



# THE GLOBAL RESET

From the Old Order  
to New Realities

October 31 - November 1 , 2025 | Istanbul

TRT  
world  
forum  
2025



# **The Global Reset: From the Old Order to New Realities**

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**world**  
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2025

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**CO-EDITORS**

ESRA ÖZTÜRK SALPAT

BURAK ELMALI

**CONTRIBUTORS**

TRT RESEARCH CENTRE

**DESIGNER**

ERHAN AĞIRGÖL

**TRT TRAINING AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT**

TRT GENERAL DIRECTORATE TURAN GUNES BOULEVARD

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# **The Global Reset: From the Old Order to New Realities**

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**October 31 - November 1, 2025 | Istanbul**

This book includes summaries and highlights of the keynote speeches, 7 public and 8 expert roundtable sessions, from the TRT World Forum 2025. The views, themes, and discussion points expressed in the TRT World Forum 2025 book are strictly those of the speakers and participants present at the Forum and do not reflect the official view of TRT.

**TRT**  
**world**  
**forum**  
2025

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# Executive Summary

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# Executive Summary

Held for the 9<sup>th</sup> time this year, **TRT World Forum 2025** brought together 132 distinguished speakers from 35 countries for a two-day discussion dedicated to meaningful dialogue and the pursuit of a more just and compassionate world. Between 31 October and 1 November, under the theme **“The Global Reset: From the Old Order to New Realities”** leaders, experts, and academics from across the globe convened in Istanbul to discuss the most pressing challenges of our time and explore pathways toward shared solutions.

The opening of the TRT World Forum 2025 featured a compelling address by the **President of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**, highlighting the urgent need for a fairer, inclusive, and embracing global system. President Erdoğan emphasised that the current world order, established by the victors of the Second World War, is no longer sufficient to address contemporary global challenges. He specifically criticised the UN Security Council’s unjust decision-making structure, asserting that “The world is bigger than five” and arguing that the Council’s failures lead to the continued suffering of innocent people in crises worldwide.

A significant portion of the speech focused on the devastating situation in Gaza, where President Erdoğan stated that the world had witnessed the Israeli government “martyr more than seventy thousand Gazans,” including over twenty thousand children. He condemned Israel’s actions, calling it the “oppressor itself” for using starvation as a weapon and deliberately bombing civilian structures. President Erdoğan criticised the international institutions for their inaction and the failure of the mainstream global media to truthfully report the atrocities, instead praising

TRT for its dedicated and uninterrupted coverage. He affirmed Türkiye’s commitment to holding those responsible for the genocide accountable, including taking necessary steps before the International Court of Justice, and called for all countries to recognise the State of Palestine without delay.

President Erdoğan concluded by stating that Türkiye has consistently chosen the “difficult path” of action and responsibility over mere observation and criticism, striving to promote peace and justice across its vast civilisational geography. He highlighted Türkiye’s mediation efforts in the Russia-Ukraine war and recent crises between Somalia and Ethiopia and Afghanistan-Pakistan, underscoring that no country can afford to remain indifferent to its neighbourhood’s problems. He also stressed the critical role of TRT in responsible journalism, particularly in an era of manipulation, and in promoting family-focused, wholesome content against the moral decay promoted by certain digital platforms.

Similarly, **Head of Communications Prof. Burhanettin Duran** highlighted the critical role of the TRT World Forum in evaluating major international issues and working to develop a human-centred approach, particularly in light of this year’s ambitious theme, “The Global Reset: From the Old Order to New Realities.” He observed that the current global landscape is defined by profound turbulence, from global warming and technological threats to the unexpected return of conventional wars, a reality that signals the end of the previous world order and exposes a troubling pattern of selective humanitarianism and double standards. He asserted that amid this challenging environment, the most devastating event

has been the genocide in Gaza, where Türkiye, under President Erdoğan's leadership, was among the first voices of conscience to speak out against Israel's blatant violations, a moral stance that has since gained traction across global public opinion. Prof. Duran stressed that this "bleak and distressing atmosphere" necessitates new sources of guidance and actors with the vision to build a new world, not the old one.

Prof. Duran admired President Erdoğan's leadership and long-articulated vision, specifically the principle that "the world is greater than five" and the conviction that a fairer world is possible, for elevating Türkiye to a unique and influential position as an actor sought out in every major crisis zone. He detailed Türkiye's distinctive approach, characterising it as a mediator committed to placing human security at the centre of diplomacy; a producer utilising indigenous defence and technological capabilities to strengthen national and regional stability; and a transformative actor bringing moral depth to international politics through a humanitarian diplomatic approach that prioritises justice over political interest. Prof. Duran concluded by reaffirming the commitment of the Directorate of Communications and the national media to stand on the side of truth and justice against disinformation and cultural imperialism, thereby contributing to the emergence of this new, more principled world.

**Prof. Mehmet Zahid Sobacı, Director General of TRT,** highlighted the role of TRT World Forum in addressing overlooked international issues with a solution-oriented perspective. Sobacı emphasised that the current international system, established after the Second World War, is deeply broken, suffering from a profound legitimacy crisis due to its inability to withstand geopolitical shocks, resolve conflicts, and deliver justice. He asserted that this system has "surrendered to power instead of rules, chaos instead of order," and has drifted away from the ideal of shared humanity by glorifying an isolationist "me first, only me" mindset. Consequently, rebuilding a more just, inclusive, rules-based, and morally grounded global system is not a choice but an urgent necessity.

Sobacı stressed that at this critical juncture, Türkiye, under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, emerges as a transformative actor that "reshapes equations" and acts as the "moral compass of the world." He cited Türkiye's principled stance as a concrete blueprint for a fairer world, prioritising diplomacy over conflict, justice over oppression, and reconciliation over division. The most recent and concrete example of this was identified as Türkiye becoming the "voice of justice" against the genocide pursued by Israel in Gaza, where the President's leadership "infused courage into words." Sobacı also highlighted Türkiye's unwavering principled position in the Syrian civil war and its commitment to acting as a mediator in all humanitarian crises. He concluded by asserting that Türkiye will not be indifferent to the "cries rising from the ruins of the old order," and will be among the leading nations in rebuilding the world, determining its place in the emerging order through its own sovereign will.

Following these keynote speeches, the forum advanced with a substantive series of discussions examining core themes, including emerging trends in the defence industry and Türkiye's expanding strategic role, shifts in regional and global geopolitics and diplomacy, the future of international law and the rules-based order, the implications of techno-feudalism, AI governance, and current developments in global trade and economics. Distinguished speakers offered informed and varied perspectives, contributing to a constructive, solution-focused dialogue aimed at addressing the most pressing global challenges during the Forum.

