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Mapping the Future: Uncertainties, Realities and Opportunities

EXPERT ROUNDTABLES

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Session **1**

The Transformation of Türkiye's Defence Industry and its Impact on Foreign Policy

Over the course of the last two decades, Türkiye's investments in developing an autonomous defence industry have become one of the fundamental pillars of the country's military and security strategy. This transformation has been driven by several interlinked factors. While the security landscape in Türkiye's neighbourhood has undergone significant and often rapid changes, the lack of tangible support from its allies as well as the country's desire to gain geopolitical advantage both regionally and globally have reinforced efforts to move towards self-sufficiency and have increased the nationalisation of its defence industry.

In terms of foreign policy, the prioritisation of national security interests has been seen in practice in various areas from countering terrorist threats in Syria to supporting the United Nations-backed Government of National Accord in Libya. In addition to these, the Turkish intervention in the Nagorno-Karabakh War alongside Azerbaijan, its ongoing balancing act in the Russia-Ukraine War and the growing global interest in Turkish drones are other prominent examples showcasing the interplay between the country's defence and foreign policy. This session will analyse the objectives, challenges and prospects facing the Turkish defence industry while discussing how these factors play into the development of Turkish foreign policy.

Discussion Themes

- What are the internal and external reasons that have driven Türkiye to seek self-sufficiency as well as autonomy in its defence industry?

- What are the objectives of Türkiye's defence policy and what are the issues and challenges the country faces in attaining them?

- How do transformations in Türkiye's foreign and defence policies impact geopolitical dynamics regionally and globally and how are these transformations themselves impacted by these dynamics?

- How does the transformation of Türkiye's defence industry contribute to the country's political economy?

Session 2

Regional and International Dynamics and the Future of the Middle East

In contrast to the habitual state of antagonism, the Middle East has witnessed an unusual moment of regional de-escalation in the past two years. Several key actors have engaged in diplomatic appeasement, normalising relations, and the opening of new pages in bilateral relations. Türkiye, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and others have followed this new approach, signing several agreements, ranging from business and security to defence and tourism.

However, optimism for a more peaceful future in the Middle East is tempered by realities on the ground. A looming food crisis exacerbated by skyrocketing prices could easily contribute to yet another wave of upheavals in the region. Meanwhile, fault lines continue to be active in Syria, Libya, Yemen and elsewhere, creating the conditions for another potential regional flare-up.

While the United States position has considerably shifted from the posturing of the 'War on Terror', the strategic coalescence around the so-called 'pivot to Asia', the renewed US focus on great power competition, the Ukraine war, as well as Russia's weaponisation of energy has paved the way for what the Center for Strategic and International Studies' Jon Alterman has called "The Middle East's Coming Centrality." This session will explore how these dynamics are set to impact the future of a region in flux.

Discussion Themes

- How will the re-emergence of great power competition impact regional dynamics in the Middle East, particularly as it relates to the ongoing war in Ukraine and the intensifying confrontation between the United States and China?

- Is the current conciliatory political mood in the MENA region reinforcing regional states' national security and regional standing?

- Will the region focus more on the development of bilateral political, economic, and security connections rather than engage in zero-sum games as was the case in the previous decade?

- How can regional actors establish a more durable equilibrium in the Middle East?

- Are the shifting alliances in the Middle East a response to the fast-changing and increasingly multipolar framework?

Session 3

The United States, China, and Taiwan: Strategic Ambiguity or Incoherence?

Since a 1972 joint communique with the People's Republic of China that acknowledged "that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China", the United States has followed a one-China principle. In the intervening years, the US has maintained a position of 'strategic ambiguity' vis-à-vis the Taiwan question. However, the long-standing policy appears to be shifting, with US President Biden's remarks that the US would defend Taiwan in the event of an attack and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taipei being the most recent manifestations of this shift. While the US one China policy has been remarkably stable over the years, as tensions continue to build over Taiwan and 'strategic ambiguity' increasingly appears to be being set aside, the risk of direct conflict between the US and China is increasing. This session will discuss the factors behind the US Taiwan policy and the implications for the future of U.S.-China relations.

