Power and Paradox: Understanding Grand Strategy in the 21st Century

Expert Roundtables
Understanding Grand Strategy in the 21st Century

Paradox

Power
Power and Paradox: Understanding Grand Strategy in the 21st Century

Expert Roundtables
TRT World Forum is a unique platform that brings together global leaders to discuss the most pressing issues facing our world and aims to provide diagnoses and prognoses to them. TRT World Forum 2021, “Power and Paradox: Understanding Grand Strategy in the 21st Century” consists of Keynote Speeches, 9 Public Sessions, 7 Expert Roundtables and Reflections series exploring cultural topics with the attendance of leading politicians, experts, regional specialists, policymakers, civil servants, journalists, and artists from various backgrounds. Due to the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the global pandemic, we have decided to host this year’s Forum digitally in a similar format to last year.

Expert Roundtables will be held parallel to the Keynote Speeches and Public Sessions. This year, the Expert Roundtables will focus on the theme of ‘Grand Strategy’ and will explore increasing competition between regional and international powers as well as both shared and divergent interests and agendas at a time when the world faces new challenges and uncertainties. TRT World Forum aims to bring together esteemed experts to enable deep and intellectually engaging discussions on key international issues. The sessions will include discussions of European and Russian grand strategies, Taliban’s return in Afghanistan, racism and culture wars in a socio-politically polarised world, foreign policy objectives of the US under the Biden administration, and the future of Turkish-Arab relations. By hosting experts from around the world, we hope to advance a range of possible solutions and approaches to critical political and security issues facing the world today.

Expert Roundtable sessions will include 3-4 speakers and 6 invitation-only discussants comprised of field experts, academics, policymakers, and journalists. The sessions will run for 90 minutes; each speaker will be allocated 5-8 minutes, followed by 60 minutes of discussion. While the sessions are open to the general Forum audience through a live broadcast on the TRT World Forum website, only discussants will be able to ask questions and make comments.
Under the Biden Administration, the US national security strategy has begun a process of switching its focus from non-state actors, e.g. terrorist organisations, to traditional state actors. For Washington, states which pose the greatest threat to US national security include China, Russia, and Iran, indicating the extent to which Eurasia has come to occupy a central place in US foreign policy. Under President Biden, economic competition with China, limiting Russian expansion in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons will continue to be at the top of the priority list for the US national security agenda as it was during the Trump era. However, in both substance and style, the Biden Administration is following a different approach than the Trump administration.

Contrary to the Trump administration, the Biden administration is focused on strengthening ties with traditional allies, especially the EU. Meanwhile, the Biden administration advocates a more diplomatic approach towards Iran, more harshly criticises China's human rights record in Hong Kong and Xinjiang and has has adopted a more more confrontational approach towards Russia. Moreover, foreign policy analysts expect the US to play an increased role in Taiwan while confronting Russia over Ukraine. The Biden administration’s changing priorities and policies regarding US national security will shape politics in Eurasia in the coming years. This session will discuss the adjustment of the Biden administration's strategy towards Eurasia and its possible outcomes.

Discussion Themes

- What are the main pillars of US national security strategy under the Biden Administration?
- In what ways will the Biden administration's approach to China differ from the Trump administration?
- What are the implications of an increased Chinese presence in Eurasia, e.g. Belt and Road Initiative, for US national security?
- What are the prospects for US-Russia relations under the Biden administration? What implications does Biden’s more assertive approach to Russia have for Eurasian politics?
- What are other potential implications of Biden’s National Security Strategy in Eurasia? How will other actors in Eurasia, particularly the Turkic states, be affected?
As the United Kingdom’s departure from the European Union settles into political and economic normality, Europe continues to face both old challenges and new realities. The unprecedented nature of Brexit and the years-long negotiation process has shed new light on the inner workings of the EU, operational strategies, and the key individuals and states involved in the decision-making process. At this stage, looking ahead, the EU is examining its role both in Europe and around the world in a rapidly evolving political environment and a period defined by the ongoing consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the same time, some consequences of previous decisions have yet to be fully determined. Rising tensions in Northern Ireland over border and customs questions are being closely watched with concern. Moreover, the continuing fallout of the pandemic and distribution of Covid-19 vaccines raise additional operational challenges and political conflicts. Besides that, the EU is exploring future relations with both the UK and partners outside of Europe, in addition to ongoing discussions with Turkey. As a result, the European bloc faces both challenges and opportunities in its future. Taking these points into consideration, this session will explore and analyse the EU’s next steps with regards to its regional and global outlooks.