### **Building Strategic Autonomy: Türkiye and the Global Defence Paradigm**

The first Public Session opened with a keynote address by H.E. Cevdet Yılmaz, Vice President of the Republic of Türkiye, who stated that Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy is grounded in the conviction that "justice without strength is unsustainable," driving its transformation from a defence importer to a major exporter by increasing localisation from 20% to over 80%. The session examined Türkiye's evolving defence

capabilities and their broader implications, concluding that its model integrates technological self-reliance, defence diplomacy, and alliance solidarity within a fragmenting global order.

Professor Murat Yeşiltaş emphasised that strategic autonomy enables Türkiye to act independently to safeguard national interests, reinforced by its technological revolution and indigenous drone capabilities, which have reshaped regional balances from Libya to the South Caucasus. Peter Westmacott, Former British Ambassador to Türkiye, described Türkiye's localisation leap from 20% to 80% as exemplary, arguing that European strategic autonomy requires deeper cooperation with Türkiye. Peter Millett, Former British Ambassador to Libya, highlighted Türkiye's intervention in Libya as a sophisticated model of military, political, and economic engagement now informing its roles in Syria and Gaza, alongside its growing leadership in humanitarian response. Ambassador Carlo Marsili, Former Italian Ambassador to Türkiye, underscored Türkiye's ability to balance NATO commitments with engagement with BRICS, the SCO, and Russia, presenting it as a compelling middle-power model and a critical partner for strengthening Europe's security landscape.

### **Syria's New Dawn: Charting a Course for Reconstruction and Stability**

The second public underscored a shared view that Syria's transition must prioritise inclusive national dialogue, social reconciliation, and trust-building rather than a security-first model. Speakers emphasised that nation-building, state-building, and peace-building must progress together to avoid replicating past authoritarian structures. Core themes included the need for truth-seeking, particularly on the missing persons' crisis affecting nearly every Syrian family, and the rapid transformation of Syria's media landscape and civil society, both essential to justice, healing, and durable peace.

H.E. Hamzah Almustafa, Minister of Information, highlighted the rebuilding of the information ecosystem

and the shift from state-run to genuine public media, noting the accreditation of more than 400 private, independent, and foreign outlets in nine months and over 3,000 foreign media delegations, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity and accountability. Professor Talha Köse stressed that positive peace requires repairing the social fabric "deliberately divided for decades" and synchronising nation-, state-, and peace-building through inclusive dialogue. Karla Quintana described the missing persons issue as a "national trauma" and emphasised that truth-seeking hinges on building trust among families, authorities, and international actors. Houda Atassi highlighted civil society's shift from emergency relief to shaping reconstruction and institutional renewal, reporting that the National Dialogue, engaging more than forty thousand participants, showed that "what unites Syrians is infinitely greater than what divides them," reinforcing a broad demand for an inclusive national future.

### **The Return of High-Stakes Diplomacy: Middle Powers and the Emerging Multipolar Order**

The third public session featured a keynote address by H.E. Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. Minister Fidan argued that today's international system is defined by pervasive uncertainty, with global governance structures losing functionality and a widening crisis of legitimacy driving states toward unilateralism. He emphasised that the way forward requires building an inclusive multilateral system by reforming global institutions, particularly the UN Security Council to make them more democratic and representative, while strengthening regional ownership and practical cooperation. He presented Türkiye's strategic balancing, sustained dialogue with all sides, and hands-on mediation, from Ukraine to Syria and Gaza as a model of adaptive diplomacy suited to a turbulent multipolar order.

Other speakers reinforced this perspective while offering their own analyses. Amitav Acharya highlighted that middle powers derive influence from regional

leadership, noting that countries such as Türkiye, many of which were once great powers, draw on historical depth to shape global norms. Thomas Greminger stressed the complementary roles of traditional and emerging mediators in making multilateralism “fit for purpose,” while Thomas G. Weiss argued that middle powers can dilute major-power dominance by increasing financial contributions and driving normative progress, even without P5 support. Professor Kılıç Buğra Kanat described the wars in Ukraine, Syria, and Gaza as the “last nails in the coffin” of faith in the current system, emphasising that effective strategic balancing requires autonomy, legitimacy, and coalition-building capacity. Ambassador Akif Çağatay Kılıç encapsulated the widespread demand for reform through the principle “The world is bigger than five,” underscoring that successful mediation depends on both diplomatic persistence and deep societal understanding to bring conflicting parties back to dialogue.

### **Journalism on the Frontlines: From Battlefield Risks to Algorithmic Suppression**

The fourth public session was opened with a keynote by Prof. Burhanettin Duran, who warned that in today’s hybrid wars, the truth itself has become a primary target, with the message on a screen carrying as much weight as a weapon on the ground. Prof. Duran noted that war journalism has grown increasingly perilous, with protective gear offering little security, as shown by the deliberate killing of more than 250 journalists in Gaza. The discussion emphasised the dual threats confronting journalists, direct attacks in conflict zones and algorithmic suppression online, which creates what he described as a “digital dictatorship” by obscuring or downgrading critical reporting.

The panel featured powerful testimonies from frontline journalists. Wael al-Dahdouh described the impossibility of reporting from Gaza without becoming part of the events, having lost close family members in Israeli strikes, and stressed the duty to ensure justice and accountability. Sami Shehada recounted being hit by a tank shell

despite clear press markings, resulting in amputation, and highlighted the impossible choices Palestinian journalists face. Ukrainian anchor Natalia Moseichuk described operating in a “new reality with an old name: hell,” while Priyanka Navani noted that the resilience of Gaza’s journalists now inspires colleagues elsewhere and warned of a growing “military informational complex” of states, platforms, and tech companies shaping narratives. She underscored Türkiye’s commitment to building an “infrastructure of truth” to uphold algorithmic fairness.

### **Beyond Techno-Feudalism: Democratising AI Innovation, Governance, and Access**

The fifth public session was opened with a keynote by H.E. Mehmet Fatih Kacır, who argued that AI has become a lever of power in international relations, shaping national competitiveness, independence, and resilience. He cautioned that the concentration of digital power among a few global tech giants, coupled with the US–China divide, risks marginalising many states, and underscored the need for an inclusive, ethical, and human-centred global governance framework to prevent new forms of dependency or “digital feudalism.” Speakers echoed this urgency, with Tommaso Valletti describing the current environment as “digital feudalism” rather than a conventional monopoly, calling for AI infrastructure to be regulated like water, an essential public utility. Kenzo Fujisue highlighted that the United States and China control more than 80% of global AI capacity and urged regional cooperation, proposing that Türkiye and Japan lead a coalition of technological middle powers. H.E. Ejup Maqedonci added that the data-driven nature of AI offers smaller states a meaningful opportunity to compete if they take swift action.

The panel also examined the ethical and social implications of AI, particularly gender inequality. Belen Sanz Luque noted that the digital revolution reproduces existing disparities, warning that 44% of AI systems already exhibit systemic gender bias and stressing that women must be empowered to become creators, not only consumers, of emerging technologies. Minister Kacır

outlined Türkiye's national strategy under the National Technology Move, emphasising justice and responsibility as guiding principles. Minister Kacır highlighted major upcoming initiatives, including increasing national data centre capacity from 250 megawatts to 1 gigawatt by 2030 and expanding AI compute capacity, to position Türkiye as a leading developer rather than merely a user of advanced AI technologies.

