displaced stay within their own country (known as internally displaced persons or IDPs). Three quarters of refugees who leave their home countries are hosted in **neighboring countries**. For example, Turkey alone hosts nearly four million Syrian refugees and asylum seekers.

Not every displaced person is fleeing conflict or political oppression. An increasing number of people are escaping the fallout from climate extremes. The world is also witnessing **unprecedented numbers** of economic migrants. With these individuals added into the mix, in 2020, a full 3.6% of the world’s population was on the move – more than at any time in the last 50 years. More than any time in living memory, *humanity is in motion*.



Asianet-Pakistan/Shutterstock



3

Well that didn't work: Attacks by the Islamic State have more than tripled in Afghanistan this year.

Many Americans are eager to turn the page on Afghanistan and the heartbreaking stories emerging from the hasty withdrawal of U.S. and Coalition forces. But averting our gaze does not change the harsh realities on the ground. In truth, a catastrophic mix of famine and human rights abuses continues to unfold there with lasting ramifications. More than [half of the population](#) now faces acute food insecurity, according to the World Food Program, and the International Monetary Fund expects the foreign aid dependent economy to [shrink](#) by as much as 30%. UN Women recently issued a "Gender Alert" on Afghanistan stating that in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal, "there have been immediate reversals on women's rights and fundamental freedoms..."

The security situation has also continued to deteriorate. A convulsion of [score settling and reprisals](#) against former security services personnel has left dozens dead, driving former soldiers without income or hope [into the arms](#) of the Islamic State they once fought. According to the terrorism researcher Abdul Sayed, ISIS attacks have more than [tripled](#) this year over last, making good on a [threat](#) known as far back as the summer of 2021. Assuring the world that everything is under control, the Taliban have sent [hundreds of fighters](#) to battle the ISIS insurgency around Jalalabad, all the while fueling it with summary executions and disappearances. In November the UN special envoy stated that the Islamic State was now present in nearly [every province](#) of the country and had expanded its attacks five-fold from a year ago. The Pentagon has testified that ISIS may have the capacity to [strike the United States](#) within six months.

Wilson Center scholars, fellows, and experts provided instant analysis of the implications of the withdrawal from Afghanistan every step of the way in a series called: "[Hindsight Up Front](#)."

“Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence...”

John Adams during the trial of the Boston Massacre



Keep up with Mark Green's Stubborn Things past, present, and future... browse the blog, or sign up for the latest post.

AFRICA

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

Crisis in the Horn of Africa Threatens Regional Stability

Ethiopia, for years an island of tense stability within the conflict-plagued Horn of Africa, has passed the one-year mark on a war that pits government forces against the country's ethnic Tigrayan minority, primarily based in Ethiopia's northern highlands. The conflict, which has reportedly killed thousands of civilians, forced millions to flee their homes and made more than nine million people dependent on food aid, has already had spillover effects in the region, and threatens more. Eritrean forces crossed the border in support of Ethiopian government forces, with rape, executions, looting, and detentions perpetrated by all sides according to the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and Ethiopia's independent human rights commission.

Humanitarian access has also been a major issue. Ethiopia has pulled some of its troops home from the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in which they have been a controversial mainstay of efforts to fight the terrorist Al Shabab insurgency. Sudanese troops have pushed Ethiopian farmers out of the disputed Al-Fashaga border area, while talks aimed at resolving disputes over the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project, championed by Ethiopia but viewed as a threat to Egyptian and Sudanese water resources, are stalled. Sudan is itself reeling from the aftermath of an October 2021 military coup that resulted in some \$650 million cuts in international assistance. The U.S. government is working with the African Union, western allies, and concerned partners in the Gulf who understand that continued fighting threatens both Ethiopian and regional stability. The high-stakes diplomatic effort aims to facilitate humanitarian access to the conflict zones, help Ethiopian parties agree on a ceasefire and reach a political settlement. The World Food Program (WFP) is trying to stave off mass starvation in Tigray and food insecurity throughout the country, even as WFP employees have been detained and UN officials expelled.



Melih Cevdet Teksen/Shutterstock

3 things to watch:

Kwame Amo/Shutterstock



1

COVID-19 Recovery Slowed by Omicron Variant, Low Vaccine Adherence

Just as COVID-19 vaccine availability in Africa began escalating, with increased production from drug companies and expanded donations from wealthy countries, the Omicron variant emerged. First detected in South Africa and Botswana, Omicron prompted renewed travel bans (since rescinded) and exacerbated an already difficult economic recovery from the pandemic. As COVID-19 continues to slow African productivity and growth, the pandemic is spurring some African countries to digitalize their economies, invest more in healthcare, and promote local industries. At the same time, debt levels are rising as African governments try to cushion the economic fallout. While Africa accounts for less than five percent of global COVID-19 cases and deaths, higher vaccination rates are critical to preventing increased disease spread. With logistical complications and healthcare worker and equipment shortages posing huge challenges, most African countries have yet to vaccinate even 10 percent of their populations.

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People celebrate after reaching the presidential palace, protesting against military rule following coup. Khartoum, Sudan December 19, 2021. REUTERS/Mohamed Nureldin Abdallah

2

Countering Democracy's Decline in Africa

Twenty countries in sub-Saharan Africa were ranked “not free” by Freedom House in 2021. Weak institutions of governance in African nations make them particularly vulnerable to authoritarian leaders. While some have cloaked themselves in the trappings of democracy – through term limit extensions and rigged elections – military coups in Mali, Chad, Guinea, and Sudan have trampled the rule of law and fomented violence. Additionally, COVID-19 was used as a pretext for election delays, restrictions on political assembly and the media, and human rights violations. Against these troubling trends, democratic and peaceful transfers of power in Zambia and Tanzania are encouraging, as is the continued determination of young activists to hold corrupt officials accountable, demand jobs and services, and protest human rights violations. New tools to counter anti-democratic trends abroad, including the Biden Administration’s recently unveiled anti-corruption strategy, may deter would-be autocrats in the future.



3

African Economic Integration and Trade

A home-grown effort to expand continental trade and increase resources for development, the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) became operational in January 2021. It could potentially boost African income by \$450 billion by 2035, increase the continent’s exports by \$560 billion (mostly in manufacturing), and lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty, according to the World Bank. While not all African countries have ratified the AfCFTA agreement, some are already reaping the benefits of tariff reductions with trading partners on the continent. As AfCFTA takes off, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is still underutilized by many African countries and the Biden Administration has deemed Ethiopia, Mali, and Guinea non-compliant with the Act’s eligibility democracy and human rights requirements. With AGOA set to expire in 2025, there is an urgent need for discussion of U.S.-Africa trade relations going forward.

ASIA

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

The Gap Between U.S. Military and Economic Strategies

Through diplomatic overtures and messaging campaigns, the Biden White House has demonstrated a strong commitment to remain a Pacific power. The first U.S. national security strategy under President Biden is anticipated to put the Indo-Pacific at the forefront of the nation's foreign policy priorities, as Washington looks to deepen support from allies and like-minded countries to counterbalance China's dominance in the region and beyond. Efforts to build upon existing partnerships, most notably the Quad, to deal with immediate regional challenges – such as the COVID-19 pandemic – will gain further momentum. Additionally, through new partnerships like AUKUS with established allies Australia and the United Kingdom, the White House has already succeeded in broadening security ties in the Indo-Pacific.

However, when it comes to economic security, new U.S. initiatives that address Asia's rapidly changing realities have been sorely lacking. The Indo-Pacific is now home to two of the world's most ambitious trade deals to date, and the United States is not party to either of them. The Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) trade agreement has become the de facto economic roadmap that can unite the politically, economically, and socially diverse Indo-Pacific region. The need to address rules to govern technological developments and strengthen cyber resilience is as pressing as the need to harmonize standards for digital trade, and yet Washington's voice has been too weak.

U.S. success as a Pacific power will depend as much on taking on economic leadership, and multilateral support for that leadership, as it will on leading from the front as a net security provider. Until it attains the former, it will be hard-pressed to achieve its full potential as a Pacific power.