**Discussion Themes**

- In the wake of Brexit, what does the future hold for the EU’s domestic, foreign and security policy?
- How will the EU look to expand its presence in diplomatic and military affairs, particularly as it moves towards strategic autonomy?
- How will domestic politics within the EU influence Europe’s global position and prospective political and economic strategies?
- Following the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, who can we expect to see fill the economic, political, and diplomatic space in the bloc?
- How will ongoing tensions in Northern Ireland and the uncertainty surrounding surrounding the issue of EU borders shape future discussions on sovereignty and trade?
Russian foreign policy is not merely a reflection of major power relations but is also a measure of dynamics in neighbouring countries. Several tenets underpin Russia’s grand strategy, namely national interests, great power ambitions, and historical grievances towards the Western-dominated global system.

The 2000s witnessed two major crises in Russia’s post-Soviet sphere of influence in which the country was directly involved. In a quest to restore its territorial integrity, Georgia suffered a heavy loss in a hot conflict with Russia in 2008. Similarly, Ukraine lost Crimea to Moscow and was pushed out from some areas in its Eastern provinces.

Georgia and Ukraine are considered the “final frontier” by the Kremlin, a principle that seems entrenched in Moscow’s grand strategy and based in its anti-Western sentiments. Both conflicts mirrored Russia’s aggressive stance vis-a-vis any enhanced engagement with the Western alliance in its vicinity, whether the EU or NATO.

While the fear of ‘losing’ Georgia and Ukraine to the West is a major factor in Moscow’s calculations, the prospects of increasing democratic values in post-Soviet countries may also be perceived by Russia as a threat. This session will review Russia’s contemporary grand strategy as it relates to Ukraine and Georgia and outline potential scenarios for the region and beyond.

### Discussion Themes

- What are the expectations, limits and possible outcomes of Russian grand strategy for the cases of Ukraine and Georgia?
- What drives Russia’s aggressive approach in neighbouring countries? What factors could lead to a change in Russia’s strategic outlook?
- Is it fair to analyse Moscow’s current aggressive stance in the context of a “security dilemma” given the Russian perception of the NATO threat?
- How important are the Ukrainian and Georgian cases as examples for other states in Russia’s vicinity?
- What are the prospects for future relations between the West and Russia? How will NATO respond Russian ambitions in Ukraine and Georgia?
Turkey’s regional security environment remains a challenging one as the region’s ongoing conflicts, most notably in Syria, continue to pose security and humanitarian threats. The tensions in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea also pose potential threats to Turkey’s national security objectives. Moreover, Turkey faces internal threats from terrorist organisations which have international links, primarily from FETÖ and the PKK.

The global security landscape has been mutating as the world continues to shift from unipolarity to multipolarity. The liberal order has also faced challenges as multilateralism, international institutions, and democratic norms have been gradually losing legitimacy. Emerging rivalries between great powers, most notably between the US and China, have become the defining feature of the world’s current state. The Covid-19 pandemic has only accelerated the ongoing transition. Such changes in the global and regional security environments present both challenges and opportunities for Turkey. To address these challenges and take advantage of the emerging opportunities, identifying grand strategic priorities and resources to meet these objectives is key. With its demographic, economic and military resources, and soft power capabilities based on its democratic legitimacy, cultural and religious assets, Turkey is in a position to develop strategies to cope with these challenges and advance a new perspective on international affairs. This session will discuss the main tenets of Turkish grand strategy, focusing on Turkey’s national security objectives and related resources.

Discussion Themes

- How is Turkish foreign policy adapting to the ongoing transformations in international affairs?
- Given ongoing regional and global challenges, what are Turkey’s core national security interests and primary security threats?
- What are the main sources of Turkey’s military power necessary to meet its security objectives?
- How can Turkey’s enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy contribute to sustainable peace and development in the region?
The Arab Spring and its aftermath led to profound changes in the Middle East, paving the way for the emergence of new actors and reconfigured alliances. As Turkey supported the region’s quest for democracy, more synergies were developed with emerging political and social actors, making Istanbul a privileged destination for many Arabs. While many proponents of the uprisings looked to Turkey as a model, others who held a counter-revolutionary perspective found themselves increasingly at odds with Turkey’s foreign policy agenda. Over the course of the last decade, this has led to varying levels of relations with Arab states, from Turkey’s strategic partnership with Qatar, to its diplomatic confrontation with the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

Beyond the specific confines of the Arab Spring, Turkey’s renewed engagement with the Arab world, a region with which it has deep historic and cultural ties, can be seen as part of Turkey’s effort to redefine its strategic priorities. More broadly, with its economic strength, young population, and vibrant culture, Turkey has reinvigorated its political, economic, and cultural ties with the peoples of the Middle East. Consequently, many still consider Turkey as a source of inspiration for its successful combination of democracy and the rule of law without giving up on traditional, conservative values ingrained in the Turkish-Islamic culture.