### **International Law in Retreat in Palestine? Turning Crisis into Reform**

The sixth public session centred on the shared conclusion that the issue is not the erosion of international law, but the failure of political institutions to enforce it. Speakers argued that the paralysis of mechanisms such as the UN Security Council has enabled persistent impunity, particularly in the case of Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian territories. Judge Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf stressed that the illegality of Israel's presence is unequivocal, yet all 194 UN member states bear responsibility for enforcement, recalling that the delegitimisation of colonialism was achieved through sustained collective pressure from the Global South rather than the will of major powers. Speakers agreed that the inability to secure justice for Palestinians demands not the abandonment of legal norms, but a deep reform of the international political order to ensure the universal and impartial application of international law.

Speakers offered stark assessments of the system's structural deficiencies. H.E. Dr Nuh Yılmaz argued that a world order built around American dominance no longer produces solutions and has afforded Israel an unparalleled degree of impunity, noting Türkiye's efforts to mobilise regional and international mechanisms to halt atrocities. H.E. Dr. Ahmed Assaf underscored the historical failure of international law, observing that none of the thousands of UN resolutions supporting Palestinian rights has ever been implemented and that, from the Balfour Declaration to current genocide allegations, legal protections have been absent at critical junctures. Humza Yousaf highlighted the widening gap between global public opinion and political leadership, pointing to

the contradiction of an ICC-wanted leader presiding over mass civilian deaths without accountability. He called for sustained civic mobilisation, the universal application of international law to all peoples, and urged Arab states, particularly in the Gulf, to use their influence to ensure such application.

### **Economic Frontlines: Trade Conflicts and the New Global Rivalries**

The final public session began with a keynote speech by H.E. Mehmet Şimşek, Minister of Treasury and Finance, Republic of Türkiye, and basically examined the rising instability of the global economic order, shaped by protectionism, geopolitical rivalry, and the breakdown of multilateral cooperation. H.E. Mehmet Şimşek stated that global policy uncertainty has "never been so high" and that "protectionism is here to stay," attributing much of the current tension to China's ascent, now representing more than 30% of global manufacturing and contributing to wage stagnation and social backlash in Western economies. Minister Şimşek presented Türkiye as comparatively resilient due to its strong services exports and deep regional integration, noting that 62% of exports go to free trade partners and more than 80% to its near neighbourhood. Minister Şimşek concluded that the post-war multilateral system is under severe strain, invoking Gramsci's observation that "the old world is dying, and the new world is struggling to be born."

Speakers in the session underscored both the erosion of the global trading framework and the emergence of new geopolitical alignments, with Henry Huiyao Wang describing US-China ties as "managed competition" and others stressing that deteriorating trust among major powers undermines collective responses to climate and debt risks, while fiscal fragility continues to grow across emerging economies. Speakers also highlighted the systemic inequities of the current trade regime and outlined potential pathways for reform. Jane Kelsey argued that today's rules-based order reflects the power politics of the neoliberal era and is now fuelling public discontent. Jan Bohanes warned that the rapid expansion of national security exceptions is eroding

the predictability of trade rules by blurring the boundary between economic protectionism and security policy. Rashid Kaukab called on developing countries to treat the present moment of global disruption as an opportunity to reorient their strategies, insisting that sustainable development be placed at the centre of global trade governance. Together, these perspectives pointed to a world economy marked by heightened rivalry, weakening institutions, and an urgent need for more equitable and resilient frameworks.

Throughout the forum, **expert roundtable discussions** provided a platform for in-depth engagement on regional and thematic issues. The first discussion was themed **Contested Futures: Conflict and Reconciliation in East Africa**, where speakers discussed that persistent conflict is rooted in structural inequalities, exclusionary governance, and externally imposed post-colonial borders, not merely short-term crises. Participants stressed that sustainable peace requires a redefinition, moving beyond mere ceasefires to encompass justice, inclusivity, and equitable economic development, which transforms the underlying social and economic conditions that perpetuate violence. The panel emphasised that solutions must be African-led and regionally owned to be legitimate and durable, arguing that economic interdependence and shared prosperity through regional cooperation offer the most practical deterrents against conflict. Furthermore, the discussion highlighted the challenge posed by the changing nature of warfare, including new technologies like drones and AI, which necessitate adaptive regional mechanisms beyond traditional diplomacy and military interventions to address hybrid threats effectively.

In the second expert roundtable, **"From Victimhood to Resilience: The Path to Justice in Gaza"**, the speakers described the Gaza war not only as a humanitarian tragedy but as a catalyst for re-evaluating the credibility of the global system, arguing it exposed the paralysis of global governance and the failure of post-1945 institutions to uphold their legal and moral standards. The discussion highlighted that public opinion, particularly among

younger generations in the West, is shifting sharply against long-standing narratives that marginalised Palestinian perspectives, creating pressure for equality in the application of international law. Türkiye's principled diplomacy was frequently highlighted as a model for middle powers, combining moral clarity with diplomatic realism through consistent advocacy for humanitarian access, accountability, and support for post-conflict reconstruction. Ultimately, participants stressed that genuine progress requires accountability, recognition of sovereignty, and the renewal of Palestinian political institutions to ensure unified, legitimate representation in any post-conflict framework, moving the focus from mere resilience to actionable justice.

The third expert roundtable was titled **"Cultural Diplomacy and Shared Identity in Central Asia: Pathways to Regional Engagement and Connectivity."** The discussion established that cultural diplomacy and economic connectivity are mutually reinforcing drivers of stability, transforming shared identity into a robust foundation for regional engagement. Speakers emphasised a necessary shift from traditional soft power projection to genuine cultural partnership centred on mutual understanding and co-creation, contrasting this with more transactional external influences. Türkiye's engagement was highlighted as an inclusive, identity-affirming model, using shared language, traditions, and media cooperation (such as Turkish TV dramas) to foster regional solidarity and confidence in local identities. Furthermore, the panel stressed that the revival of historical narratives and the preservation of cultural heritage are essential for strengthening post-Soviet nation-building efforts, providing continuity that anchors modern development and peace in a "unified cultural space." The session concluded that the future of this connectivity depends on leveraging the young generations and digital transformation by investing in creative industries and cultural innovation.

The fourth session, titled **"European Security Architecture: Between Institutional Overlap and Strategic Necessity,"** examined the system's ability to

cope with geopolitical shifts and internal vulnerabilities. The discussion affirmed that the European security framework functions as an ecosystem reliant on the synchronisation of distinct institutional mandates: NATO for hard power and military deterrence, the EU for soft power and resilience, and the OSCE for diplomatic channels. The session highlighted the crucial role of Türkiye as a key global actor with a strategic vision, particularly in regions like the Sahel and North Africa, which many European states overlook. This strategic necessity is driving pragmatic, transactional partnerships, such as the cooperation between Italy's Leonardo and Türkiye's Baykar, which offer a model for integrating critical defence technologies into the European system. Internally, the panel stressed that the rise of populism, the erosion of liberal values, and unresolved disputes in the Balkans and the Mediterranean create critical vulnerabilities, which external powers can exploit to destabilise the continent's security.