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi (R) and Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi attend a video conference. Eugene Hoshiko/Pool via REUTERS



3 things to watch: 2022



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1

Rivalries and Cooperation: Beyond U.S.-China Tensions

The regional order of the Indo-Pacific will no longer be defined solely by tensions between Washington and Beijing. While the United States will continue to lead the way in defining the region's security architecture, its lack of a clear vision for the regional economy will prevent it from fulfilling its full potential as a Pacific power. While U.S. allies and like-minded countries will continue to press for a greater commitment from Washington to engage in the region, they will also opt to shape the economic landscape of the Indo-Pacific without the United States. On the security front, the European commitment to the region could increase, while new configurations of partnerships and alliances are likely to emerge in response to the longer-term challenge of confronting China's ambitions of dominating the region through coercion and enticement.

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2

Regional Implications of Taliban-led Afghanistan

The Taliban will face major challenges consolidating power in 2022. They will struggle to ease a catastrophic humanitarian crisis likely to kill hundreds of thousands, and they will confront an intensifying terrorism threat from Islamic State-Khorasan. If the Taliban can't gain domestic legitimacy, a new armed resistance and civil war could ensue. Afghanistan's neighbors, which include top U.S. competitors Iran, Russia, and China, strategic partner India, and key players like Pakistan, will be impacted by heightened refugee flows, the drug trade, cross-border terrorism, and other spillover effects of Afghan instability. Difficult decisions will be needed around how to engage with the Taliban government—to the extent that it survives. As regional players pursue their interests in Afghanistan, the outcomes could be cooperation but also competition, and, in the case of India and Pakistan, potential proxy conflict.



Jet fighters landing at Chiayi Air Force Base. ChenHao_Kuo/Shutterstock

3

Tensions over Taiwan

Given Taiwan's unique circumstances in the international community, Washington's relations with Taipei have deliberately been defined by strategic ambiguity. Escalation of China's claims to Taiwan, coupled with the critical importance of Taiwan for the global economy, however, will require greater clarity in how Taiwan can continue to prosper as a democracy. The Biden administration will be pressed to commit further to ensure stability in cross-Strait relations, and expectations for Washington to lead coordinated efforts among Indo-Pacific powers in Taiwan's defense politically and economically—as well as militarily—will continue to increase.

BRAZIL

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

Calibrating Competing Priorities

Amid concern over democratic backsliding, record deforestation, and growing global competition with China, Washington's top foreign policy challenge with Brazil will remain how best to calibrate these competing priorities. The Bolsonaro government has cast doubts on the integrity of Brazil's democratic process, done little to reverse record levels of deforestation, and opted against a complete exclusion of Huawei from its 5G public auctioneering, despite sustained engagement and pressure from the Biden administration. U.S. congressional concern is rising and the Biden administration will have little choice but to continue to seek ways to credibly improve the Bolsonaro government's abysmal track record on the environment and democracy, without causing a backlash in Brazil over issues of sovereignty. There is a risk that the United States could become a political pawn in Brazil's polarized presidential contest next year, including by pushing Brasília further into China's orbit and/or reinvigorating the Bolsonaro government's attacks on Brazilian democracy. The White House will need to pursue a delicate balancing act in the consequential electoral year ahead.



3 things to watch: 2022



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1

Presidential Election

A faltering economy, growing poverty, and the devastating toll of over 600,000 COVID-19 deaths have exacerbated political polarization in Brazil. This, amid a looming presidential election likely to be dominated by archetypes of the country's political left and right wing. Despite calls from centrists for less controversial alternatives, the presidential race will likely be decided between incumbent Jair Bolsonaro and former president Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva. Although neither Bolsonaro nor Lula has achieved majority voter support, no centrist candidate has yet been able to approximate a competitive level of support. Given the state of the race, the outcome of the 2022 presidential election will likely have profound repercussions for Brazilian foreign policy, environmental policy, and macro-economic policy, even if the eventual winner faces a divided Congress and high levels of rejection from a significant portion of the Brazilian electorate.

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2

Deforestation Diplomacy

Since the Biden administration took office, international engagement with Brazil regarding Amazon deforestation has intensified, particularly in the context of the UN COP26 climate summit. It is increasingly apparent, however, that diplomatic overtures have been unsuccessful: to avoid international criticism, the Brazilian government reportedly hid data regarding the country's deteriorating deforestation rates—the worst in fifteen years—until the summit concluded. The obfuscation only exacerbated existing distrust that the Bolsonaro administration will act in good faith to implement its COP26 commitments, including a 50 percent carbon emissions reduction by 2030. If current deforestation trends continue, tensions between Brazil, the United States, and the European Union (EU) will grow. This could reinforce Brazil's diplomatic isolation, further jeopardize the Mercosur-EU trade agreement, and threaten Brazilian trade flows, especially if international efforts to prohibit imports of goods linked to deforestation advance.



3

Economic Turbulence

Presidential cycles are often turbulent in Brazil, but the country enters 2022 in a particularly vulnerable economic position. Post-pandemic economic recovery has been lackluster—the country has the fourth highest unemployment rate in the world, incomes have fallen sharply after an emergency cash transfer program ended, inflation is high, growth is not recovering, and interest rates are set to increase markedly. Due to Bolsonaro's falling popularity, his economic agenda has become hostage to short-term electoral considerations, fueling market uncertainty. Elected on a platform of fiscal responsibility and economic liberalization, Bolsonaro is now moving to circumvent the country's fiscal cap and stagger payments on court-ordered debts to boost the president's re-election prospects. This macro-environment is not merely a driver of economic stagnation, but also a recipe for societal tensions that could have broader policy ramifications for the winner of the 2022 contest.

CANADA

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

China and Canada-U.S. Cooperation

In September 2021, the Biden administration struck a deal with Beijing that returned Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou to China, and released Canadian hostages Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor from China to Canada. For 1,019 days the status of the “Two Michaels” was an obstacle to any improvement in Canada-China relations, and one of the most important issues in Canada’s bilateral relationship with the United States.

Canadian public opinion turned hostile to China during this period, and remains so. Yet Canadian public opinion also soured on relations with the United States during this crisis. Fairly or unfairly, many Canadians felt that in presenting an arrest warrant for Meng when her flight stopped in Vancouver, the United States exposed Canada to Chinese retaliation.

The Biden administration’s diplomatic resolution of the Meng and Michaels affair could lead to greater alignment on China policy in Ottawa and Washington in 2022. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, speaking at the Wilson Center, stressed the importance of working together to: confront China on human rights; cooperate with China to promote trade and COVID recovery; challenge China’s aggressive moves against Hong Kong, Taiwan, the South China Sea and elsewhere; and collaborate with China to address climate change. It is an agenda that the Biden administration shares.

U.S.-Canada alignment on China would be a game changer. The success of U.S. leadership in the 20th century depended on middle powers like Canada that shared American aims and values and translated these into norms and principles of international law. Canada is one of the most effective countries in promoting global consensus, and might qualify today as a super-middle power. Like many countries, Canada was reluctant to confront China and risk losing access to the Chinese market. China’s hostage diplomacy could prove to be one of the greatest blunders in modern Chinese history.



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau embraces Michael Kovrig. CTV via AP

3 things to watch: 2022



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1

Economic Recovery

Canada used fiscal policy to stave off pandemic-related economic disaster in 2020 and 2021, but Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s minority government signaled in October that the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) that replaced the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) would end in 2021. According to the International Monetary Fund, Canada’s fiscal surge totaled 15.9 percent of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) between January 2020 and September 2021. By comparison, the U.S. fiscal stimulus was 25.5 percent of a larger GDP over the same period, but “Buy American” requirements could deny Canadian firms access to U.S. infrastructure contracts and electric vehicle subsidies. New COVID-19 variants and border restrictions are holding back recovery for tourism and activism has blocked new resource projects so that even rising commodity prices have not helped. These headwinds will make Canadian economic recovery harder to achieve in 2022.

