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Issue 1
February 2022

Global Politics Update

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Essentially VCE Global Politics Unit 3 and 4 is the study of global power. As traditionally states are the most powerful entity in global politics, this course wants students to analyse and evaluate whether that is still the case in the 21st century. This begins in Area of Study 3.1 where the concepts of states and sovereignty are introduced as well as other significant global actors and types of global actors. The discussion of other global actors is primarily in relation to how they impact on states' power and whether a state's sovereignty, which is the embodiment of a state's power, is challenged.

This update provides recent information over the past year that students are required to study from the Key Knowledge in Area of Study 3.1 as well as providing questions and activities to prepare for SACs and the exam.

States and challenges to state sovereignty

It is always advantageous to condense the content that students must learn by having that content apply to various Key Knowledge within the Study Design. The tension between China and Taiwan can be used for the notion of statehood as well as contested borders. The ongoing conflict in the South China Sea can also be used for both contested borders and issues that require multilateral resolution. This introduces Key Knowledge from Area of Study 3.2 into this Area of Study if their chosen state is China, which will be advantageous to students. What is happening in Ukraine currently can be used as, at least, Contested borders and if there is fighting, as an example of conflict in Area of Study 4.2. Equally, a shift to the regional grouping of NATO would be advantageous as a Regional Grouping, particularly in relation to what is happening between Russia and Ukraine being linked to the potential of Ukraine joining this Regional Grouping.

Contested borders

Russia and Ukraine

Developments on the Russian/Ukrainian border are developing every day, and it is likely that more will have developed by the time this Update is published. At time of writing, Russia has not entered Ukraine. However, Russia has amassed over 100,000 troops on the Ukrainian border. Along the border region there are Russian-backed separatists within Ukraine. This is where the elements of this subject become quite relevant as there are certainly Russian 'nationals' that live in Ukraine, as in they identify with being Russian as a nation. This is what allowed Russia to easily invade Crimea in 2014, as the majority of people in Crimea thought of

themselves as Russian. The USA has also brought troops into Europe, but primarily in states that are also a part of NATO (see below). President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Tony Blinken have been clear they will not go into a military conflict with Russia. For up-to-date news on the crisis, most international news organisations are following this, such as Al Jazeera here: <https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/ukraine-russia-crisis/>.



China and Taiwan

Taiwan is a state in all but international recognition as China's 'One China Policy' will not allow states where mainland China has economic and diplomatic relations to recognise Taiwan as its own state. Taiwan is not a member-state of the United Nations and it is difficult for it to gain and maintain recognition. That being said, in the latter part of 2021, the USA and its allies have called for more "meaningful participation in the UN system". Still, the USA to-date has accepted China's One China Policy but maintains a strong relationship with Taiwan, including considerable arms trading so Taiwan may defend itself. In November 2021, President Xi Jinping of China warned US President Joe Biden that if the US supported Taiwanese independence, it would be "like playing with fire" and that "those who play with fire will get burned." Continuing with the metaphor, the Chinese Ambassador to the US, Qin Gang, said in January 2022 that "The Taiwan issue is the biggest tinderbox between China and the United States" (more here: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/28/china-ambassador-us-warns-possible-military-conflict-taiwan>). It is seen as the most likely way the two biggest superpowers could see actual military conflict.

Recently, China has also been making frequent claims about reunification with Taiwan. In October 2021, President Xi Jinping claimed this would be through peaceful means. However, it has also increased incursions into Taiwanese airspace with its warplanes, most recently in January

2022 with 39 planes in one day. In November 2021, Australian Defence Minister Peter Dutton was the first government minister in the world to say aloud the prospect of war between China and the USA because of Taiwan, stating that Australia would naturally side with the USA. He defended his comments to say that critics were ignoring the realities of the region. (more here: <https://7news.com.au/politics/peter-dutton/dutton-defends-comments-on-taiwan-action-c-4682115>)

The South China Sea

The South China Sea is strategically important. It is estimated to contain 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion feet of natural gas deposits, as well as 10% of the world's fisheries. 30% of the global shipping trade goes through the South China Sea, used as a corridor from the Middle-East to East Asia. This is a good video (from 2017 but still relevant) that outlines the disputes and the Sea's importance: <https://youtu.be/luTPMHC7zHY>.



