PICTET WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Precious Metals: Gold

The Curious Case of Official Demand

AUTHOR

LUC LUYET
lluyet@pictet.com

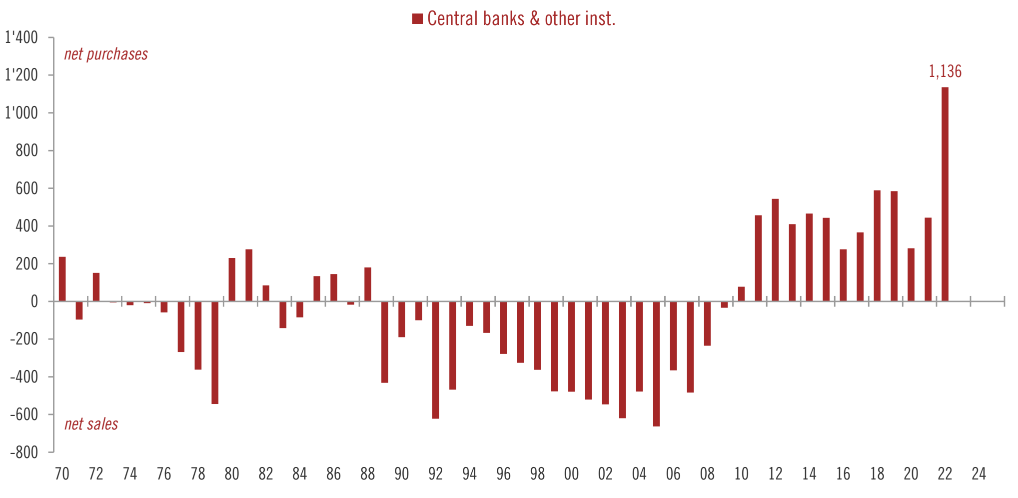
FLASH NOTE

14 FEBRUARY 2023, CIO OFFICE & MACRO RESEARCH

SUMMARY

- According to data from the World Gold Council, official demand for gold surged in 2022, mostly driven by unreported purchases.
- Countries looking to reduce their dependency on the US dollar may be behind such a large increase in unreported official demand.
- Looking forward, official demand may stay above levels seen before 2022. At the same time, opportunity costs may be a drag on investment demand.
- We recently revised higher our projections for the yellow metal. Our three-month projection now stands at USD1,820 per troy ounce (compared to USD1,853 on 13 February) and our 12-month projection at USD1,980.

Chart 1: Annual demand from central banks and other institutions (in tonnes)



Source: Pictet Wealth Management, Refinitiv, Reuters, as of 13.02.2023

For illustrative purposes. Past performance should not be taken as a guide to or guarantee of future performance. Performances and returns may increase or decrease as a result of currency fluctuations. There can be no assurance that these projections, forecasts or expected returns will be achieved. The projection is not based on simulated past performance.

MASSIVE OFFICIAL DEMAND SUPPORTED THE GOLD PRICE IN 2022

The recent publication of the breakdown of gold demand in 2022 by the World Gold Council (WGC) showed massive buying by the official sector, which scooped up 1,136 tonnes last year (150% more than in 2021). Most of these purchases were in the form of unreported purchases (estimated to have been 755 tonnes if one looks at the mismatch between supply and demand). As a reminder, the official sector represents mostly central banks as well as sovereign wealth funds. The latter are usually quite secretive about their asset allocation, while central banks may not always publicly report their purchases given gold's strategic role as an alternative to the US dollar. "Unreported purchases" refer to undeclared purchases by such entities.

In light of its sheer volume, much of the so-called unreported demand likely comes from central banks. In 2022, the Bank of Russia stopped reporting its gold purchases but said it would buy gold domestically. That said, the Bank of Russia alone cannot adequately explain the rise in official demand, since Russia produced slightly more than 300 tonnes of gold last year and domestic demand outside the central bank (for jewellery, gold bars and coins) came to 60 tonnes, according to WGC data.

Because of its past habit of not disclosing gold purchases and given its relatively low (reported) gold reserves as a percentage of the total, China is a likely suspect for most of the increase in unreported demand. As per its dual-circulation strategy, China aims to wean itself off dependency on the US dollar, which currently accounts for a large part of its foreign-exchange reserves.