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2

Roadmap for Renewal

Trudeau and U.S. President Joseph Biden agreed to a Roadmap for a Renewed U.S.-Canada Partnership at their virtual bilateral summit in February 2021. It included new and renewed commitments to work together in six areas: policy responses to COVID-19, fostering economic recovery, advancing climate goals, promoting diversity and inclusion, strengthening security cooperation, and shoring up global alliances and institutions. Progress to date has been uneven, strongest on COVID-19 collaboration, (good, despite an uncoordinated approach to border restrictions) and support for alliances and multilateral institutions (pledges to hold a North American Leaders Summit and a Summit for Democracy were fulfilled). Washington and Ottawa will need to overcome domestic political divisions, particularly in the U.S. Congress, in order to achieve progress on infrastructure, climate, and security goals in 2022.



3

Climate Action

With the Trudeau government proposing to raise its carbon price to \$170 per ton to meet its Net Zero by 2050 pledge, climate policies in Canada and the United States could be on a collision course despite shared ambitions that were reaffirmed in the Roadmap. The United States Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA) permits carbon border adjustment fees to raise the prices of imported goods on which no carbon price was paid to ensure domestic producers are not undercut. Yet this would contribute to inflation in Canada while rendering Canada's exports more expensive in world markets. The United States has made little progress on carbon pricing and none of the 11 U.S. jurisdictions with a carbon price are close to \$170 per ton. Political sustainability considerations may force Canada to embrace innovation and postpone the shift to a higher carbon price in 2022.

CHINA

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

Accommodation or War?

Beijing's drive to legitimize autocratic practices worldwide, its technological and military buildups, and its aggression in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait have increased the chances of conflict between the superpowers. The U.S. has reacted with a clear *attitude*, but has not articulated an effective *strategy* to stabilize relations. Finding that strategy is the United States' most pressing foreign policy challenge.

An effective strategy should define American goals: How can we achieve a sustainable peace between a powerful, prosperous United States and a powerful, prosperous China? It should be clear about what competition with China will cost the American people, and manage relations within a framework that promotes multilateral efforts to combat climate change, pandemics, poverty, technological disruptions, and injustice worldwide. It should also acknowledge that China policy cannot be based on American grievances alone: we must begin with a determination to avoid war, recognizing that China's power may make some accommodations necessary.



3 things to watch: 2022



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1

Regional Reactions to U.S.-China Competition

“We don’t want to make you choose. We want to give you choices.” That was Secretary of State Antony Blinken during his November 2021 trip to Africa. It’s a good line that belies geopolitical reality; neither China nor the United States wants to be seen as pressuring countries to pick between them, but each rests easier when a choice goes its way. In Africa, South America, and Southeast and Central Asia, countries value their economic relations with China, but also need the check on Chinese influence offered by the U.S. Most would rather hedge between the powers than tilt either way. Nevertheless, antagonism between China and the United States, and the gradual emergence of separate technological and financial systems, may compel the decisions they hope to avoid. Will great power rivalry produce a bifurcated world, or will Middle Powers temper U.S.-China competition?

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2

The Impact of Domestic Politics

The 2022 U.S. mid-term elections will not be decided on foreign policy issues, but President Biden’s desire to avoid being painted as soft on China in an election year will likely limit his ability to cooperate or compromise with China. Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping faces a key Party Congress at the end of the year and must project strength even as the Chinese economy slows, and international criticism of China’s human rights record intensifies. Negative public opinion in each country toward the other limits both leaders’ ability to make concessions, even if they were inclined to make them which they aren’t. China is dangerously set in its course. The U.S. is dangerously unsure of its own. This bad combination is made worse by fraught domestic politics in both countries.



3

The Clash of Old Ideas, the Absence of New Ones

U.S.-China rivalry is framed by both countries—with more certainty than precision—as an ideological competition. President Biden defined the stakes when he hosted the Summit for Democracy in 2021: U.S.-China tensions derive from a global struggle between democracy and autocracy and the system that best meets the human needs will prevail. He believes America has the upper hand despite the weakening of its democratic institutions. China rejects this view as an outmoded “Cold War mentality,” even as it encourages such thinking with its claim that The East is Rising and the West is Declining. China, too, claims to be democratic despite its lack of elections or political pluralism.

CHINA ENVIRONMENT FORUM

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

Finding Climate as Common Ground

When it comes to climate emissions, the United States and China are jointly responsible for 40% of the world's carbon emissions. A common U.S. and Chinese "dream" of aggressive climate action will determine the world's fate in avoiding the worst climate change scenarios. The U.S.-China relationship has been fraught with conflicts. However, climate and environment have long been a channel for dialogue between the two, which can be good for the planet and act as a diplomatic lifeline when other parts of the relationship are fraught with tension.

Globally, the momentum is towards greener and cleaner development, and we know the United States can take action. In the run-up to COP 26 hosted in Glasgow in late 2021, the United States and Europe signed a new methane agreement. At the summit an 11th hour U.S.-China declaration to also reign in methane emissions was presented. This is creating a multilateral platform that could ease Sino-U.S. climate cooperation.

Domestic climate action will give the United States the moral authority needed to meet the foreign policy challenges of climate change. President Biden can host a Leaders Summit on Climate, but ultimately Congress must pass laws that deliver results. Xi Jinping has vowed to "green" the Belt and Roads Initiative (BRI) and drastically reduce CO2 emissions at home. Europe is pursuing its Global Gateways development scheme to invest in climate friendly development in poorer countries, while leading the world on decarbonization at home. Cooperating, or even engaging in healthy competition with China and the EU on clean energy will yield greater impact than actions pursued alone.

If the United States continues to make promises while failing to take action on climate, then we will not have a say in the rules of the future green global economy, nor will we have the same access to - and dominance of - many of the markets that we currently enjoy.



3 things to watch: 2022



1

U.S.-China Climate Cooperation to Build a Better Future

At the 11th hour of the Glasgow Climate COP, the U.S. and China unveiled a new climate declaration that highlights common ground on controlling methane emissions, expanding policies to integrate renewables and increase energy efficiency, and decarbonizing the Global South. With ongoing tensions over trade, human rights, and cyber security, this agreement may seem surprising, but climate and environmental diplomacy between the two countries has maintained a steady dialogue for nearly 40 years. While vague in parts, the agreement could help rebuild trust. As the U.S. and China are the world's carbon superpowers, their collaboration generates new ideas and technology to accelerate global climate action. Domestic policy roadblocks will inevitably complicate progress on climate collaboration, but competition on EVs, battery storage, and more could also fuel vital progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

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2

Can China Green its Belt and Road Initiative?

Since 2013, half of China’s \$1.2 trillion in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments went towards building fossil fuel plants in the Global South. Other investments cut down forests, dammed rivers, and paved wetlands. The environmental and social consequences of these BRI projects are sizable and public concern is growing. This is not lost on Beijing: Xi Jinping recently announced an end to overseas coal investments and hosted summits on greening BRI and shifting to a “softer” BRI in healthcare, connectivity, and services. Nevertheless, existing BRI projects have long lifespans with significant carbon emissions. If BRI countries continue to follow traditional high-carbon development pathways, global temperature rise will exceed 2.7°C even if Paris climate goals are met. Build Back Better and Great Reset policies could spur the competition and accountability that China needs to truly “green” its BRI.



3

Closing the Loop on Plastic Waste to Protect Oceans and the Climate

For years China has been perceived as the world’s largest source of ocean plastic leakage, but a recent National Academies study found that the U.S. is number one in single-use plastic waste generation. With its 2018 ban on plastic waste imports, China completely altered international waste trade. Domestically, China is moving aggressively on plastic bans and mandated waste collection and sorting while in the U.S. subnational plastic action has been more fast-moving. Scientists and activists are increasingly vocal on the need to do more. By 2030, single-use plastics are on track to consume more than 10 percent of the global carbon budget. Instead of competing for the plastic top spot, the U.S. and China could endeavor to be global leaders to close the loop on plastic waste.

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

Humanity in Motion

Around the world, record levels of displacement, conflict, and the increasing devastation of accelerating climate change have caused many to wonder if the world is heading toward a more violent and unstable future. Between 2010 and the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of major armed conflicts tripled, and experts forecast that the pandemic's impact could drive even more countries into conflict and poverty. Researchers predict that by 2030, climate change could push 100 million more people into poverty, and by 2050, drive as many as 216 million from their homes. It is already a phenomenon: the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center estimates that 21.5 million people per year over the past decade have had to flee their homes due to storms, floods, wildfires, droughts, and other weather events.