The fifth session, **"The Ukraine Conflict: Diplomacy Amid the Fog of War,"** explored the paradox of concurrent high-intensity warfare and critical diplomatic efforts, such as the Istanbul and Antalya talks and the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The discussion highlighted that the fundamental design flaw of the UN Security Council, where a permanent member is a belligerent, renders the post-WWII international security architecture effectively paralysed and undermines its validity. Progress in negotiations is primarily driven not by economic pressure but by military outcomes that convince the fighting parties they cannot achieve their goals on the battlefield. A central theme was the weaponisation of food security, with speakers citing the deliberate interruption of supply chains to use food as a "hunger weapon" against socio-economic stability globally, underscoring the vital yet fragile nature of the Grain Initiative facilitated by brokers like Türkiye. Moreover, effective negotiation is complicated by deliberate linguistic manipulation, such as using "special military operation," which prevents the establishment of common ground and accountability under international law. Looking forward, the session stressed that a military cessation will not equate to peace, as the conflict is framed as a neo-

colonial effort aimed at destroying the opposing nation's identity and independence. The existential threat posed by the aggressor state will remain without significant internal political change in that country. The global fallout of the war has far-reaching geopolitical consequences, including influencing anticipated future conflicts in regions like the Indo-Pacific.

The sixth expert roundtable, **"The Gulf Amid a Fragmenting Global Order: Vision, Rivalry and Fault Lines,"** concluded that the region remains at a crossroads, with persistent mistrust among Gulf states impeding a cohesive regional security framework comparable to NATO. Despite visible diversification efforts, Gulf leaders remain structurally dependent on U.S. security guarantees due to decades of investment in military and diplomatic ties, even as confidence in Washington's reliability fluctuates. Türkiye's pragmatic diplomacy and growing defence industry, notably in drones, positions it as a flexible and effective partner for selective Gulf states, offering a model for their own defence localisation strategies. Ultimately, while ideological fault lines (particularly over political Islam) hinder collective decision-making, the most realistic path toward building confidence and stability lies in pragmatic joint economic initiatives, such as defence industrial cooperation and post-conflict reconstruction, to foster interdependence.

The seventh session, **"Trump's America: Unpacking the Transformation,"** focused on how U.S. foreign policy has become uniquely shaped by the individual leader, requiring foreign governments to formulate a specific "Trump policy" alongside traditional state policy. This administration is characterised by its extreme centralisation, staffed primarily by loyalists to eliminate policy "blocking coalitions." The session detailed how traditional alliances based on partnership have been replaced by transactional diplomacy focused on the leader's personal benefit (power, attention, profit), disproportionately harming long-standing US allies. A key, often hidden, driver of seemingly irrational policies like aggressive tariffs is a geoeconomic strategy aimed at securing access to critical minerals and rare earth elements to regain US dominance in the Fourth

Industrial Revolution. This profound shift is compelling middle powers to assume roles as global stabilisers, forging new, flexible “webs of relationships” among themselves to mitigate global instability.

The final expert roundtable session, **“From the Margins to the Mainstream: The Global Rise of the Far Right”** addressed the profound shift of far-right sentiment into mainstream politics, challenging the idea that these roots were ever truly marginal, but were often simply kept “under the carpet” within conventional parties. The discussion was framed by a critique that contemporary political analyses suffer from “race amnesia” and “colonial amnesia,” preventing a deep engagement with the structural and historical roots of racism underlying the phenomenon. Speakers linked the rise of the far right to a “crisis of whiteness” driven by inevitable demographic changes in Western nations, and highlighted how state institutions, particularly in the UK, contribute to the far right’s framing by implementing policies that securitise the Muslim community as an inherent threat. Furthermore, the modern far right successfully leverages digital platforms and sophisticated, “respectable” communication strategies to gain unprecedented legitimacy and traction among the disillusioned, while minority figures who enter political power often face pressure to “reproduce whiteness” or risk losing the respect of the communities they represent.

All these roundtable sessions facilitated candid discussions on pressing global concerns, in accordance with the Chatham House Rule.

TRT World Forum 2025 concluded with a collective call for the construction of a more just global governance architecture, bringing together solution-oriented and diverse perspectives under a shared vision. The sessions featured high-level speakers, including H.E. Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, H.E. Hamza Almustafa, Minister of Information of the Syrian Arab Republic, and former First Minister of Scotland Humza Yousaf, alongside a broad array of academics, policymakers, and civil society leaders.

By convening such a wide spectrum of voices, the forum outlined concrete pathways toward a more equitable, sustainable, and stable international order. Sincere appreciation is extended to all distinguished speakers and participants for their invaluable contributions to this critical global dialogue.



# Inaugural Speeches

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# President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Inaugural Speech

## Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

President, Republic of Türkiye

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has served as the President of the Republic of Türkiye since August 10, 2014, becoming the first President elected by popular vote.

He is also the founder and Chairman of the Justice and Development Party.

His political career gained national prominence with his election as Mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul.

Before assuming the presidency, he served as Prime Minister from 2003 to 2014. During his tenure, he implemented policies aimed at strengthening democratic standards, advancing economic development, and enhancing social welfare, including a rise in GDP per capita from around \$3,500 to over \$18,000. Leading a country in one of the most volatile regions of the world, President Erdoğan has also been an advocate for regional cooperation and reform within international institutions.

Following the constitutional amendment approved by a referendum on April 16, 2017, he was sworn in on July 9, 2018, as the first President under Türkiye's new Presidential System.

Distinguished participants of the TRT World Forum, esteemed members of the business, media, and academic communities, honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen, I greet you all with my heartfelt respect and affection.

I am greatly pleased to be with you on the occasion of the 9th TRT World Forum held this year. I would like to welcome our distinguished guests, who have honoured the Forum with their presence from different parts of Türkiye and the world, to our beautiful Istanbul, a city where seven colours, seven voices, and seven climates converge.

We observe that the Forum has truly become a highly valuable platform for consulting on issues concerning humanity. I wholeheartedly congratulate the TRT leadership and its members who have successfully organised the TRT World Forum since 2017.

At the very beginning of my speech, I would like to underline a fundamental truth. TRT, one of Türkiye's most respected institutions, is a source of pride for us with its human-centred broadcasting approach and its efforts to bring the voice of truth to all corners of the world. The TRT World Forum, organised by our broadcaster that faithfully upholds its responsibility as a public service institution, is among the most important manifestations of TRT's approach, which is now recognised across all seven continents.