Other countries besides Russia and China may also wish to reduce their dependency to the US dollar in light of the West's freezing of Russia's FX reserves. Overall, unreported purchases could lead to higher official demand in the next few years. Nevertheless, the outlook for gold price may not be as bright as in 2009 when central banks switched from being net sellers of gold to net buyers.

OPPORTUNITY COSTS COULD WEIGH ON INVESTMENT DEMAND

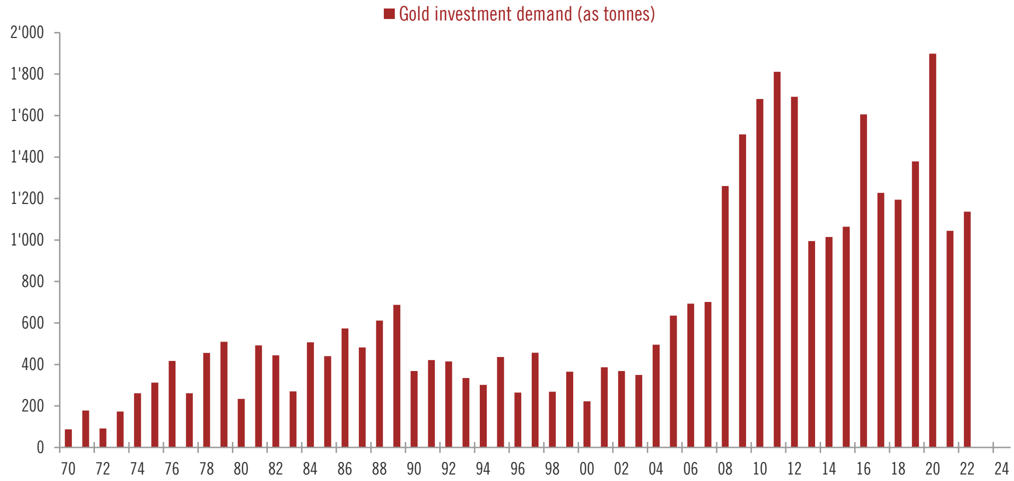
Besides the magnitude of the shift in official demand, investment demand may also switch to a new equilibrium, but a lower one. Indeed, the sharp increases in interest rates since last year mean that gold now faces tough comparisons with other safe-haven assets such as government bonds. It would not be surprising to see investment demand continue to hover in the next few years around the 2022 level, which was close to the lowest in 14 years.

That said, there could be scope for some improvement in investment demand this year. Although unlikely in the next months, at some stage, the start of a monetary easing cycle in the US should lead to renewed interest in gold from investors. In the short term, concerns over the US federal debt ceiling may also offer some temporary support to the gold price by provoking higher global risk aversion, as happened during a similar episode in 2011.

Jewellery demand for gold may also be hurt by relatively high prices. Chinese demand could improve in the short term thanks to post-covid 'revenge spending' fuelled by high household savings—but could quickly evaporate, as was the case in India.

Overall, we do not see the same strong dynamics as in 2009, when all the major sources of gold demand pushed the gold price higher at the same time. That said, a structural increase in official demand would likely make the gold price more resilient to dips in investment flows of the kind seen in 2022.

Chart 2: Annual investment demand for gold (in tonnes)



Source: Pictet Wealth Management, Refinitiv, as of 13.02.2023

GOLD TO REMAIN ATTRACTIVE AS A STRATEGIC ASSET

Overall, we see high geopolitical uncertainties as supporting the gold price due to higher official demand in the years ahead. We acknowledge that it is difficult to know where the recent increase in unreported gold purchases comes from. We also admit that the gap between known supply (i.e. from mining and recycling) and known demand (jewellery, investment, usage in technology and reported central bank demand), which is roughly equal to unreported official demand and over-the-counter (OTC) trading, is, by nature, difficult to identify. In any case, since unreported purchases for gold probably reflects a desire by certain countries to diversify their strategic reserves, such demand could remain strong in the years ahead. While sovereign wealth funds may have increased their allocations to gold, their general investment goal to create long-term returns for future generations suggests that interest in non-yielding gold may not be as strong as unreported purchases would imply (especially since the rise in yields means that bonds are once again being seen as a credible option for capital preservation).