There are considerable misconceptions about why people move, how many move, and what effects that mobility has on the places of both origin and arrival. Speculation about the social, political, and economic risks from increasing climate-related migration, and the accompanying risks of violence and conflict, tends not to account for the adaptive capacity of major population centers. Cities are essential to both understanding the challenges of climate-related migration and conflict, and attaining resilient outcomes. Across the globe, cities have been effectively absorbing – and even harnessing – human mobility to strengthen urban communities, ultimately providing a laboratory of learning. Through these experiences, a knowledge base is being developed in real time to help ensure that city governments and stakeholders can be proactive agents of fostering and reinforcing the benefits of human mobility.



3 things to watch: 2022



Pomalaa, Indonesia: Open nickel mining activity by clearing land using heavy axle excavators. KAISARMUDA/Shutterstock

1

Avoiding “Backdraft” in Climate Response

Countries around the world are ramping up their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. This effort to transition to a renewable energy economy and protect communities on the frontlines of climate change is critical. There is, however, a risk that well-intentioned efforts could have a “backdraft” effect, leading to unintended consequences. If designed or implemented without consideration for conflict potential, unforeseen negative spillover might damage economic development, undermine political stability, or fray the social fabric of communities. How can policymakers anticipate and minimize these risks? More ambitiously, how can mitigation and adaptation efforts be designed to avoid conflict and help build peace? We must guide research and analysis on the potential “backdraft” effects of climate responses to inform efforts that, minimally, do no harm, and potentially yield multiple benefits.

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Katja Tsvetkova/Shutterstock

2

Addressing Converging Risks in the Sahel

Security conditions in the Sahel are deteriorating at a rapid pace, with long-term humanitarian consequences that extend far beyond the region. Women in the Sahel are disproportionately affected by the escalating instability and violence. They face high levels of gender-based violence, devastating maternal mortality rates, and severe deficits in educational attainment. As a result of early marriage and a lack of access to reproductive healthcare, birth rates are three to four times higher in the Sahel than in other parts of the world. Access to voluntary family planning and girls' education are often disconnected from broader security and development prospects, but investments in these areas can yield economic and social benefits that simultaneously advance development and security goals. The importance of these investments and entry points for more effective and integrated responses to the crises facing the Sahel must be elevated in the coming year.



Guatemalan migrants cross the Rio Grande. David Peinado Romero/Shutterstock

3

Climate Change and the Violence-Migration Connection in the Northern Triangle

Together, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador represent a strategically significant region experiencing a diverse range of climate impacts and extreme weather events coupled with widespread violence and migration flows. Within the last ten years, the region has experienced two multi-year droughts – including its most severe multi-year drought on record – and an increase in the number and severity of hurricanes, driving both water and food insecurity. Yet, the climatic and environmental dimensions influencing the violence-migration trends in the region remain understudied and poorly addressed. Efforts to improve predictive capabilities and responses to regional security risks must include consideration of environmental and climatic factors and policy responses must as be diverse and multilayered as the motives of the migrants themselves. It will be critical to better understand the complex climate change, violence, and migration connections in the region to help policymakers tailor responses more effectively.

GLOBAL EUROPE

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

A Sea Change vis-a-vis China?

One of the Biden administration's key policy directives is to get European allies to align with the United States on their approach to China. The year 2022 promises a lot of movement in this respect given the fallout from the AUKUS deal and the new leadership in Germany. If reelected, French President Emmanuel Macron is set to fill the void left by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and push his vision for a more independent and "sovereign" Europe, including in the Indo-Pacific region. In contrast, Germany's new foreign minister Annalena Baerbock likely won't hold back in calling China out on its human rights abuses nor revive the EU's investment deal with China.

This coming year provides a major opportunity for the Biden administration and Congress to forge a stronger alliance with European countries vis-à-vis China. It will be important to not only get the European powerhouses such as Germany and France on board to decrease dependency on China, but to support smaller European countries such as Lithuania or the Czech Republic that are taking a stance. Lithuania left the 17+1 grouping with China in 2021, warmed relations with Taiwan, and now bears the brunt of economic and diplomatic sanctions.

Power station Pocerady, Czech Republic. Shutterstock.com



3 things to watch: 2022



1

Changing European Leadership

In 2022, key European allies will experience leadership changes that will reverberate across the Atlantic. Social democrat Olaf Scholz succeeded longtime Chancellor Angela Merkel and formed a three-party coalition with the pro-business Free Democrats, and the Greens. Annalena Baerbock from the Greens is set to become Germany's first female foreign minister and has hinted at a break with Merkel's soft China policy. Meanwhile, France is due for presidential elections in April 2022, with concerns that diminished support for current President Emmanuel Macron might lead to the rise of a far-right leaning candidate Eric Zemmour, which could have profound implications for U.S. cooperation on security issues, specifically through NATO. Elections are also set to be held in Sweden, Slovenia, and Hungary. Even Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, could face significant competition for the first time since he rose to power in 2010. Longtime partnerships will be tested by this change in leadership and will present both challenges and opportunities for U.S. policymakers.

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Sustainable neighbourhood in Almere, The Netherlands. Pavlo Glazkov/Shutterstock.com

2

Europe Left in the Cold with Energy Security Dilemma

Squaring the spike in oil and gas prices with the transition to renewables, green energy will be a Herculean task for Europe in the coming year. As part of the European Green Deal, the EU Commission plans to introduce a framework for the certification of carbon removal, implement a zero-pollution action plan, and review CO2 emission standards for heavy-duty vehicles. The EU will also push forward with its controversial carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM). Meanwhile, the future of Nord Stream 2 continues to cause rifts between Europeans and Americans, and simultaneously increases Russia's leverage to turn the gas tap off as it sees fit. Goeconomic pressure will make it difficult to pursue green policies and provide energy security to European citizens, a vital security interest of the United States.



Drop of Light /Shutterstock

3

Future of European Sovereignty: NATO 2030 and Beyond

A theme that will continue with France at the helm of the rotating EU presidency, is the increased calls for the EU to develop its own security mechanisms. Commonly referred to as "strategic autonomy," the idea is that Europe could defend itself without a heavy reliance on the United States. Importantly, this does not entail a decoupling from the U.S., nor does it imply a reduced importance of NATO; instead, NATO leadership has stressed this enhanced build-up as complementary. A new strategic concept has been commissioned, a guiding document outlining the mandate and goals of the alliance. This year, the new strategic concept will be proposed and then approved: expect a reflecting period on how to modernize the alliance to ensure a strong mandate through 2030 and beyond. Russian demands to halt further NATO enlargement after military build-ups along the Ukraine border cause concern for 2022.

HISTORY AND PUBLIC POLICY



360b/Shutterstock.com

“A generation which ignores history has no past and no future.”

-Author, Robert Heinlein

The year ahead in U.S. foreign policy and world affairs presents daunting challenges. Opportunities for progress, too, abound. In helping the policy community prepare, the Wilson Center relies on one of its great strengths – the ability to help leverage lessons from the past. The History and Public Policy Program will continue to expand and study its remarkable collection of archival materials – from previously unpublished diplomatic correspondence on nuclear crises to primary sources on the Cold War – to better inform analysis and decisions today.

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KOREA

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

No Path to North Korean Denuclearization in the Near-term

The Biden administration would like to denuclearize North Korea but doesn't know how. From sanctions to direct negotiations with Kim Jong Un, the United States has tried every option. Nothing has worked. At the Hanoi summit in 2019, Kim demanded the lifting of most sanctions in return for only a partial shutdown of his nuclear program. That deal was unacceptable to President Trump and will not be accepted by President Biden either—especially because North Korea still refuses to deliver an inventory of its nuclear program or agree to international inspections. Biden has little choice but to continue with sanctions, deterrence, and containment policies even though they will not prevent the further expansion of the North Korean WMD program. There simply is not a more attractive alternative.