Discussion Themes

- **Does Biden's Taiwan policy differ from that of his predecessors? Has the US strategic position vis-à-vis Taiwan and China actually become clearer?**

- **What drives China's aggressive approach to Taiwan? What factors could lead to a change in China's strategic outlook?**

- **What are the prospects for US-China relations under the Biden administration? How might regional actors, particularly Taiwan, be affected?**

- **Why does the United States care about Taiwan? What lies ahead for China and the US after Pelosi's Visit?**

Session 4

Africa's Moment: Seeking Greater Continental Integration Amid Persistent Challenges

The Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is the world's largest global free trade area bringing together 55 countries and establishing a common market for goods and services. Being one of the key projects of the African Union's 'Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want' AfCFTA is expected to turn the continent into a global economic powerhouse by providing an important opportunity to promote investment as well as inclusive economic growth. With Africa continuing to transform at a rapid speed, plans like these highlight the commitment to an integrated, prosperous Africa led by Africans themselves. Moreover, the continent aims to become interconnected not only regionally but also globally.

However, despite the ambition, severe challenges continue to hinder the prospect of progress and development. Cross-cutting issues such as climate change, demographic expansion, urbanisation and migration combined with armed conflicts and violence are major impediments that require the development and implementation of interlinked strategies. Taking the diverse and complex nature of African countries into consideration, this session will explore and analyse the future trajectory of the continent.

Discussion Themes

- **What are the potential benefits of AfCFTA in various areas from industrialisation to economic transformation as well as risks and challenges posed by the project?**

- **How can rapid demographic expansion and urbanisation be turned into an advantage and what are the key stumbling blocks in this regard?**

- **What are the possible prospects of the success of African Union's 'Silencing the Guns' initiative and how do global geopolitical realignments affect ongoing conflicts, in particular given the revival of great power competition on the continent?**

- **What kind of comparative advantage does Africa have in the field of energy and how does this play into various other areas from tackling climate change to ensuring food security?**

Session 5

Islamophobia Today: Right-Left Convergences

Islamophobia, in its various global manifestations, has most often been treated as a right-wing phenomenon. From Donald Trump's 'Muslim ban' and anti-migrant policies to India's increasingly anti-Muslim leanings under the Hindu Nationalist leadership of Narendra Modi's BJP. However, in recent years it has become increasingly clear that the left has its own Islamophobia problem. Perhaps nowhere has this been more clearly displayed than in France where figures from across the political spectrum have adopted views that openly betray their anti-Muslim bias. Islamophobia on the left tends to be more subtle and can be seen in the views of leftist intellectual giants such as Noam Chomsky on a variety of issues ranging from US support for the YPG to the Syrian Revolution. This session will examine the convergence of Islamophobic discourse on the left and the right and explore the roots of this tacit agreement.

Discussion Themes

- **What are the key points of convergence between the left and right as it relates to anti-Muslim sentiments and what drives them?**

- **Why are anti-Muslim biases on the left often overlooked in discussions on Islamophobia?**

- **Is Islamophobic convergence on the left and the right a new phenomenon?**

- **Is left-wing 'anti-imperialism' and 'progressivism' inherently Islamophobic?**

- **Can the left tolerate Islam beyond the lens of identity politics?**

Session 6

Covering the Climate Crisis and the Imperative of Journalism

Commendable efforts have been undertaken to tackle the climate crisis. However, progress can sometimes seem slower than expected. While global political leaders and corporations have endeavoured to cut emissions and adopt more sustainable energy solutions, opinion leaders, journalists, advocacy groups, and citizens must keep the issue alive by constantly spreading awareness.

Reporting on climate issues is very important as it can provide the impetus for real action and help to improve audiences' understanding while providing them with the knowledge and skills needed to help them adapt. Thus, it can be said that journalists have a significant role to play in the fight against climate change in general, and ensuring the public understands what is at stake in particular. In this session, the panellists will discuss the imperative for news outlets to keep climate coverage at the top of their agendas irrespective of the day's news items.