According to China, it owns the South China Sea area surrounding what it calls 'the 9-dash line'. This ownership is based on historical considerations that it has always controlled this area and China even includes this 9-dash line in its passports (<http://time.com/4412191/nine-dash-line-9-south-china-sea>). However, many states claim they own sections of the South China Sea based on the Convention on the Law of the Sea relating to maritime borders of states. China's claim and that of other states overlap, which has resulted in disputes around the South China Sea. For example, China, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia all lay claim to the Spratly Islands, in the middle of the South China Sea. Despite losing a case at the arbitral tribunal relating to the Convention of the Law of the Sea to the Philippines in 2016 that dismissed the legal foundations of the 9-dash line, China continues to behave as though it has control of the entire Sea.

Most notably, since 2015 China had been transforming reefs to islands and then constructing infrastructure, including military infrastructure, on the islands, such as Fiery Cross Island. This is to shore up China's claim to ownership, as well as enhance its military power in the region as the islands can effectively be used as stationary aircraft carriers. This incremental approach of forming islands, arming them and thus manoeuvring more ships into the area is known as the 'Cabbage Strategy' because each new leaf (island or ship) becomes a part of the greater whole and makes it difficult for other states to penetrate.

In November 2021, the Philippines told China to "back off" as Chinese coastguard vessels were preventing Filipino boats to move within its exclusive economic zone. The Filipino Foreign Minister Teodoro Locsin claimed the actions of the Chinese coastguard were illegal under maritime

law. This was later reiterated by Filipino President Duterte. President Xi weighed in at an ASEAN conference shortly after claiming, "China resolutely opposes hegemonism and power politics, wishes to maintain friendly relations with its neighbours and jointly nurture lasting peace in the region and absolutely will not seek hegemony or even less, bully the small" (more here: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/22/xi-china-will-not-seek-dominance-over-southeast-asia>).

Nevertheless, in December 2021, the USA and EU said in a joint-statement that they were deeply concerned with China's "problematic and unilateral actions" in disputed seas in the Asia-Pacific. This included the South China Sea, as well as the East China Sea and the Taiwan Straits. The US has had a presence in the South China Sea that has increased as China's claims have increased. Embarrassingly, an F35 Fighter Jet fell off a US aircraft carrier in the South China Sea in January 2022, to the great amusement of the Chinese media.

Regional Grouping

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

NATO was created in 1949 as an agreement between North America (the USA and Canada) and Western Europe essentially to unite as a military alliance against the USSR. It is a condition of NATO that if one member-state is attacked that the other members will come to their defence. Since the end of the Cold War, 14 new members have joined NATO, including ex-USSR states, such as Poland. Its most recent member is North Macedonia, which joined in March 2020, after Greece allowed it to do so. In June 2021 at the Brussels Summit, NATO leaders reiterated the decision taken at the 2008 Bucharest Summit that Ukraine would become a member of NATO. This is what has fired up Putin most recently in relation to Ukraine. In November 2021, President Putin stated that an expansion of NATO's presence in Ukraine would be a "red line" issue for Russia (more here: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/30/russia-will-act-if-nato-countries-cross-ukraine-red-lines-putin-says>). Shortly after, Secretary-General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, stated "It's only Ukraine and 30 NATO allies that decides when Ukraine is ready to join NATO" (more here: <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/43334/nato-pushes-back-against-russian-president-putins-red-lines-over-ukraine>). As NATO members are obligated to defend each other, if Russia were to attack Ukraine as a NATO member, Russia would then have made enemies with the USA and most of Europe. Since Russia has moved its forces to the Ukraine border, as also to parts bordering other NATO members near the Baltic Sea, the USA has deployed troops to NATO allies that border with Russia, to show their support for the NATO allies. In February 2022, Russia won the support of China, where they issued a joint statement that said, "The parties oppose the further expansion of NATO and call on the North Atlantic Alliance to abandon the ideological approaches of the Cold War era," urging respect for the "sovereignty, security and interests of other countries" (more here: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/4/russia-wins-chinese-backing-in-showdown-over-ukraine>).