Reuters/KCNA

3 things to watch: 2022



1

Accelerated North Korean Nuclear and Missile Threat

North Korea has embarked on an ambitious new five-year military modernization plan, and we are likely to continue to see Kim's efforts create a nuclear triad that can survive a first strike. Some of the weapons the North has tested this year include a new long-range cruise missile, a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SRBM), a new rail-mobile based mode for SRBMs, and a new hypersonic boosted-guided missile. Particularly in the latter half of 2022, after the Beijing Winter Olympics in February and South Korea's presidential election in March, the North could seek to escalate tensions, even carrying out an ICBM test (such as the yet untested Hwasong-16), or a nuclear test. These tests fit the North's broad strategic objectives of bolstering its nuclear deterrent while seeking added leverage in future diplomacy with the United States. Kim's short-term goal is to achieve significant sanctions relief; his long-term objective is to be recognized as a nuclear power.

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2



Increased Tensions on the Korean Peninsula

In South Korea's March 2022 presidential election, the conservative candidate of the opposition People Power Party, Yoon Seok-yeol, is running neck and neck with the Democratic Party candidate, Lee Jae-Myung. South Korean politics is volatile, and the outcome is far from certain, but if Yoon wins, he is likely to adopt a more confrontational posture against North Korea, particularly if the North escalates tensions. The conservatives would shift away from Moon's sunshine policy of trying to reach out to North Korea, especially if North Korea conducts nuclear or missile tests.

3



Shift in Korea-Japan Relations

The relationship between South Korea and Japan soured considerably in recent years after the 2015 comfort women deal fell apart and the South Korean Supreme Court ruled that Japanese companies had to pay South Korean citizens for wartime labor. The Korea-Japan relationship—difficult in the best of times—is deeply vulnerable to South Korea's domestic politics. The current stalemate between South Korea and Japan is likely to continue or even worsen, particularly if the ruling party candidate, Lee Jae-Myung, wins the presidency in March. Lee has called for South Korea to do more to punish pro-Japanese Koreans who had cooperated with the Japanese military during the 1910-1945 colonial rule. But Yoon Seok-yeol, the opposition candidate of the conservative People Power Party, has said he would like to restore the frayed relationship with Japan and have a “future-oriented” approach. Relations with Japan could improve if Yoon wins, despite anti-Japanese sentiments among the South Korean public. A Yoon administration could have the chance to hit the reset button.

LATIN AMERICA

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

A Cornucopia of Challenges

COVID-19 has exacted a devastating toll in Latin America and the Caribbean: a region with eight percent of the world's population has accounted for 30 percent of global deaths. The year 2020 witnessed the worst economic contraction in more than a century, with growth in 2021 insufficient to make up for losses in the pandemic's first year. COVID-19 occasioned staggering increases in poverty and unemployment, pushing into high relief longstanding inequalities in access to health care, quality education, and digital connectivity. Before the pandemic, popular frustration with anemic growth, corruption, and inequality had boiled over into street protests – some quite violent – in numerous countries. Protest movements reemerged in 2021, roiling politics and reflecting ongoing dissatisfaction with democratic performance. With notable exceptions—Uruguay, Costa Rica—volatility, polarization, and anti-incumbent sentiment characterized the region's politics. Authoritarian governments in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela responded to threats with even greater repression. Responding constructively to the region's polarization, fragmentation, and economic reversals constitute the Biden administration's central challenge in the LAC region.



3 things to watch: 2022



1

Greater U.S. Engagement

Great power competition is increasingly shaping U.S. engagement in Latin America, from infrastructure finance to “vaccine diplomacy.” In September, U.S. officials traveled to Ecuador, Colombia, and Panama to explore potential investments under the G7’s Build Back Better World program, an alternative to China’s Belt and Road Initiative that has channeled tens of billions of dollars into the region. After falling behind China’s “medical diplomacy,” the United States has sent more than half of its global vaccine donations to Latin America, though China’s vaccine sales far outnumber U.S. deliveries. Chinese investment in Latin America declined in recent years; in 2020, its state banks made no new loans in the region. But major commodity exporters remain dependent on the Chinese market. Latin American governments welcome greater U.S. engagement, but are anxious over U.S.-China tensions and unwilling to choose between Washington and Beijing.

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Manoj Paateel /Shutterstock

2

Summit of the Americas

Next summer, the United States will host the triennial Summit of the Americas for the first time since it began in Miami in 1994. In convening leaders of the Western Hemisphere, the Biden administration hopes to mobilize a response to the pandemic’s economic and public health ravages in Latin America. Hosting the summit offers an opportunity to demonstrate renewed interest in the region, following President Trump’s decision to skip the 2018 meeting. President Biden has signaled, some say tepidly, Latin America’s importance by sending top officials for several visits to the region. And his administration held high-level dialogues with Mexico and Colombia. The United States has sent the region 54 million vaccine doses. Still, many see the White House as overly focused on migration and underinvested in Latin America’s immense economic, public health, and security challenges.



Joseph Sorrentino/Shutterstock

3

Migration and its Root Causes

Migrant encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border in 2021 reached a 21-year high, but migration trends represent a colossal challenge throughout the Americas. Some six million Venezuelans have fled their country’s political, economic, and humanitarian crisis; 80 percent live in Latin American and Caribbean countries, straining national budgets and resources. Mexico, long a transit country for those trying to reach the United States, is also a migrant-receiving country struggling with its own challenges of absorption. Increased numbers of migrants—from Haiti, Central America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East—attempted the dangerous journey through the Darien Gap between Panama and Colombia in 2021. Poverty, criminal violence, political repression, and climate change-related extreme weather continue to push people from their homes. The effective management of migrant flows will require U.S. policymakers and lawmakers to address the root causes of increased migrant flows, dismantle human smuggling networks, and balance national border enforcement with humanitarian obligations under domestic and international law.

MATERNAL HEALTH

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

Recovery Plans That Empower Women in U.S. Foreign Assistance

Despite the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, policymakers have largely failed to consider the specific needs of women. Women are significantly underrepresented in COVID-19 task forces globally, and only 28 percent of recovery measures across 196 countries address the specific needs of women and girls related to the pandemic. It is critical that U.S. foreign policies enact and bolster gender proactive policy responses worldwide to safeguard decades of progress toward gender equality. Global recovery plans must include gender-responsive employment policies that address the gender-specific effects of COVID-19 on women's work, health, and safety. Recovery plans must also be gender-inclusive and include women in informal, vulnerable, and/or unregulated employment, migrant women, women with disabilities, and pregnant and lactating women. Further, the care sector – both paid and unpaid – must be central in these plans.

Entities such as the Biden administration's Gender Policy Council are vital to ensuring a strong recovery from the regression brought by COVID-19. They released the first-ever National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, which calls for a whole-of-government effort to advance equity in foreign and domestic affairs. Actions such as these, and the commitments that the United States made at the 2021 Generation Equality Forum, are needed to counteract the gendered impact of COVID-19. Foreign policy strategy should prioritize women's leadership, the safety of female workers, and addressing the gendered burden of caregiving.



Cryptographer /Shutterstock

3 things to watch: 2022



In The Light Photography /Shutterstock

1

Maternal Health in Humanitarian Settings

Each day, 810 women around the world die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes. Women and girls affected by conflict and crisis face a heightened threat of maternal mortality and morbidity. More than half of all maternal deaths occur in humanitarian and fragile settings, in part due to the increased occurrence of gender-based violence and harmful practices. In 2020, some 244 million people across 75 countries needed humanitarian assistance. Women and girls facing crisis and conflict are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, exploitation, rape, and dangerous birth conditions. Forced migration and displacement have also been shown to negatively impact maternal and child health due to food insecurity, lack of clean water and sanitation, poor health care infrastructure, and lack of skilled birth attendants and maternal healthcare providers. Girls in humanitarian settings also lack access to education, which can leave them vulnerable to exploitation, gender-based violence, unintended pregnancy, and child marriage. Addressing the growing crisis of maternal health in humanitarian settings is crucial.

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2

The Devastating Effects of COVID-19 on Women’s Health, Work, and Safety

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an outsized impact on women. Even before the pandemic, women’s health, safety, and economic security were under threat. However, COVID-19 has added to the pre-existing challenges that women face globally, particularly health, paid and unpaid work, and safety. Women are more likely to be employed as essential workers, placing them at an elevated risk for COVID-19 exposure. Demands for unpaid caregiving have drastically increased and women have been forced to choose between their careers and their families. The pandemic has also had a significant impact on women’s safety, with reports of gender-based violence increasing significantly worldwide. It is essential to implement global recovery plans that are gender inclusive and proactive to address the gender-specific impacts of COVID-19.