In light of all these considerations, we recently revised higher our projections for the gold price. Our three-month forecast currently stands at USD1,820 per troy ounce (compared to a price of USD1,853 on 13 February), our six-month forecast at USD1,920 and our 12-month forecast at USD1,980.

For illustrative purposes. Past performance should not be taken as a guide to or guarantee of future performance. Performances and returns may increase or decrease as a result of currency fluctuations. There can be no assurance that these projections, forecasts or expected returns will be achieved. The projection is not based on simulated past performance.

DISCLAIMERS

Distributors: Banque Pictet & Cie SA, Route des Acacias 60, 1211 Geneva 73, Switzerland and Pictet & Cie (Europe) SA, 15A, avenue J. F. Kennedy, L-1855 Luxembourg/B.P. 687 L-2016 Luxembourg.

Banque Pictet & Cie SA is established in Switzerland, exclusively licensed under Swiss Law and therefore subject to the supervision of the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA).

Pictet & Cie (Europe) SA is established in Luxembourg, authorized and regulated by the Luxembourg Financial Authority, Commission de Surveillance du Secteur Financier.

This marketing communication is not intended for persons who are citizens of, domiciled or resident in, or entities registered in a country or a jurisdiction in which its distribution, publication, provision or use would violate current laws and regulations.

The information, data and analysis furnished in this document are disclosed for information purposes only. They do not amount to any type of recommendation, either general or tailored to the personal circumstances of any person. Unless specifically stated otherwise, all price information is indicative only. No entity of the Pictet Group may be held liable for them, nor do they constitute an offer or an invitation to buy, sell or subscribe to securities or other financial instruments. The information contained herein is the result neither of financial analysis within the meaning of the Swiss Bankers Association's Directives on the Independence of Financial Research, nor of investment research for the purposes of the relevant EU MiFID provisions. All information and opinions expressed in this document were obtained from sources believed to be reliable and in good faith, but no representation or warranty, express or implied, is made as to its accuracy or completeness.

Except for any obligations that any entity of the Pictet Group might have towards the addressee, the addressee should consider the suitability of the transaction to individual objectives and independently assess, with a professional advisor, the specific financial risks as well as legal, regulatory, credit, tax and accounting consequences.

Furthermore, the information, opinions and estimates in this document reflect an evaluation as of the date of initial publication and may be changed without notice. The Pictet Group is not under any obligation to update or keep current the information contained herein. In case this document refers to the value and income of one or more securities or financial instruments, it is based on rates from the customary sources of financial information that may fluctuate. The market value of financial instruments may vary on the basis of economic, financial or political changes, currency fluctuations, the remaining term, market conditions, the volatility and solvency of the issuer or the benchmark issuer. Some investments may not be readily realizable since the market in the securities can be illiquid. Moreover, exchange rates may have a positive or negative effect on the value, the price or the income of the securities or the related investments mentioned in this document. When investing in emerging countries, please note that the political and economic situation in those countries is significantly less stable than in industrialized countries. They are much more exposed to the risks of rapid political change and economic setbacks.

Past performance must not be considered an indicator or guarantee of future performance, and the addressees of this document are fully responsible for any investments they make. No express or implied warranty is given as to future performance. Moreover, forecasts are not a reliable indicator of future performance. The content of this document can only be read and/or used by its addressee. The Pictet Group is not liable for the use, transmission or exploitation of the content of this document. Therefore, any form of reproduction, copying, disclosure, modification and/or publication of the content is under the sole liability of the addressee of this document, and no liability whatsoever will be incurred by the Pictet Group. The addressee of this document agrees to comply with the applicable laws and regulations in the jurisdictions where they use the information reproduced in this document.

Distributor: Pictet & Cie (Europe) S.A., London branch ("Pictet London Branch")

This is a marketing communication distributed by Pictet London Branch.