Intergovernmental Organisations

The United Nations (UN)

The UN Security Council has become the latest battlefield of diplomatic rows between Russia and the USA over Ukraine. Each permanent member of the Security Council makes accusations against the other, with the USA claiming that Russia is heading to war with Ukraine, while Russia accuses the USA of overblowing the situation and using the international forum to drum up anti-Russian support (more here: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/31/us-and-russia-spar-over-ukraine-crisis-at-un-security-council>). The UN Secretary-General told the Security Council that there is no alternative to diplomacy in the tensions along the Russia/Ukraine border. The Under-Secretary-General for

Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary A. DiCarlo, repeated that any military intervention involving Russia, or NATO alliance forces which are also now on high alert, must be averted. She said that any incursion by one State on another's territory, would be against international law and the United Nations Charter (more here: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/01/1110912>). There will certainly be no Resolution passed in the Security Council regarding this situation one way or another, as either the US and its allies or Russia will veto a Resolution against them (more here: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-01-31/can-the-un-do-more-than-just-talk-about-russia-ukraine-crisis/100794032>). This again calls into question the effectiveness of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The IMF has been a big player in the global response to the pandemic. It has doubled the access of states to emergency financing, with 90 states currently receiving this. The IMF's current lending commitments are over \$170 billion (USD) for these 90 states, and it has the capacity to loan \$1 trillion (USD). To find out what the IMF is doing in response to the pandemic go here: <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/COVID-Lending-Tracker>.



In recent years the IMF has moved away from a purely neoliberal model that concentrates on cutting government spending through austerity measures. This was largely as a result of the evident failure of the bailout in Greece during the Great Financial Crisis and the growing anti-neoliberal sentiment from experts across the world. But before there was Greece, there was Argentina. In 2001, Argentina's economy crashed, largely because it followed the advice of the IMF on condition for IMF loans. In September 2018, Argentina received the biggest loan in IMF history of US\$57 billion. Both the IMF and Argentina are haunted by 2001 and want to ensure they can put Argentina back on track. The IMF has learnt some lessons, having Argentina focus on raising taxes and not cutting essential services and benefits, a far cry from its advice in 2001. Since that time, however, there has been a change in government to a left-leaning Peronist government fronted by President Alberto Fernández. In January 2022, the IMF reached a deal with this new government to stop the possibility of defaulting on the loan (more here: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2022/01/28/pr2218-argentina-imf-staff-statement-on-argentina>). However, many in this government make the claim that Argentina shouldn't repay the loan while their state is in crisis. Included in this is that the loan should never have been offered in the first place. Interestingly, this is not an instance of the IMF imposing austerity, but rather allowing Argentina's overspending. The IMF will still not impose austerity measures on Argentina. For more, and an overview of the relationship between the IMF and Argentina in the 21st century, go here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/31/argentina-imf-international-monetary-fund-debt/>.

The International Criminal Court (ICC)

The International Criminal Court has as new Prosecutor, Karim Khan. A UK national, Khan is the ICC's third Prosecutor since its creation and began his role in June 2021. He has already moved in a new direction to his predecessor, Fatou Bensouda. In his first remarks as Prosecutor he stated, "We need a greater realisation of what is required... Building stronger cases and getting better cases in the courtroom" (more here: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/16/new-icc-prosecutor-karim-khan-vows-to-build-stronger-cases>). This is because the ICC has a poor track record, with only five convictions since it started in 2002. Khan has also dropped an investigation into the US for its actions in Afghanistan (more here: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/6/icc-prosecutor-defends-dropping-us-from-afghan-investigation>). Previously, President Trump had banned former Prosecutor Bensouda from entering the USA when the investigation commenced. He also reminded the international community that the ICC is to be considered a court of last resort, as in only used when domestic courts cannot administer justice. This was evident in his decision to remove investigations in Colombia, which have been running since the court was established in 2002, because he is satisfied that the Colombian courts can address the mass atrocities committed in that state (more here: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/12/08/icc-colombia-farc-special-jurisdiction-peace-complementarity-interventionism/>).

Non-State Actors

Legal Organisations: Human Rights NGOs

Human Rights Organisations can include any organisation that is upholding either human rights in general or a particular human right. For example, any NGO relating to poverty alleviation can be considered a Human Rights Organisation within the bounds of the Study Design (and so can be relevant to studying 'Development' as your ethical issue in Area of Study 4.1).