Discussion Themes

- **What role does the media play in climate change discussion? How should the media talk about the climate crisis?**

- **What are the specific challenges faced by journalists while covering the climate crisis? How can essential information be made more accessible to the public?**

- **What lessons can we learn from the media response to the COVID-19 pandemic with regards to reporting on the climate crisis?**

" Day 2

Session 1

Multipolarity and the New Realities of Global Politics: Türkiye as a Stabilising Power

As the global system continues to move towards multipolarity, new powers have emerged seeking to make their mark on the shifting global system. Türkiye is no exception, and recent years have borne testimony to Ankara's growing role in regional and global affairs. Over the course of the last decade, Türkiye has emerged as a stabilizing regional power and has played an active role in resolving global crises and ending regional conflicts. Its role in the Libyan conflict, and its proactive diplomatic engagement in the Russia-Ukraine war, including the Ukraine Grain Deal, are but two of the most recent examples.

In addition to Türkiye's proactive engagement with conflicts and crises, Turkish foreign policy has consistently reflected the idea that the international system needs to reflect the new emergent global reality. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been one of the most vocal advocates for the restructuring of key international institutions, the most important being the United Nations Security Council, leading the charge for reform with his mantra that "the world is bigger than five." This session will discuss the future of Turkish foreign policy, its position, and its promises as a stabilising power amidst the challenges and opportunities of the emerging global system.

Discussion Themes

- What factors have led to Türkiye's international rise? What strategies has it used to pursue and achieve its objectives?

- How have established powers reacted to the rise of the Türkiye? How will regional and international dynamics affect its position?

- Does Türkiye seek to reform the global order? How can Türkiye's efforts toward establishing peace and stability be capitalized on sustainably?

Session **2**

A New Vision for Eurasia: The Global Rise of the Organisation of Turkic States

While the rise of Eurasia has been continuously discussed over the last years, the emergence of the Organisation of Turkic States as a new global actor in the region is increasingly becoming a part of these debates. Most recently, the Organisation marked a milestone in cementing this notion by adopting 'Turkic World Vision 2040' in its last summit held in November 2021 in Istanbul. The strategic document presents a roadmap to achieve a set of common goals and has a particular emphasis on the development of commercial and economic relations.

This growing cooperation and solidarity among the member states and Türkiye's ascendance as agenda setter in the Eurasian landscape has been a game changer for the great powers. With both Russia and China having vested geopolitical and economic interests in Central Asia, it remains to be seen whether they will approach this change in the balance of power as a potential threat or an opportunity to forge partnerships. For the Turkic states, this new vision of deepening cooperation provides an alternative path for attaining regional stability and prosperity. This session will explore the main tenets of the Organisation of Turkic States' strategies while discussing existing challenges and future prospects.

Discussion Themes

- **What are the key challenges associated with the use of new technologies in governance?**

- **What are the key targets of 'Turkic World Vision 2040' that set guidelines for future cooperation and what is the proposed roadmap to achieve these goals?**

- **How will the institutionalisation of the Organisation of Turkic States impact great power competition between China, Russia, the European Union and the United States in the region?**

- **What role does the Organisation of Turkic States play in Turkiye's 'Asia Anew Initiative' that aims to broaden the country's economic and trade cooperation with Asian nations?**

- **Can the Organisation of Turkic States contribute to the stability of Central Asia and the Caucasus as a constructive instrument in resolving regional conflicts?**

- **How can Turkic States collaborate on global issues such as climate change, terrorism and xenophobia?**

Session 3

European Security and the Future of the Transatlantic Relations

The war in Ukraine has become a catalyst for greater cooperation and cohesion among transatlantic partners despite an ongoing series of bilateral disagreements between Europe and the United States. In this regard, with Europe facing its most important crisis since the end of the Cold War, security and defence policies have been thrust to the top of the agenda. While this challenging environment has reignited debates on the balance between Europe's long-sought strategic autonomy and the United States' continued centrality to European security, the war in Ukraine has also provided space for the revitalisation of NATO at a time when the alliance's relevance has been increasingly called into question. With a key emphasis on security, this session will explore the major trends and issues in transatlantic relations and analyse potential scenarios that could unfold in the coming decade.

Discussion Themes

- How has the new security landscape altered European security policies and strategic orientation, both on an individual state and collective level?