This document sets forth neither a personal recommendation tailored to the needs, objectives and financial situation of any individual or company (investment advice as defined in the Financial Conduct Authority's Handbook of rules and guidance (the "FCA Handbook")), nor the results of investment research within the meaning of the FCA Handbook. Moreover, it does not constitute an offer, or an invitation to buy, sell or subscribe to securities or other financial instruments, nor is it meant as a proposal for the conclusion of any type of agreement. Furthermore, this document should not be considered a suitability report as Pictet London Branch has not received all the necessary information on the recipient to complete its suitability assessment that covers the recipient's knowledge and experience, tolerance to risk, investment needs and the recipient's ability to absorb financial risk. Should its addressee decide to proceed to any transaction in relation to a financial product referred to herein, this will be in his sole responsibility, and the suitability/appropriateness of the transaction and other financial, legal and tax aspects should be assessed by an expert.

Any information contained in this document is disclosed for information purposes only, and neither the producer nor the distributor can be held liable for any fluctuation of the price of the securities. No express or implied warranty is given as to future performance. The opinions expressed reflect an objective evaluation of information available to the general public, such as rates from customary sources of financial information. The market value of securities mentioned may vary on the basis of economic, financial or political changes, the remaining term, market conditions, the volatility and solvency of the issuer or the benchmark issuer. Moreover, exchange rates may have a positive or negative effect on the value, the price or the income of the securities or the related investments mentioned in this document. It is also expressly noted that forecasts are not a reliable indicator of future performance, while past performance is not a reliable indicator of future results.

You shall only take investment decisions when you fully understand the relevant financial product and the involved risks. In particular, the relevant product documentation (such as the issuance program, final terms, prospectus, simplified prospectus and key (investor) information document), as well as Appendix 4: Risk Warnings Relating to Trading in Financial Instruments of the Terms and Conditions of Pictet London Branch, shall be read. Structured products are complex financial products and involve a high degree of risk. The value of structured products depends not only on the performance of the underlying asset(s), but also on the credit rating of the issuer. Furthermore, the investor is exposed to the risk of default of the issuer/guarantor.

In respect of any product documentation, including key information documents of Packaged Retail and Insurance-based Investment Products ("KIDs") and key investor information documents of Undertakings for Collective Investment in Transferable Securities ("KIIDs"), please note that these may change without notice. You should therefore ensure that you review the latest version of them prior to confirming to Pictet London your decision to invest. If you have been provided with a link to access the respective KID/KIID/other product document, you should therefore click on the link immediately before confirming to Pictet London Branch your decision to invest, in order to review the most recent version of the respective KID/KIID/other product document. If you have not been provided with a link to access the relevant document, or if you are in any doubt as to what the latest version of the respective KID/KIID/other product document is, or where it can be found, please ask your usual Pictet London Branch contact.

Pictet London Branch is not the manufacturer of the product(s) and the KID/KIID/other product document is provided by a third party. The KID/KIID/other product document is obtained from sources believed to be reliable. Pictet London Branch does not make any guarantee or warranty as to the correctness and accuracy of the data contained in the KID/KIID/other product document. Pictet London Branch may not be held liable for an investment decision or other transaction made based on reliance on, or use of, the data contained in the KID/KIID/other product document.

By subscribing to the product(s) proposed herein, you acknowledge that you have (i) received, in good time, read and understood any relevant documentation linked to the product(s), including, as the case may be, the respective KID/KIID/other product document; (ii) taken note of the product(s) restrictions; and (iii) meet the applicable subjective and objective eligibility conditions to invest in the product(s).

Pictet London Branch may, if necessary, rely on these acknowledgements and receive your orders, to transmit them to another professional, or to execute them, according to the relevant clauses of your mandate, as well as the Terms and Conditions of Pictet London Branch.

The content of this document shall only be read and/or used by its addressee. Any form of reproduction, copying, disclosure, modification and/or publication in any form or by any means whatsoever is not permitted without the prior written consent of Pictet London Branch and no liability whatsoever will be incurred by Pictet London Branch. The addressee of this document agrees to comply with the applicable laws and regulations in the jurisdictions where they use the information provided in this document.