Amnesty International

Despite being one of the most famous human rights organisations in the world, the question remains whether Amnesty is actually successful in achieving its aims on its own. Its primary aim is to promote the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To this end it undertakes research and actions focused on preventing and ending grave human rights abuses. Amnesty's aim is to promote human rights or prevent human rights abuses and so as long as they are spreading awareness, they see this as a success. For example, every year it publishes its 'The State Of the World's Human Rights' in April to provide a snapshot of progress on human rights across the world (more here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/3202/2021/en/>). It will also share human rights 'wins' each year (more here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/33-human-rights-wins-to-celebrate-this-year/>). These 'wins' include winning human rights awards, such as Amnesty Denmark or Amnesty Hungary, against heightened security laws in those states. They also note that the ICC has used Amnesty reports to commence investigating the Philippines and Venezuela. It is often difficult for Amnesty to claim sole responsibility for an action or change because there are many actors trying to affect change. Nevertheless, Amnesty is achieving its aim of promoting awareness of human rights issues, by amplifying these issues. That is sufficient for the NGO.

Legal Organisations: Environmental Organisations

Environmental organisations can range from activist bodies like Sea Shepherd and Greenpeace to reporting and research bodies such as the Climate Council. Organisations like Oxfam, which partly deal with environmental concerns, can be considered an Environmental or Human Rights Organisation, depending on the work it does.

Greenpeace

According to its Mission Statement, “Greenpeace is an independent campaigning organisation, which uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and to force the solutions which are essential to a green and peaceful future.” Greenpeace has a complicated history as an NGO, with some government’s considering them extremists, such as the UK, while others provide them with charity status, like New Zealand.

Greenpeace updates its ‘Victories’ every year (more here: <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/about-greenpeace/victories/>). These can be in the form of petitions and lobbying, such as in the UK where London has significantly lowered its emissions due to pressure from Greenpeace. Like other NGOs, Greenpeace may contribute rather than lead victories that achieve its aims. It recently celebrated 10 inspiring environmental victories of 2021 (more here: <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/51761/10-inspiring-environmental-victories-2021/>). For example, a Netherlands court that ordered oil transnational Shell to cut emission, Greenpeace was one of many groups bringing this action to court. In other instances, it concentrated on being a part of awareness-raising, such as the landmark victory against air pollution in Indonesia.

Legal Organisations: Organised Religions

Although in many states there is meant to be separation of religion and government, organised religions still have a powerful role in global politics as they may decree actions and advice to their followers.

The Catholic Church

Pope Francis has considerable influence over Catholics globally and can easily dabble in global politics. He is a fervent advocate of fighting climate change, ever since his second encyclical in 2015 (more here: <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/07082020/climate-change-pope-francis/>). He reiterated his dedication and urged global leaders to do more at the most recent COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow in December 2021 (more here: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/earthbeat/pope-francis-tells-cop26-show-political-will-not-defer-action-climate-change>). He has also made sustainability a foundational element of education in Catholic schools and universities, who educate more than 70 million people worldwide. In relation to the potential for conflict between Russia and Ukraine, he led a day of prayer for peace in Ukraine on 26 January 2022 (more here: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/day-prayer-ukraine-pope-recalls-countrys-historical-suffering-2022-01-26/>). On this same day, he also told parents not to condemn children with different sexual orientations (more here: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-francis-tells-parents-not-condemn-children-different-sexual-orientations>). Pope Francis is often considered a socially progressive Pope, as seen here, and also in his recent call to nuns to fight sexism within the Catholic Church (more here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/03/pope-francis-nuns-sexism/>). At the same time, he criticised couples who chose to have pets and not children as selfish earlier this year (more here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59884801>).

Global Terrorist Movements

A global terrorist movement is considered as any terrorist movement that is active in more than one state. For this reason, you cannot study Boko Haram but you could study al-Qaeda or any of its affiliates as well as the Islamic State.

Islamic State

ISIS’ power is significantly diminished since its claimed Caliphate of a third of Syria and Iraq in 2015. In February 2022, ISIS’ latest leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi was killed during a US counterterrorism raid in northwest Syria (more here: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/02/03/world/syria-us-special-forces-raid-intl-hnk/index.html>). This will cause further disarray for the leadership of the terrorist group.