To date, nearly one thousand speakers from various fields have shared their ideas, assessments, and recommendations on this platform, while close to ten thousand participants have followed the program in person. Every year, under different themes, we have had the opportunity to hear the views of distinguished figures in the fields of economics, politics, security, media, technology, and international relations.

This year, our Forum is being held under the theme "The Global Reset: From the Old Order to New Realities." Over the next two days, 132 accomplished speakers from thirty-five countries and more than two thousand participants will work to develop innovative solutions to global challenges. Considering the turbulent period our region and the world are going through, such a fertile environment of ideas undoubtedly gains even greater importance.

It is a fact that the more we speak about the problems that threaten the future of humanity, and the more we discuss them within the framework of mutual respect, the closer we come to genuine solutions. I sincerely hope that the issues consulted upon here, the ideas voiced here, and the calls raised here will contribute to humanity's pursuit of peace and tranquillity.

I wish the Forum, where not only media-related matters but many global issues will be discussed in depth, to proceed successfully. I extend my gratitude, on behalf of myself and my nation, to all our guests who enrich the Forum with their participation, ideas, and recommendations.

Distinguished guests,

Each passing day reveals how urgently the world needs a global system that is more just, more inclusive, and more embracing. Wars, conflicts, inequalities, and injustices have all but occupied the agenda of humanity. The current system, established by the victors of the Second World War, unfortunately no longer corresponds to today's realities and necessities.

Due to the unjust decision-making structure of the UN Security Council, it fails to provide solutions to humanity's shared problems. Even when both the problems and their solutions stand plainly before our eyes, innocent people continue to die in many parts of the world. As Türkiye, we state that the fate of humanity cannot be left to the mercy of five countries, and for this reason, we say, "The world is bigger than five."

Even in the gravest humanitarian crises and in the most blatant human rights violations, the current system delays taking decisions, revealing its need for fresh ideas, new contributions, and a restructuring that reflects today's realities. Over the past two years, we have all witnessed what has occurred in Gaza. Before the eyes of the world, the Israeli government has martyred more than seventy thousand Gazans, over twenty thousand of them children.

More than 170,000 of our Palestinian brothers and sisters have been injured by Israeli attacks. Almost no building remains intact in Gaza. Schools, churches, mosques, and hospitals have been deliberately bombed. And still, they claim: "Israel is innocent." How can that be? Israel possesses nuclear weapons, the most powerful bombs, and the capability to strike Gaza whenever it wishes. How, then, can it be innocent? As we said yesterday as well, Israel is not innocent; it is the oppressor itself. It possesses nuclear arms, bombs, and every type of weapon, short-range, medium-range, and long-range. How can it be the victim? They cannot deceive us, and certainly not Türkiye.

Israel has used starvation as a lethal weapon, especially against children. We have just seen on the screen the images of those children reduced to skin and bone, children punished by hunger. Against Israel's propaganda machine built on lies, 270 journalists who tried to reveal the truth to the world at the cost of their lives were killed.

Palestinian journalists have not only lost their own lives but also their children. One of them, whose testimony we saw earlier, lost his wife and children, and also his parents. I regret to say that while all of this took place, the institutions tasked with safeguarding global peace and stability took no steps to stop the massacres, prevent genocide, or save the lives of children. Decisions adopted overwhelmingly by the General Assembly were sacrificed to the political calculations within the Security Council. This is incomprehensible and indefensible.

Brothers and sisters,

I must also emphasise this: The international media, including the outlets that set up camp in Istanbul during the Gezi incidents, likewise failed in Gaza by deliberately concealing the perpetrators in their reporting. Except for a handful of media organisations and courageous journalists, no one conveyed the voice of the oppressed Gazans to the world. I believe the global media community will eventually, albeit belatedly, reckon with this in an objective manner. Exposing the embedded journalists who used their pens, cameras, and platforms to obscure the crimes of genocide is essential for restoring the credibility of the media. In this regard, I consider the uninterrupted and dedicated coverage by TRT from the very first day of the genocide to be immensely valuable. TRT not only continued reporting from Gaza without pause but also excelled in documenting

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and archiving evidence on the perpetrators. In this struggle, we also lost our brother, photojournalist Yahya Barzak, as a martyr. I once again commemorate Yahya and all journalists who lost their lives in Israeli attacks with mercy. Shortly before, we watched the final moments of our martyred journalists together. I believe that the collective conscience of humanity will honour the memory of Yahya Barzak and the other 270 journalists, ensuring that those responsible for genocide are held accountable under the law for the evidence gathered at the cost of their lives.

As Türkiye, we stand ready to do whatever falls to us in this regard. We are prepared to take all necessary steps before institutions such as the International Court of Justice in The Hague. As you know, following two years of oppression, a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel was reached recently, with our support. For the first time, our brothers and sisters in Gaza were able to breathe. While Hamas has shown diligence in adhering to the agreement, Israel has sought pretexts to violate it and resume its massacres. Just two days ago, they martyred over one hundred

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**Türkiye stands ready to shoulder any responsibility and make every sacrifice for Gaza's recovery. Just as we have done before, we will continue to stand by our Palestinian brothers and sisters today and tomorrow, and we will continue advocating for a two-state solution. We consider the recent wave of recognition of Palestine to be extremely important. I call upon all countries that have not yet taken this step to act without delay and recognise the State of Palestine.**

Gazans, mostly children. Israel's dismal record of breaking deals is well-known. Therefore, maintaining the ceasefire, delivering humanitarian aid to Gazans, and initiating the reconstruction of Gaza will only be possible by compelling Israel to comply.

Türkiye stands ready to shoulder any responsibility and make every sacrifice for Gaza's recovery. Just as we have done before, we will continue to stand by our Palestinian brothers and sisters today and tomorrow, and we will continue advocating for a two-state solution. We consider the recent wave of recognition of Palestine to be extremely important. I call upon all countries that have not yet taken this step to act without delay and recognise the State of Palestine.

Distinguished friends,

Sitting back, watching, and even criticising global developments is the easy path. What is difficult is to change, transform, and light a candle against the darkness. Yet we have always chosen the difficult path. Instead of merely observing or criticising wrongdoing, we chose to act, to assume responsibility, and to strive to turn darkness into light.

Across the vast geography of our civilisation, which spans millions of square kilometres, we are striving to promote peace, justice, solidarity, and serenity. Türkiye assumes responsibility not only in Gaza but in every humanitarian crisis. From the first day of the Russia-Ukraine war, which is now approaching its fourth year, we have worked for a just and lasting peace. In our meetings with President Putin and President Zelenskyy, we clearly expressed our determination to support an immediate ceasefire and subsequently a lasting peace. I hope that, in the near future, a middle ground will be found between the parties, paving the way for the two neighbouring peoples to once again live side by side in peace. Türkiye will continue to make every contribution to this end.