Pictet London Branch is a branch of Pictet & Cie (Europe) S.A.. Pictet & Cie (Europe) S.A. is a société anonyme (public limited liability company) incorporated in Luxembourg and registered with the Luxembourg Registre de Commerce et des Sociétés (RCS no. B32060). Its head office is at 15A, avenue J.F. Kennedy, L-2016 Luxembourg. Pictet London Branch is registered as a UK establishment with Companies House (establishment number BR016925) and its UK establishment office address is Stratton House 6th Floor, London, 5 Stratton Street, W1J 8LA.

Authorised and regulated by the Commission de Surveillance du Secteur Financier. Deemed authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority. Subject to regulation by the Financial Conduct Authority and limited regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority. Details of the Temporary Permissions Regime, which allows EEA-based firms to operate in the UK for a limited period while seeking full authorisation, are available on the Financial Conduct Authority's website.

Distributors: Bank Pictet & Cie (Asia) Ltd ("BPCAL") in Singapore and/or Banque Pictet & Cie SA, Hong Kong Branch ("Pictet HK Branch") in Hong Kong.

The information, tools and material presented in this document are provided for information purposes only and are not to be used or considered as an offer, an invitation to offer or solicitation to buy, sell or subscribe for any securities, commodities, derivatives, (in respect of Singapore only) futures, or other financial instruments (collectively referred to as "Investments") or to enter into any legal relations, nor as advice or recommendation with respect to any Investments. This document is intended for general circulation and it is not directed at any particular person. This document does not have regard to the specific investment objectives, financial situation and/or the particular needs of any recipient of this document. Investors should seek independent financial advice regarding the appropriateness of investing in any Investments or adopting any strategies discussed in this document, taking into account the specific investment objectives, financial situation or particular needs of the investor, before making a commitment to invest.

BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch has not taken any steps to ensure that the Investments referred to in this document are suitable for any particular investor, and accepts no fiduciary duties to any investor in this regard, except as required by applicable laws and regulations. Furthermore, BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch makes no representations and gives no advice concerning the appropriate accounting treatment or possible tax consequences of any Investment. Any investor interested in buying or making any Investment should conduct its own investigation and analysis of the Investment and consult with its own professional adviser(s) as to any Investment including the risks involved.

This document is not to be relied upon in substitution for the exercise of independent judgment. The value and income of any Investment mentioned in this document may fall as well rise. The market value may be affected by, amongst other things, changes in economic, financial, political factors, time to maturity, market conditions and volatility, and the credit quality of any issuer or reference issuer. Furthermore, foreign currency rates of exchange may have a positive or adverse effect on the value, price or income of any Investment mentioned in this document. Accordingly, investors must be willing and able to assume all risks and may receive back less than originally invested.

Past performance should not be taken as an indication or guarantee of future performance and no representation or warranty, expressed or implied, is made by BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch regarding future performance.

This document does not constitute the investment policy of BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch, or an investment recommendation, and merely contains the different assumptions, views and analytical methods of the analysts who prepared them. Furthermore, the information, opinions and estimates expressed herein reflect a judgment at its original date of publication and are subject to change without notice and without any obligation on BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch to update any of them. BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch may have issued or distributed other reports or documents that are inconsistent with, and reach different conclusions from, the information presented in this document.

While the information and opinions presented herein are from sources believed to be reliable, BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch is not able to, and do not make any representation or warranty as to its accuracy or completeness. Accordingly, BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch accepts no liability for loss arising from the use of or reliance on this document presented for information purposes only. BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch reserves the right to act upon or use any of the information in this document at any time, including before its publication herein.

BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch and its affiliates (or employees thereof) may or may not have long or short positions in, and buy or sell, or otherwise have interest in, any of the Investments mentioned herein, and may or may not have relationships with the issuers of or entities connected with Investments mentioned in this document. BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch and their affiliates (or employees thereof) may act inconsistently with the information and/or opinions presented in this document.

The information used to prepare this document and/or any part of such information, may have been provided or circulated to employees and/or one or more clients of BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch before this document was received by you and such information may have been acted upon by such recipients or by BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch.

This document is provided solely for the information of the intended recipient only and should not be reproduced, published, circulated or disclosed in whole or in part to any other person without the prior written consent of BPCAL/Pictet HK Branch.