3

Perinatal Mental Health

Globally, 15 to 20 percent of women will experience a perinatal mental health condition. Suicide and overdose are among the leading causes of death in the first year postpartum. However, 50-75 percent of people struggling never receive treatment, and prevention, early recognition, and treatment of perinatal mental health conditions is a challenge for health systems around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has added stress for pregnant people, further exacerbating the perinatal mental health crisis. While there have been some policies and legislation introduced in the United States to provide care and support to pregnant people’s mental health, solutions are in demand globally. In order to provide care and support during the perinatal period, clinicians and health care providers need greater resources to translate the latest research into practical techniques and interventions.

MEXICO

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

Energy

Proposed efforts to reverse Mexico's 2013 energy reform, which opened the sector to foreign direct investment, present the United States with economic, environmental, and national security challenges. Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) has long advocated for Mexican energy self-sufficiency, which he associates with the restoration of the primacy of PEMEX and CFE, the state-owned oil and electricity entities. Long an opponent of the 2013 reform, he has proposed a constitutional reform that, *inter alia*, would grant CFE control of at least 54% of domestic electricity production and prioritize dispatching electricity from CFE's own generation facilities over private facilities, replacing the current economics-based dispatch framework with one that is ownership-based. Many of CFE's generation facilities burn bunker oil or combustóleo, a byproduct of oil refining for which there is limited use because of its high sulfur content.

Consequently, Mexican electricity would be more costly than electricity derived from renewable sources, and "dirtier" due to the reliance on *combustóleo*. The proposed reform would deny firms the right of self-supply – much of which currently comes from investment in renewables, likely undermining Mexican efforts to attract firms seeking to bring production back to North America from Asia. The reliance on dirtier energy will undermine efforts to meet corporate global emissions reductions targets, thus discouraging investment. The proposed reforms likely violate the U.S. Mexico Canada Agreement. Failure by the United States and Canada to challenge the reform's compliance with the agreement will undermine confidence in the agreement overall. Finally, reliance on fossil fuels for electricity generation questions Mexico's ability to meet its Paris commitments to address climate change.



3 things to watch: 22



David Peinado Romero/Shutterstock.com

1

Migration

As border apprehensions of undocumented migrants reach record levels, the Biden and López Obrador (AMLO) administrations strive to collaborate to reduce the flow and improve the treatment of those who reach the Mexico-U.S. border. Following the Biden administration's recent acknowledgement of Mexico's concerns about the treatment of migrants, the López Obrador administration accepted resumption of the Migration Protection Protocols (aka "Remain in Mexico"), which the Biden administration sought unsuccessfully to terminate. Collaboration is also underway to address the drivers of migration from Central America's Northern Triangle. Expansion of Mexico's tree-planting "Sembrando Vida" program may provide immediate cash transfers while the new "Sembrando Oportunidades" program provides skills development opportunities. Until these efforts bear fruit, sizable groups of migrants seeking to cross Mexico in caravans offer AMLO a bargaining chip for use in other areas of the bilateral relationship.

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2

Security

Agreement on a new bicentennial security cooperation framework in October marked the end of the often decried and mischaracterized Merida Initiative. Criminal organizations' dominance in large areas of the country has fueled much of Mexico's violence, highlighted the military's lack of complete territorial control, and undermined the López Obrador administration's "hugs, not bullets" strategy. Precursor chemicals and fentanyl increasingly flow from China through Mexico into the United States while small arms and cash flow south. The success of the new framework depends largely on the reestablishment of trust between law enforcement and justice agencies. Mexico's resumption of the issuance of visas for DEA agents is a good first step though a great deal of work remains to resolve this multifaceted bilateral challenge.



3

Democratic Institutions

Government actions that reduce independence and inhibit performance of their duties are steadily eroding the faith Mexicans place in their institutions. The National Election Institute successfully organized Mexico's largest ever election in 2021 yet faces budget cuts and potential reforms that would politicize its membership. A recent decree declaring virtually all public works projects matters of national security and requiring regulatory and other agency approvals within five days, undermines public oversight and regulatory institutions' autonomy. Interference in the independence of academic institutions and criticism of those who express views contrary to those of the government stifles independent thought. The increasing use of governmental investigative bodies to harass political opponents under the guise of anti-corruption efforts undermines faith in the judicial system. Continued efforts to undermine institutions will likely invite further comparisons to Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua while constraining the Biden administration's ability to engage with the López Obrador administration.

MIDDLE EAST

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

The Iran Factor

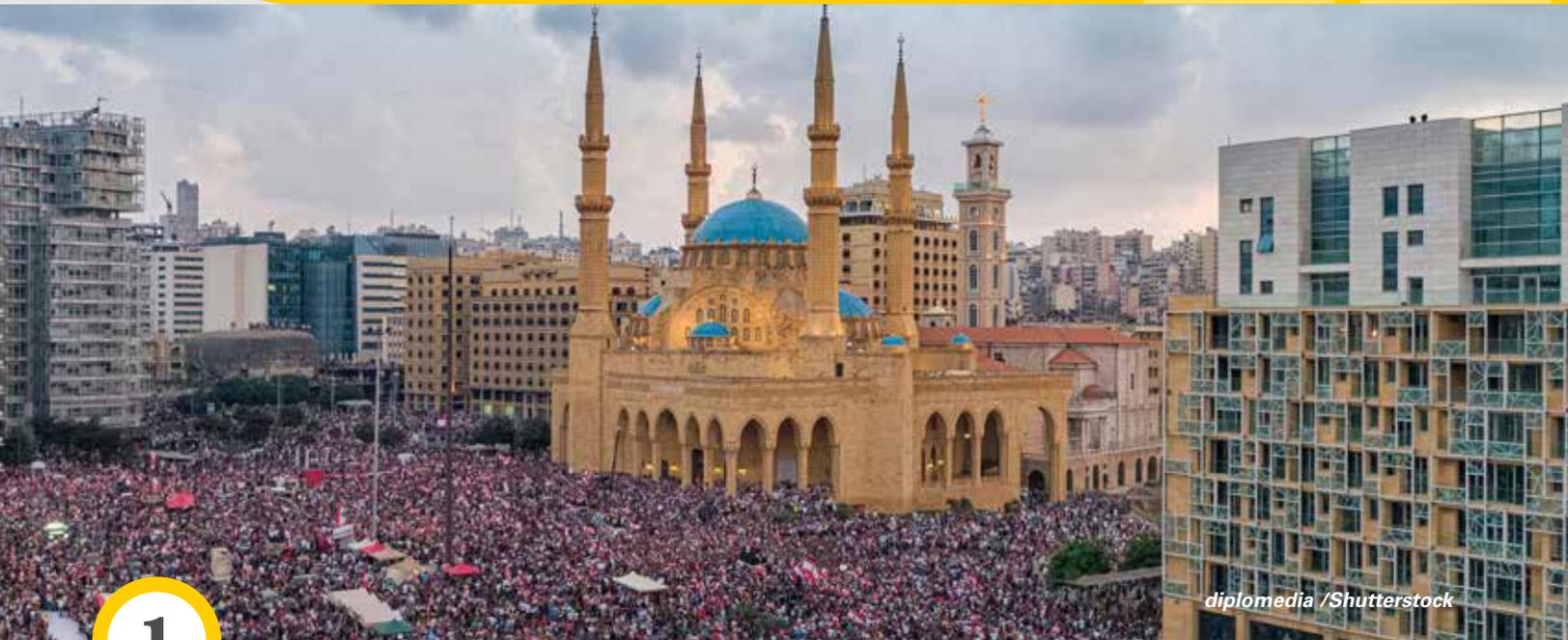
The most significant issue dominating politics in the Middle East in 2022 will be Iran. It is unlikely a satisfactory nuclear arrangement will be achieved. Iran's dangerous behavior throughout the region, will also likely persist, adding to threats that will focus U.S. and regional attention on the troubling country. Even if a nuclear agreement is reached, the distrust between Iran and most regional and western countries is so pervasive that tension would remain and uncertainty in U.S. domestic politics will likely make any agreement appear temporary, at best. Meanwhile, there is a risk of state failure in Lebanon, and a Houthi victory in Yemen, both largely the result of Iranian policies, further destabilizing the region.