Last year, we assisted in resolving the tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia, which had the potential to escalate into a major crisis. We also played a leading role in defusing the crisis that erupted between Afghanistan and Pakistan in recent weeks. The mediation efforts undertaken by our National Intelligence Organisation bore fruit quickly, an

indication of the trust placed in our country, and a ceasefire agreement was signed between the parties. We sincerely hope this agreement becomes permanent.

Let me express this with all my heart and sincerity: In today's world, no country has the luxury of confining itself within its own borders. Geographically, no country can remain indifferent to the problems in its immediate neighbourhood. Those who look at the deaths of innocents in Gaza, Afghanistan, or Sudan and say, "These are not our problems," will ultimately learn, one way or another, that reality is quite different.

Those who, with great selfishness, disregard the poverty, conflicts, and crises just beyond their borders cannot promise even their own children a bright future, let alone humanity. A world where "every man for himself," as the saying goes, is a dark world for all of us.

Remaining silent in the face of injustice is complicity in that injustice. And remember: tolerating oppression is itself oppression. As people who believe in a day of reckoning,

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we cannot condone oppression nor remain silent in the face of injustice.

I want to draw your attention to the following: Despite all the resources, technology, and communication revolutions of the past twenty years, if children in Asia and Africa continue to die, then we must all critically examine ourselves.

In recent days, I believe you have all followed the horrifying images coming from Sudan, the massacres against civilians in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur. No person of conscience can accept this, nor remain silent or indifferent. As Türkiye we strongly condemn the atrocities committed against civilians in El Fasher. The attacks in and around El Fasher must be halted, and the massacres of innocent civilians must stop immediately. We stand ready to fulfil whatever our ties of brotherhood require of us, sincerely and wholeheartedly. We only ask that no more blood be shed, that innocent children, women, and civilians are not killed. I also expect our members of the press to support this cause by conveying the suffering of our Sudanese brothers and sisters to the world.

Distinguished guests, dear friends,

TRT plays a critical role in ensuring that the work we carry out for global peace is firmly embedded in humanity's collective memory. Today, TRT represents our country in the best possible way with its seventeen television channels, seventeen radio stations, digital applications, films, documentaries, and foreign-language digital news platforms. Through TRT World, TRT Arabi, and its digital news platforms in the world's major languages, as well as its internet and radio broadcasting in forty-one languages and dialects, TRT now reaches more than half of the world's population. Through these broadcasts, TRT expands the space for responsible journalism in an era when manipulation has become a reflex of the media. At a time when truth is sacrificed to perception, TRT provides billions with an alternative grounded in reality. We consider this extremely valuable.

In a period when Turkish TV dramas are followed with admiration by billions across the world, TRT also leads this sector. TRT-produced series are broadcast in more than 110 countries and in over 50 languages. Through these productions, many people from diverse geographies have

the opportunity to learn our beautiful Turkish language and to become acquainted with our history, culture, and national and moral values. This is particularly important: as you know, the institution of the family is under serious attack. Distorted relationships, deviant movements, and unions that disregard human nature are being promoted through digital platforms. Social media similarly fuels this process of moral decay. The institution of the family made up of a man and a woman is being undermined.

Under the guise of "freedom," all kinds of immorality are being normalised. People do not hesitate to reveal their privacy for a few likes, and sadly, without any sense of shame. I believe we must prioritise productions that highlight humanity and human values, those that promote community over individualism, solidarity over selfishness, and authentic relationships over virtual ones.

In this regard, I appreciate TRT's efforts to expand family-focused, wholesome content across both traditional and digital platforms. I expect you to continue your mission without sacrificing what is best, right, beneficial, and moral for our nation, our country, and humanity, for the sake of ratings. May God bless your path and broaden your horizons.

With these thoughts, I hope that the 9th TRT World Forum will lead to auspicious outcomes. I wholeheartedly believe that the sincere efforts put forward for our shared global future, and the ideas and recommendations to be expressed during the sessions, will help open the door to a more just world.

I express my gratitude to all participants who have honoured our Forum with their presence from Türkiye and around the world. Once again, I greet you all with respect and affection. Stay well.

# Burhanettin Duran's Inaugural Speech

## Burhanettin Duran

Professor, Head of Communications, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye

Prof. Burhanettin Duran was appointed Director of Communications of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye in July 2025. He is also a member of the Presidential Security and Foreign Policy Council, a position he has held since 2018. A distinguished scholar of political science and international relations, Prof. Duran earned his Ph.D. from Bilkent University and his B.A. from Boğaziçi University. Over his academic career, he has served at Sakarya University, İstanbul Şehir University, Ankara Social Sciences University, and Ibn Haldun University, and was a visiting scholar at George Mason University. Prof. Duran previously served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and as General Coordinator of the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA). His research focuses on Turkish foreign policy, Turkish political thought, democratisation, and transformations in the Middle East and Europe. He is the author and editor of numerous books and articles in leading journals, including *Middle Eastern Studies* and *The Muslim World*, and co-editor of volumes such as *Türkiye's Vision for Its New Century* and *The AK Party Years in Türkiye*.

Mr President, distinguished guests,

I extend my sincere greetings and welcome you all to the TRT World Forum. I hope that this forum will bring meaningful outcomes for our country, our region, and all of humanity. As you know, every year at the TRT World Forum, we evaluate critical international issues together and work to develop a human-centred approach. This year's theme, *The Global Reset: From the Old Order to New Realities*, is undoubtedly an ambitious one. It requires a thorough analysis of ongoing crises and the collective production of solutions. That is precisely why we are here today and tomorrow. I am confident that valuable ideas will emerge, and we truly need them. Over the past two decades, our region, our neighbourhood, and the global environment have experienced so many conflicts and disruptions that a fair and principled response has become indispensable.

From the pandemic to global warming, from technological threats to evolving security risks, a wide range of crises has left individuals and societies vulnerable. More strikingly, conventional wars that we believed belonged to the past



have reappeared within just a few years, and even between major powers. Such a reality signals the end of the world we once knew, yet it also shows that the dangers we observed throughout history are still present and that a new order has not yet emerged. This turbulence and this darkness offer sobering lessons. Once again, we witness selective humanitarianism, double standards in defending rights, and a mindset that respects power rather than principles. Amid this troubling environment, the most tragic development has undoubtedly been the genocide in Gaza.

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**In the face of Israel's blatant violations of international law, only a few voices of conscience were raised at the outset, led by our President and Türkiye. Thankfully, this moral stance has since resonated with people across the world, bringing us to the point where global public opinion now recognises the truth. In such a bleak and distressing atmosphere, what we need most is new sources of guidance and new actors with vision. It is these new actors who will help build not the old world, but the new world that must emerge.**

In the face of Israel's blatant violations of international law, only a few voices of conscience were raised at the outset, led by our President and Türkiye. Thankfully, this moral stance has since resonated with people across the world, bringing us to the point where global public opinion now recognises the truth. In such a bleak and distressing atmosphere, what we need most is new sources of guidance and new actors with vision. It is these new actors who will help build not the old world, but the new world that must emerge.