Singapore

This document is not directed to, or intended for distribution, publication to or use by, persons who are not accredited investors, expert investors or institutional investors as defined in section 4A of the Securities and Futures Act (Cap. 289 of Singapore) ("SFA") or any person or entity who is a citizen or resident of or located in any locality, state, country or other jurisdiction where such distribution, publication, availability or use would be contrary to law or regulation or would subject BPCAL and any of its affiliates or related corporations to any prospectus or registration requirements.

BPCAL is a wholesale bank regulated by the Monetary Authority of Singapore ("MAS") under the Banking Act Cap. 50 of Singapore, an exempt financial adviser under the Financial Advisers Act Cap. 110 of Singapore ("FAA") and an exempt capital markets licence holder under the SFA. Please contact BPCAL in Singapore in respect of any matters arising from, or in connection with this document.

Hong Kong

This document is not directed to, or intended for distribution, publication to or use by, persons who are not "professional investors" within the meaning of the Securities and Futures Ordinance (Chapter 571 of the Laws of Hong Kong) and any rules made thereunder (the "SFO") or any person or entity who is a citizen or resident of or located in any locality, state, country or other jurisdiction where such distribution, publication, availability or use would be contrary to law or regulation or would subject Pictet HK Branch and any of its affiliates or related corporations to any prospectus or registration requirements. If you do not want Pictet HK Branch to use your personal information for marketing purposes, you can request Pictet HK Branch to stop doing so without incurring any charge to you. In distributing investment products as agents for third party service providers, Pictet HK Branch is an agent of the third party service provider and the product is a product of the third party service provider but not Pictet HK Branch. In respect of an eligible dispute (as defined in the Terms of Reference for the Financial Dispute Resolution Centre in relation to the Financial Dispute Resolution Scheme) arising between Pictet HK Branch and you out of the selling process or processing of the related transaction, Pictet HK Branch is required to enter into a Financial Dispute Resolution Scheme process with you; however any dispute over the contractual terms of the product should be resolved between directly the third party service provider and you.

Banque Pictet & Cie SA is a limited liability company incorporated in Switzerland. It is an authorized institution within the meaning of the Banking Ordinance and a registered institution (CE No.: BMG891) under the SFO carrying on Type 1 (dealing in securities), Type 4 (advising on securities) and Type 9 (asset management) regulated activities. The registered address of Pictet HK Branch is 9/F., Chater House, 8 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong.

Warning: The contents of this document have not been reviewed by any regulatory authority in Hong Kong. You are advised to exercise caution in relation to the offer. If you are in any doubt about any of the contents of this document, you should obtain independent professional advice. Please contact Pictet HK Branch in Hong Kong in respect of any matters arising from, or in connection with this document.

Distributor: Pictet Bank & Trust Limited, where registered office is located at Building 1, Bayside Executive Park, West Bay Street & Blake Road, Nassau, New Providence, The Bahamas.

The document is not directed to, or intended for distribution or publication to or use by persons who are not Accredited Investors (as defined in the Securities Industry Regulations, 2012) and subject to the conditions set forth in the Securities Industry Regulations, 2012 or to any person or entity who is a citizen or resident of or located in any locality, state, country or other jurisdiction where such distribution, publication, availability or use would be contrary to law or regulation or would subject Pictet Bank & Trust Limited to any prospectus or registration requirements. Pictet Bank & Trust Limited is incorporated in The Bahamas with limited liability. It is a bank and trust company that is licensed in accordance with the Banks and Trust Companies' Regulation Act and is regulated by the Central Bank of The Bahamas. Additionally, Pictet Bank & Trust Limited is registered with the Securities Commission of The Bahamas as a Broker Dealer II and is approved to (i) Deal in Securities 1.(a) & (c); (ii) Arrange Deals in securities; (iii) Manage Securities; (iv) Advise on Securities.

Warning: The content of this document has not been reviewed by any regulatory authority in The Bahamas. You are, therefore, advised to exercise caution when processing the information contained herein. If you are in any doubt about any of the content of this document, you should obtain independent professional advice.