The Biden administration will seek a return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as long as that is viable; if not, it will attempt other arrangements to keep Tehran from approaching fissile materials sufficient to produce a nuclear device. The administration, by prioritizing diplomacy, will likely discourage Israel from using military force in almost any eventuality. Fortunately, the administration has earned the trust of its European partners on the Iran front and is further developing its ties with the key regional actors: Israel, the GCC states, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey. Here, Iran's consultations with the UAE and Saudi Arabia are particularly important as it will be able to mobilize the region, and the EU, around common diplomatic approaches.

The Biden administration, however, may prove less effective in dealing with Iran's influence throughout the region. The administration's conciliatory steps on Yemen and Syria have not produced positive results, and it could face tough decisions, including choosing between humanitarian assistance or anti-Iran actions, on Lebanon if state collapse approaches.



3 things to watch: 2022



1

Lebanon's Elections and Implications for the Region

Lebanon's parliamentary elections, scheduled for March 2022, represent a critical flashpoint for the country's political and economic trajectory with implications for the region, especially given its sectarian power-sharing system that mirrors regional politics. The collapse of the financial system has triggered capital flight, skyrocketing inflation, a food insecurity crisis, and unprecedented poverty, with more than 70 percent of the population living below the poverty line. Lebanon risks falling faster into state collapse, particularly if the political wing of the terrorist group Hezbollah continues to seize control. While youth and grassroots opposition groups are organizing for the elections, many fear that Hezbollah and its allies may deliberately disrupt and destabilize political progress. The ripple effect is likely to spill beyond Lebanon's border, further strengthening Iran's influence and emboldening it as it continues talks with the United States on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

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2

Challenges and Opportunities for MENA's Digital Economy

The number of people in the MENA region who accessed the internet in the past year increased by 11 percent. Due to the pandemic, the internet became a lifeline for schools, hospitals, and businesses virtually overnight. Countries that boasted superior digital infrastructure, particularly in the Persian Gulf, faced less extreme economic contractions. However, developing countries saw millions of job losses, especially for women, because employees could not access workplaces or connect with customers efficiently. The surge in internet access presents an opportunity. Last year was the best on record for Middle East startups, doubling total investment over the previous year to \$2 billion. The digital economy in the region is expected to triple by 2023, and investors contributed massively to fintech, which is poised to develop the digital payment solutions that will further expand online retail consumption.



3

MENA's Democratic Experiments Fall Short

The year 2021 witnessed a retreat of democratic governance in Tunisia and Sudan, as protests persisted in different parts of the region. In Tunisia, the birthplace of pro-democracy protests that swept the Arab world a decade ago, democratically elected President Kais Saied suspended the Parliament, dismissed the prime minister, and granted himself judicial power. On October 25, Sudan's transitional sovereign council, established after protests ousted the dictator Omar Al-Bashir in 2019, was dissolved by military leader Abd Al-Fattah Al-Burhan, shortly before a deadline to hand chairmanship to a civilian. Violent clashes between security forces and protestors ensued. Democratic backsliding comes amidst frustration over the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and rising unemployment and poverty. As U.S. officials urge the restoration of democracy in these countries, authoritarian voices are emboldened by democratic retreats in Tunisia and Sudan, leaving activism and mass movements at risk across the region.

POLAR

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

Arctic Security Challenges

The Arctic has long been a region characterized by international cooperation, even during times of heightened tensions elsewhere. The Arctic Council has focused its efforts on a broad range of initiatives focusing on sustainable development and environmental protection. The Arctic Council explicitly excludes military security matters from its mandate. While it is not likely for a conflict to begin in the Arctic, there are concerns that a conflict that starts elsewhere may broaden to include or impact the Arctic. The increase in military activity in the region has led many Arctic experts to call for renewed multilateral, military-to-military dialogue to reduce risk of escalation. U.S. agencies will maintain focus on potential Arctic security challenges posed by Russia and China.

Radiocontrolled military drone flies over Arctic. Sommthink/Shutterstock

3 things to watch: 2022



Bernhard Staehli / Shutterstock

1

Climate Change and the Arctic Environment

Climate change continues to have significant large-scale impacts across the Arctic, as the region is heating at roughly three times the global average. In 2020, for example, the Arctic Ocean ice pack reached its second-lowest recorded summer ice extent on record—continuing a troubling, decades-long declining trend. Many changes are outpacing model predictions, pointing to the need for urgent action. The eight Arctic nations face many diverse challenges, and the profound consequences of accelerating climate change have become more apparent for Arctic and non-Arctic nations alike. Thawing permafrost and coastal erosion threaten communities and infrastructure, food and water security are growing concerns, the number and frequency of large-scale forest fires are evident across the North, and homeland security challenges such as search and rescue are all exacerbated by a rapidly changing Arctic. Climate change may also present openings for the Arctic region, with economic opportunities related to shipping and trade of particular interest.

Featured Experts

Evan Bloom, Senior Fellow, Polar Institute

Dr. Lawson Brigham, Global Fellow, Polar Institute;
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2

Reinvigorated U.S. Government Presence in the Arctic

The Biden administration has reactivated the Arctic Executive Steering Committee, first established under the Obama administration to advance U.S. Arctic interests, and coordinate Federal actions in the Arctic. The Department of Defense (DoD) announced the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies, the sixth such DoD Regional Center established by the United States. The Ted Stevens Center’s charge is to support DoD’s mission in the Arctic, enhance security cooperation throughout the North, and advance research, academic, and policy-oriented initiatives. The White House also announced a new team of presidentially-appointed Commissioners to serve on the United States Arctic Research Commission (USARC), including President Biden’s appointment of the Wilson Center Polar Institute’s Mike Sfraga as Commission Chairman. USARC was established by Congress in 1984 to advise the President and Congress on domestic and international research priorities and related policies. The Biden administration has also charged applicable U.S. government agencies with updating the country’s National Strategy for the Arctic Region. These efforts are key to the administration’s goal of ensuring a whole-of-government approach to the Arctic region.



Arctic Council Meeting. U.S. Department of State

3

Russian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council

The Arctic Council is comprised of the eight Arctic states – Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, United States, and Greenland – and six Indigenous organizations, and serves as the region’s leading intergovernmental forum. The Russian Federation assumed the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in May of 2021 and will lead the Council through May of 2023. The Russian Federation has an ambitious agenda, approved by the eight Arctic nations, and a holistic set of activities highlighting areas such as sustainable development of the region for Arctic peoples, including Indigenous peoples, environmental protection, socioeconomic development, and strengthening the Arctic Council.

RUSSIA & UKRAINE

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

Russia and Ukraine on the Brink

Western intelligence projects that Russia will boost its troop deployment to the Ukraine border from 100,000 to 175,000 in early 2022. That coincides with an upsurge in Russian efforts to destabilize the government in Kyiv. Kremlin officials, including President Putin, have repeatedly declared that Russians and Ukrainians are historically “one people,” in essence arguing that Ukraine itself is not a legitimate state separate from Russia.

The proximate cause, this time, for Russia’s escalation of military and rhetorical threats against Ukraine, according to President Putin, is the establishment of NATO military capacity in Ukraine through military aid. Putin declared that Ukraine or Georgia joining NATO would cross a “red line” for Russia; and that the increasing military aid and cooperation provided to Ukraine constitutes a de facto inclusion of Ukraine in the alliance. The immediate risk is that some act, similar to what happened in Georgia in 2008, could trigger a Russian invasion of Ukraine. Unlike Georgia, Russia confronts a military that has fought for years against Russian-backed separatists in Eastern Ukraine and is armed with modern American weapons.

President Putin says he is open to discussions on resolving the situation, though not with the leadership in Kyiv, who he considers a client state of the West. Instead, he wants to negotiate with the West, particularly President Biden. Russia is seeking a new security architecture in Europe—a post-Cold War Yalta—helps set the rules, and where Russia has ultimate say in areas it considers essential to its national security.