Mr President, distinguished guests, at a time when the world is struggling with a profound crisis of order and meaning, our country, under the leadership of our President, has assumed responsibility for building a more just future both in our region and globally. Türkiye has become an actor that is sought, expected, and welcomed in every major crisis zone. What elevates our country to this unique position is its distinctive approach. The calls voiced by our President for many years, including the principle that the world is greater than five and the conviction that a fairer world is possible, have found strong resonance, particularly across the global South but also around the world.

Today, people in many regions believe this vision is attainable. Mr President, your leadership has played a decisive role in this success. The peace diplomacy you have pursued has become a source of inspiration for leaders across the world. With its diplomatic, military, and normative capabilities, Türkiye now stands among the most influential actors in the global reset that is underway.

Through the strong will of our President, Türkiye has articulated a comprehensive vision built on the principles of human security, a just international order, and resilient systems. This vision makes Türkiye a mediator, because it places human security at the centre of diplomacy and believes that crises can be resolved through dialogue rather than military escalation. This understanding makes Türkiye a partner for solutions, not conflicts. Türkiye is also a producer. The indigenous capabilities we have developed in defence and technology strengthen not only our national security but also regional stability. For us, production means growth, independence, confidence, and national dignity, while at the same time promoting shared prosperity and collective gain.

Moreover, Türkiye is a transformative actor. Through a humanitarian diplomatic approach that prioritises justice over power and conscience over political interest, Türkiye brings moral depth to international politics. Our policies on migration, our development initiatives, our humanitarian operations, and our diplomatic efforts for Gaza all reflect this principled stance.

In this sense, Türkiye is contributing to the emergence of a new world. As the Directorate of Communications, we are fully aware of our responsibilities in this important global endeavour. At a time when technological feudalism and social media extremism are rising, when societies and economies are weakened by disinformation, and when attacks on families and values intensify, we stand firmly on the side of truth against falsehood and justice against oppression. We resist cultural imperialism and project diversity, creativity, and cultural dynamism. We work to generate good not only for ourselves but for all humanity.

In this regard, TRT, Anadolu Agency, and our national media institutions continue to serve as the voice of truth. They amplify the voices of the oppressed in many languages and bring complex global issues to the forefront with depth and clarity. I would like to express my gratitude to all journalists who continue to report the truth despite pressure and obstruction in Gaza. I honour the memory of those who lost their lives in this cause and wish a swift recovery to the wounded.

Mr President, esteemed participants,

I conclude by wishing that the exchanges and discussions that will take place throughout the TRT World Forum contribute positively to all of humanity. I congratulate the TRT family and everyone who worked to make this forum possible, and I extend my sincere gratitude to our President. Thank you, and may you remain in God's protection.

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# Mehmet Zahid Sobacı's Inaugural Speech

## Mehmet Zahid Sobacı

Professor; Director General, TRT

Prof. Mehmet Zahid Sobacı graduated from Uludağ University's Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences in the Department of Public Administration in 2001. He earned his Master of Arts in 2005 and his Doctorate in 2009 from the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the Uludağ University Institute of Social Sciences. He became an associate professor in 2013 and a professor in 2020.

His areas of expertise are reform in public administration, public policy and the relationship between social media and politics. The books "Administrative Reform and Policy Transfer," "Public Administration in Theory and Practice," "Social Media and Local Governments: Theory and Practice," "Sub-National Democracy and Politics through Social Media," and "E-Parliament and ICT-Based Legislation: Concept, Experiences and Lessons," are among his main works. He has also published articles in multiple national and international journals in his areas of expertise.

In 2014, he received the TÜBA (Turkish Academy of Sciences) Notable Work (Honorable Mention) Award in the field of Social Sciences with his editorial work titled "Public Policy: Theory and Practice".

Between 2015-2018, he carried out studies in the field of Internal Politics at the think tank SETA. He served as the Vice Director of the Directorate of Communications of Presidency for the Republic of Türkiye between 2018 and 2021. At the same time, he served as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Press Advertising Agency between 2019-2021. He is married and with two children.

Your Excellency, Mr President, distinguished guests, welcome to the ninth edition of the TRT World Forum.

Since 2017, we have been convening the TRT World Forum without interruption, bringing to the international agenda, through a solution-oriented perspective, issues that are overlooked, postponed, or suppressed. As in previous years, our forum, honoured by the presence of our President, brings together one hundred and thirty-two speakers and more than fifteen hundred participants from thirty-five countries.



Over the next two days, we will examine the world's multiple crises, simultaneous transformations, and the challenges and opportunities that arise alongside them, offering proposals to address humanity's shared problems. We have designated this year's theme as "The Global Reset, From the Old Order to New Realities." This title aptly reflects the current state of world affairs. The international system built in the aftermath of the Second World War has, after eighty years, grown weary from crises, conflicts, and wars and has lost its capacity to generate solutions. Today, this system possesses neither the resilience to withstand geopolitical shocks nor the strength to confront multidimensional crises.

As it has lost its resilience, it has surrendered to power instead of rules, chaos instead of order. By glorifying a mindset of "me first, only me," it has drifted away from the ideal of shared humanity. We are now confronted with an international system that suffers from a profound legitimacy crisis in the eyes of global public opinion, that fails to deliver justice, that elevates power above morality, that shies away from accountability, and that is unable to resolve problems.

The world is seeking direction within this broken system. The remedy lies in articulating a vision and will to rebuild it anew. A more just and inclusive, rules-based, and morally grounded global reset is no longer a matter of choice but an urgent necessity. At precisely this juncture, under

the global peace vision and diplomatic initiatives of our President, Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Türkiye emerges as an actor that reshapes equations.

Prioritising diplomacy over conflict, reconciliation over division, justice over oppression, and order over chaos, Türkiye, under your leadership, is assuming a transformative role in the process of global reconstruction. Over the last twenty-three years, our country has become a game-changer capable of shaping the future of the world. While safeguarding its own rights and interests, Türkiye also presents humanity with the blueprint for a fairer world, adopting a principled stance that restores the rights of the rightful and restrains the unjust.

The most recent and concrete example of this stance is undoubtedly Gaza. As attempts were made to legitimise the genocide Israel has pursued in Gaza for two years, Türkiye became the voice of justice. While walls of silence were being built, our President infused courage into words; while human values were being put on trial, our nation carried the banner of conscience. Türkiye's principled position throughout the Syrian civil war stands as a testament of honour. Today, through its presence on the ground, Türkiye contributes substantively to establishing an inclusive order in Syria and to containing destabilising actors.

Not only in Gaza and Syria, but across all humanitarian crises and conflicts near and far, Türkiye has acted as a mediator, placing new realities at the centre of the international system in place of the old order. Your Excellency, we know that global reconstruction is possible only through the leadership of strong actors guided by conscience, and when conscience is in question, Türkiye undoubtedly stands as the moral compass of the world. Today, our nation presents a new vision for a world order that elevates justice, protects the vulnerable, defends peace, and centres human dignity. Refusing to remain indifferent to the cries rising from the ruins of the old order, Türkiye will be among the leading nations in rebuilding the world and will determine its place in this emerging order not by boundaries drawn by others but through its own sovereign will.