- Will the crisis in Ukraine renew a European push for strategic autonomy in the areas of security and defence or rejuvenate its partnership with the United States and, in turn, strengthen NATO? Is there an inherent contradiction between these two potential outcomes?

- In a post-Brexit Europe, how might changes in the internal balance of power in Europe impact the future trajectory of transatlantic relations?

- Beyond the immediate security and strategic concerns brought on by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, can the United States and Europe bridge their differences on a range of issues from migration and climate change to relations with China given their often divergent interests?

Session 4

Balkans at a Juncture: Regional Collaboration or Fragmentation?

Twenty years following the destructive wars that resulted in the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Balkan countries still remain in a precarious situation. While Bosnia-Herzegovina is going through its most significant crisis since the signing of the 1995 Dayton Accords with the spectre of secession threatening the country's unity, tensions are occasionally renewed between Kosovo and Serbia over the former's sovereignty. As of now, North Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro are part of NATO, but their EU membership process is stalled seemingly both due to a lack of progress by the countries themselves as well as the commitment of the EU itself. Moreover, many other serious challenges such as the population decline, concerns over the rule of law and good governance, the rise of populism and persistence of ethnopolitics continue to stand in the way of sustainable peace and stability.

However, despite these lingering issues, there is positive momentum in terms of advancing regional cooperation driven by the common interest of finding solutions to issues faced by all of the Balkan states. In this regard, the introduction of new initiatives such as the establishment of Regional Economic Area or 'mini Schengen' allowing the free circulation of goods, services, investments and labour is expected to enhance not only intra-regional trade but also facilitate an easier integration to the EU economy. This session will present an overview of the current situation in the Balkans while discussing the potential scenarios that could unfold, assessing the trends and growing geostrategic competition among the great powers in the region in light of local dynamics.

Discussion Themes

- **How do ethnocentrism and populism impact the internal politics of the Balkan states?**

- **What is the possibility of reaching settlements in bilateral disputes and what are the probable steps that could be taken to ensure stability in this regard?**

- **What are the future prospects of the Balkan countries' inclusion and integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions?**

- **How do regional and global developments impact the Balkans? Do they contribute to resolution of conflicts or exacerbate existing crises?**

- **What are the geopolitical, security and economic interests of foreign actors in the Balkans and how do they play into the regional and domestic dynamics within and among these countries?**

Session 5

Playing With Fire: Media, Populism, and the Challenge to Democracy

In recent years, the collaboration between certain media moguls and far-right populist political figures has become increasingly apparent. From the billionaire and media-mogul Vincent Bollore's backing of French far-right firebrand Eric Zemmour and the rise of Georgia Meloni in Italy eased by the media empire of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, to the symbiotic relationship between Donald Trump and Rupert Murdoch's Fox News, large media empires have provided populist movements with the opportunity to disseminate and legitimise both their discourse and their leaders. Moreover, large digital platforms have been shown to have been complicit in the spread of disinformation, most often to the benefit of far-right populists. While figures such as Eric Zemmour did not ultimately achieve electoral success, the growing popularity of another far-right French populist, Marine Le Pen, is proof of the continued appeal of their brand of politics. This presents challenges to democracies and democratic processes on a number of levels from viral misinformation to the populist tendency to undermine the legitimacy of national institutions. This session will discuss trends in populism in relation to media and the media's role in facilitating the rise of populist leaders worldwide.

Discussion Themes

- How have populist movements benefited from corporate mainstream media (through misinformation, disinformation, and fake news) worldwide? Is there a media policy failure behind this phenomenon? How can media deficits be addressed, and what is the role of public broadcasting services in such a process?

- Is far-right populism exclusively a Western problem? How do populist leaders succeed (or fail) in sustaining their electoral success? What role does the media play in their success?

- What is the nature of the threat to democracy and democratic processes posed by the rise of far-right populism? Has media-ownership concentration compounded these challenges?

- What is the importance of media literacy in combatting populist discourses? How can media literacy be instilled at an early age?

- How can we empower the potential of digital technologies to increase the quality of democracy in the context of rising populist sentiments?

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