However, ISIS has also had some success, particularly in Afghanistan since the US and its allies withdrew in August 2021. ISIS-K, as the Afghan branch of the terrorist group is known, is now considered the most powerful ISIS branch in the world. They even killed 13 US defence force personnel during the August evacuation (more here: <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/single-suicide-bomber-killed-us-troops-afghans-isis/story?id=82676604>). According to a report by an Israeli think tank that monitors ISIS globally, Afghanistan topped ISIS killings of all its branches (more here: <https://www.voanews.com/a/afghanistan-tops-2021-global-survey-of-islamic-state-casualties-/6415735.html>). In December 2021, Deborah Lyon, the UN Secretary-General’s special representative for Afghanistan, told the UN Security Council, “Once limited to a few provinces and the capital, [ISIS-K] now seems to be present in nearly all provinces, and increasingly active” (more here: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-taliban-are-losing-the-fight-against-islamic-state/>). In fact, it is considered that the Taliban, who took control when the US left, cannot defeat ISIS-K. This is ironic as the purpose of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was to weed out al-Qaeda, and now ISIS, which was once a branch of al-Qaeda, is stronger there than ever.

Transnational Corporations (TNCs)

Meta

That Meta, the overarching company that includes Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, is powerful is obvious. In terms of Global Politics, however, the influence it has on states and other non-state actors, as well as conflict with other non-state actors, is quite different to typical TNCs, even if its motivations are the same. Like any TNC, Meta’s primary aim is to make profit. 98% of its revenue is through advertising. Even though it makes billions from this each year, in February 2022 the stocks of Meta actually fell in value by 22% because it did not experience growth in its profits from the same quarter last year. At the end of 2020 Meta made \$11.2 billion (USD) in profits from advertising, whereas in the same 3 month period in 2021 it made \$10 billion (more here: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/meta-facebook-earnings-report-lower-profits-q4/>). The market has interpreted this to mean that Meta’s profitability is questionable given that recent profits are down on expectations. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg attributed the decline in profits to increasing competition from rival TikTok and a shift in the way users engage with content on Facebook and Instagram. 2021 was a rocky year for Meta, as in October 2021, the “Facebook papers” revealed that the company was actually much more in control of what was happening with users, in terms of dissemination of fake news for example, than it had previously admitted (more here: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/oct/30/facebook-papers-meta-analysis-zuckerberg>). Meta had created an external Oversight Board, following the January 6 Riots on the US Capitol in 2021, which is meant to act as a “Supreme Court” on decisions by the company. This Board, although criticised for being created by Meta to examine Meta, seems to be doing its job perhaps better than expected, noting in January 2022 that there are clearly different rules for different kinds of users, such as celebrities (more here: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-28/meta-oversight-board-left-waiting-for-answers-on-celebrity-rules>). Reining in Meta, and other social media, is actually one of the few bipartisan issues in the USA, where its Congress is proposing a number of bills to limit the power of the social media transnational giant (more here: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/17/tech/meta-facebook-regulation/index.html>).

Application Exercise: Global actors challenge to state sovereignty

Each of the global actors referred to in this update challenges state sovereignty in some way. Complete the following table based on the information in this Update.

Global Actor	Challenge to State Sovereignty	Evidence of challenge
NATO	Obligations to member-states	Current situation with US troop deployments in Europe
United Nations		
International Monetary Fund		
International Criminal Court		
Amnesty International		
Greenpeace		
Catholic Church		
Islamic State		
Meta		

Review Questions (30 marks)

1. Describe how issues that require multilateral resolution challenge state sovereignty. (2 marks)
2. Describe one action of a non-state actor. (2 marks)
3. Describe the power of states. (3 marks)
4. Explain multilateralism with reference to a regional grouping. (3 marks)
5. Explain the power of an intergovernmental organisation, with reference to its actions in the past year. (4 marks)
6. Explain the role a different intergovernmental organisation, with reference to actions taken by that IGO in the past year. (4 marks)
7. Analyse the power of a transnational corporation. (5 marks)
8. Evaluate the success of two global actors in achieving their aims. (8 marks)

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