Vadim Savitskiy/Russian Defense Ministry Press Service via AP



3 things to watch: 2022



Mass Protests In Russia Call For Alexei Navalny's Release. Elena Rostunova / Shutterstock

1

Action and Reaction in Moscow

During the last year, the Kremlin took its crackdowns against domestic protesters to new heights, making multiple protest citations a criminal offense for the first time. The Kremlin's most famous critic, Alexei Navalny, was poisoned, most likely by Russian agents, and then imprisoned upon returning to Russia. Moscow prosecutors moved to close Russia's best-known NGO, Memorial, as a foreign agent. It even tightened state oversight over guest lectures and extracurricular activity in Russian schools for fear of foreign influence. The Kremlin may be cracking down on its own society as a low-cost way of responding to foreign interventions it dislikes by threatening social actors favored by the West, and thereby complicating the moral calculus of pressuring Moscow. This strategy also betrays an eroding confidence the Kremlin has in the domestic legitimacy of Putin's power vertical.

Featured Experts:

William Pomeranz, Deputy Director, Kennan Institute

Mykhailo Minakov, Senior Advisor, Editor-in-Chief, *Focus Ukraine* blog, Kennan Institute

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2

Russia, China, and Central Asia

For more than 15 years, Russia and China have strengthened their partnership, forging an understanding over the neighboring territory of Central Asia, resulting in increasing joint military exercises and greater economic investment, particularly from China. Yet the nations of Central Asia are not content to play the role of pawns in a Great Power Competition model many assume prevail. A new administration in Uzbekistan is supportive of increased regional cooperation, and Kazakhstan has for decades sought to play a leadership role both in the region and beyond, while maintaining a “multi-vector” foreign policy that seeks to balance the influence of its larger neighbors. How the nations of Central Asia pursue their regional identity while keeping on good terms with their powerful neighbors is a dynamic that bears watching in the coming years.



3

U.S.-Russian Relations

The U.S.-Russian relationship has been deteriorating—sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly—for more than half a decade. In practical terms, the two strongest areas of U.S.-Russian cooperation are to be found in space and in the Arctic. While the 2021 presidential meeting between Biden and Putin in Geneva offered promise to restore contacts on issues like arms control, disagreements between the two states continue to flare. With few remaining areas of cooperation between our nations left to collapse, will those surviving avenues of contact endure? Cooperation in space, at least, seems at some risk following Russia’s test of an anti-satellite weapon created a debris field that temporarily threatened those on the International Space Station.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE U.S.

Maintaining Our Technological Advantages

Harnessing global technology talent in the United States has historically been our superpower. According to the World Bank, since World War II, more than two-thirds of Nobel Prizes have been awarded to academics associated with U.S. institutions, only half of whom were born in the U.S. American universities still attract the top scientists and engineers, but today we struggle to grow that pool and keep it here. Meanwhile, over the last two decades, China has produced more science and engineering PhD graduates and Georgetown University expects that gap to be 40,000 in the next few years absent change.

Recharging policy efforts to increase the number of people building innovative, secure, reliable, and competitive technology products and services at home and abroad—especially on geostrategically important technologies, including semiconductors and artificial intelligence, is urgent. Today, American industry recruitment around the world is limited by the number of H1B visas available—less than 100,000 annually—while other countries are stepping in the void to offer attractive entry programs with short wait times.

The U.S., together with its allies, must identify new, creative ways to improve the talent and skills pipeline and bring industry experts to government, especially as short-term advisors when needed. Technology ecosystems are deeply interconnected across state borders and no single country, not even the U.S., can afford to go it alone. Failure to act now will mean that adversaries may enable the next series of critical innovations and set them on a trajectory that cannot easily be disrupted.



3 things to watch: 2022



Andrey Armyagov/Shutterstock

1

Space and Security

As long as critical infrastructure and services are heavily reliant on satellite systems, space will be viewed as a domain of potential conflict by our competitors. Moreover, the age of centralized, government-directed human space activity is long gone, replaced by a new era where public initiatives in space share the stage with private priorities. With malicious activities increasingly threatening the safe functioning, confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data traversing these space systems, and novel actors gaining access to space and its resources, it is essential that space is included in broader national security and geopolitical conversations—not as an afterthought to land, sea, and air.

Featured Experts:

Chris Davenport, Global Fellow

Nina Jankowicz, Global Fellow

Alan Rechtschaffen, Chair, Digital Assets Lab

Richard Whittle, Global Fellow

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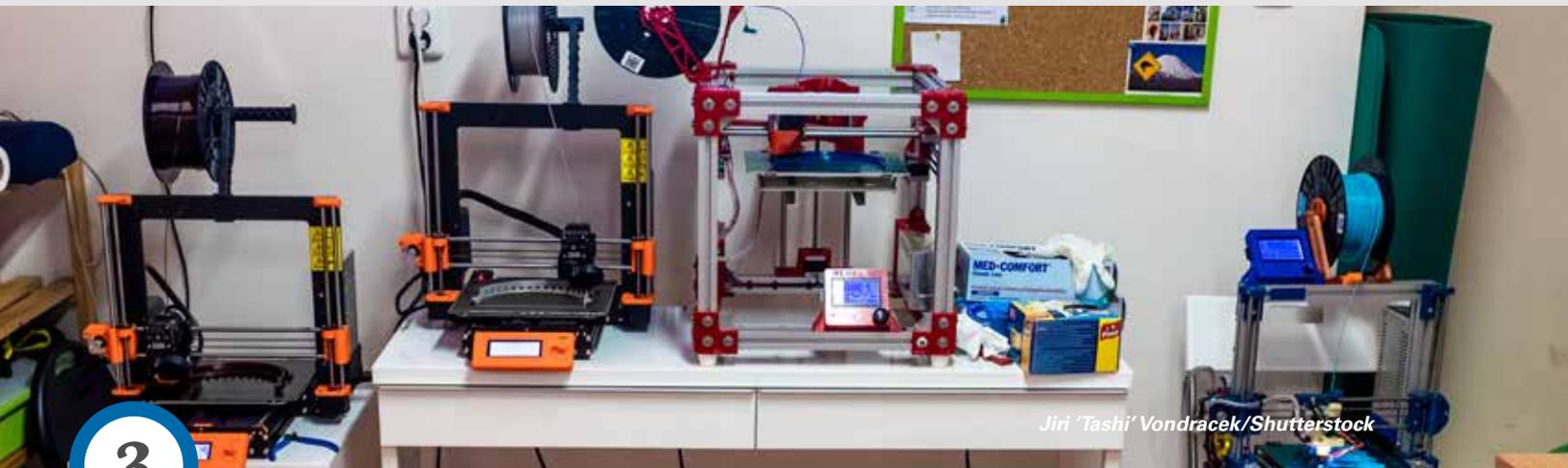


Oatawa/Shutterstock

2

Digital Assets Further Disrupt

Demand for access to digital assets—including cryptocurrency—will grow and continue to disrupt economies in new ways worldwide. Meanwhile, virtual worlds called “metaverses” allow for the creation of a new social and economic order where virtual banking-like activities and labor are rapidly evolving. In response, companies are developing software to use blockchain-linked assets and are assessing the evolution of a new and decentralized shadow social and financial system. Policymakers will need a clear understanding of the technology powering digital assets before they can create regulations that are effective and allow for powerful evolution.



Jiri 'Tashi' Vondracek/Shutterstock

3

The Value of Open Science

The continued threat of the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the value of open science, from open access scientific publications about the coronavirus to open licensing of new designs for personal protective equipment. Open source hardware, in particular—machines, devices, and other physical things whose design is released to the public in such a way that anyone can make, modify, and distribute those things—rapidly increased the development and use of life-saving technologies. At the same time, geopolitical factors—such as competition with China—threaten to hamper scientific collaboration and knowledge sharing. As policymakers address priorities like equity in science and technology, supply chain security, and climate change, they should look to promote low-cost and open source hardware and other open practices to build more collaborative science, while addressing related issues in cybersecurity, intellectual property, and data management and sharing.



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