Recently, there have been overtures between Turkey and notable regional states, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia. While such overtures remain limited at this stage, they highlight Turkey’s renewed geopolitical imagination and desire to mend ties with different protagonists and move away from tension to a more prosperous state of relations. Within this context, the future of Turkish-Arab relations will be analysed in this session.

Discussion Themes

- A decade after the start of the Arab Spring, what are the state of Turkish-Arab relations today and what forces are likely to shape those relations in the decade to come?
- What are the key drivers of Turkey’s interests in the Middle East and the larger Muslim world and what are the main impediments to a deeper engagement with the Arab world?
- What are both the short-term and more structural causes behind recent overtures between Turkey and several regional powers, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia?
- Beyond the Arab Spring, how might an increasingly multipolar world impact regional dynamics, including Turkish-Arab relations, over the course of the next few decades?
World politics have substantially changed since the September 11th attacks. In their wake, George W. Bush declared a global ‘War on Terror’ and called the global effort to defeat terrorism a moral obligation. Soon after, the US announced the invasion of Afghanistan.

The US-led war in Afghanistan was initially meant as retaliation for 9/11. The American reasoning was to punish those responsible for the attacks, namely al-Qaeda, and their Taliban hosts. US troops would continue to remain in Afghanistan on the pretext of ensuring that the country did not pose a security threat to America. The concepts of ‘nation building’ and ‘winning hearts and minds’ were later tacked on to this mandate.

Although Afghanistan had ceased to be a direct security threat to the United States, and the weakened al-Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden, was killed by the US in neighbouring Pakistan a decade ago, American forces remained on the ground in Afghanistan until the summer of 2021. The US had brought its NATO allies into Afghanistan, invested heavily in the training of the Afghan army, and supported the Kabul-based government.

Towards the end of the US and NATO presence in Afghanistan, a peace process began with the Taliban. Intra-Afghan talks were launched in Qatar and the US urged both sides to make more efforts to achieve a settlement. However, after almost two decades of American involvement, there were little palpable returns. The swift collapse of the Afghan government and army in the face of Taliban advances were widely viewed as a testimony to the failure of the American project in Afghanistan. This session will discuss the aforementioned 20 years of conflict, US failures and the potential regional and global ramifications of the Taliban’s return to power.

Discussion Themes

- Why did US ‘nation building’ efforts fail in Afghanistan?
- How will the latest developments in Afghanistan impact the regional and international landscape?
- What is the likelihood of Afghanistan becoming once again a proxy battlefield? Will regional and/or international powers support an active armed resistance to Taliban rule?
- Will Afghanistan’s governance structure be sustainable in the months and years to come?
- What economic challenges as well as opportunities await Afghanistan’s new rulers?
- How will the Taliban deal with dissent, women, minorities, or the media in the long run?
- Can Turkey, a NATO member, offer assistance or mediation efforts to Afghanistan?
Racism, Culture Wars, and the Polarisation of Global Politics

The increasing risk of social polarisation has been identified by strategic forecasters as potentially one of the most pressing threats to global stability over the course of the next decade, particularly as the world enters a period increasingly marked by compounded economic, environmental, and geopolitical risks. While much of the world’s attention has focused on the polarisation of American political and social discourse during the Donald Trump era, particularly as it relates to race and divergent views of the social good, these issues are not limited to the United States and can increasingly be seen playing out on the global stage through the rise of populist, nativist and xenophobic politics from Europe to India and beyond. Not only has this increased polarisation within societies but also between nations, further complicating geopolitics and international relations.

In an interconnected and interdependent world, challenges to social cohesion, whether based on race, religion, culture or ethnicity, can no longer be considered purely as an internal matter and must be accounted for at the international level. This session will discuss the interplay between race, culture wars and political polarisation at the local and global levels.

Discussion Themes

- What is behind the seemingly widespread phenomenon of political and social polarisation across much of the world today? Are there purely local explanations, or are there global trends that can account for the phenomenon?
- How do issues such as lack of job security, widening digital divides and the disillusionment of youth impact social cohesion? What kind of global-level solutions can be developed in order to deal with these problems effectively at the local level?
- How do threats to social cohesion within countries impact interstate relations?
- How might increasing political polarisation on the global level impact prospect for cooperation in the face of global threats such as pandemics and climate-related disasters?
Understanding Grand Strategy in the 21st Century
Paradox
Power
Understanding Grand Strategy in the 21st Century

Paradox

Power