As Türkiye's public broadcaster, we at TRT strive to contribute to the reconstruction of the international system, following the direction you have set, through our global media network that stretches from our television and radio channels to our digital news platforms, from our series and documentaries

to our international strategic media summits, from our global digital platform Tabii to TRT Academy.

We continue to convey the steps our country takes for the benefit of humanity to billions of people in their native languages and to document Türkiye's defence of truth. At TRT, we are acutely aware of the responsibility we bear on the media front of the Century of Türkiye. Within this framework, our fundamental duty is to strengthen, through our broadcasting work, our country's humanitarian, moral, and strategic posture on the international stage.

I would especially like to emphasise that, on this path, our greatest source of strength is your determined leadership and your global struggle for justice. With these thoughts, I extend my deepest gratitude to Your Excellency for honouring our event. I hope that the TRT World Forum will contribute meaningfully to the process of global reconstruction.

I thank our esteemed guests in advance for the contributions they will make to our forum, and I congratulate all my colleagues who have worked with great dedication to make this event possible.

My respects.

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**The world is seeking direction within this broken system. The remedy lies in articulating a vision and will to rebuild it anew. A more just and inclusive, rules-based, and morally grounded global reset is no longer a matter of choice but an urgent necessity. At precisely this juncture, under the global peace vision and diplomatic initiatives of our President, Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Türkiye emerges as an actor that reshapes equations.**



TRT  
World  
Forum  
2025

# Public Sessions



## Session 1

# Building Strategic Autonomy: Türkiye and the Global Defence Paradigm



### Keynote Speaker

**Cevdet Yılmaz**, PhD; Vice President of the Republic of Türkiye

### Moderator

**Alican Ayanlar**, Presenter, TRT World

### Speakers

**Carlo Marsili**, Former Italian Ambassador to Türkiye

**Murat Yeşiltaş**, Professor, Social Sciences University of Ankara; Director, Foreign Policy Studies, SETA Foundation

**Peter John Westmacott**, Former British Ambassador to Türkiye, France, and the United States

**Peter Millett**, Former British Ambassador to Libya

# Key Takeaways

- Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy has transformed its defence industry into a pillar of national resilience, raising localisation in defence production from 20% to over 80% and turning the country from a defence importer into a leading exporter and innovator.
- Türkiye's model of strategic autonomy seeks not isolation but engagement on equal and principled terms, combining technological self-reliance with alliance solidarity, particularly within NATO.
- Defence diplomacy has become a central element of Türkiye's foreign policy, as seen through partnerships and joint production projects that link military capability with international cooperation and peacebuilding.
- Türkiye's approach to strategic autonomy differs from Europe's fragmented efforts, as it has institutionalised a multidimensional model spanning defence, economy, and diplomacy, enabling independent yet multilateral action.
- Türkiye's growing role in the global defence ecosystem underscores its technological leadership and its ability to integrate defence, political, and commercial tools to advance stability and national interests.
- The country exemplifies how middle powers can combine defence industrialisation, diplomacy, and regional influence to assert an independent and balanced security posture within a multipolar world.
- Türkiye's strategic autonomy embodies strength with responsibility, merging deterrence and diplomacy to position the nation as both a security provider and a humanitarian actor in an unstable global order.

# Summary of the Session

This session mainly explored the concept of strategic autonomy in the evolving global defence paradigm, with particular focus on Türkiye's growing defence capabilities and its broader implications for regional and international security. Participants discussed how Türkiye's defence transformation, marked by the localisation of production, innovation in unmanned and AI-assisted systems, and diversification of defence diplomacy, embodies a balance between self-reliance and international cooperation. The session highlighted Türkiye's role as both a key NATO ally and an increasingly independent actor contributing to global stability through humanitarian engagement, peacebuilding, and technological advancement.

Speakers primarily touched upon how the pursuit of strategic autonomy has become a shared aspiration among states navigating a fragmented world order, where traditional alliances and dependencies are being redefined. They compared Türkiye's approach with European and global counterparts, emphasising the country's distinctive model that integrates defence industrialisation, diplomacy, and economic strategy. The discussion also addressed the shifting military balance in regions such as Europe and the Middle East, underscoring Türkiye's influence through defence exports, conflict mediation, and its ability to leverage defence innovation for geopolitical and humanitarian purposes.

# Keynote Speech by Cevdet Yılmaz

## *PhD; Vice President of the Republic of Türkiye*

From November 2020 to June 2023, Dr Cevdet Yılmaz chaired the Planning and Budget Commission in the House of Commons. As of June 3, 2023, he is serving as the Vice President of the Republic of Türkiye. He graduated from the Department of Public Administration at the Middle East Technical University. He earned a master's degree in International Relations from the University of Denver, and a doctorate in Political Science and Public Administration from Bilkent University. He has held various positions, including leading the Directorate-General for Relations with the European Union at the Under secretariat of the Prime Ministry's State Planning Organisation. He served as a Member of Parliament for Bingöl for several terms and for Diyarbakır in one term. He has also held government positions, including Minister of State and Minister of Development, and was Deputy Prime Minister.



Esteemed participants, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to address such a distinguished gathering, and I congratulate TRT for this excellent organisation. The theme of this year's TRT World Forum is The Global Reset: From the Old Order to New Realities, insightful to reflect the historic crossroads our world is facing. Power structures, once considered immutable, are being reshaped by technological disruption, regional conflicts and the deepening crisis of global governance. Global challenges such as pandemics, economic volatility, and hybrid warfare have blurred the boundaries between security, development and diplomacy, revealing the fragility of the old order. In this context, I will examine Building Strategic Autonomy: Türkiye and the Global Defense Paradigm both as a national and global response to these shifts. Türkiye's experience illustrates how a nation can strengthen its sovereignty and resilience amid systemic uncertainty, not by withdrawing from the global order, but by engaging it on more equal, innovative and principled terms.

Distinguished guests,

Türkiye stands as a pivotal power, shaping the evolving global security architecture. Türkiye's expanding technological base, resilient economy and independent foreign policy vision enable it to play a constructive role

not only in sustaining regional stability, but also in shaping the global understanding of security. At the same time, the country's growing defense capabilities enhance both its own deterrence posture and NATO's collective strength, particularly along the alliance's southern flank. Its experience demonstrates that technological innovation and strategic autonomy can coexist with alliance solidarity, offering a model for nations seeking to build strength without dependence. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has articulated Türkiye's defense philosophy with remarkable clarity in today's world. Being right is not enough. One must also be strong, protect what is right. This conviction lies at the core of Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy, a doctrine born from the realisation that justice without strength is unsustainable. From Bosnia to Syria and most recently, Gaza, Türkiye's historic experiences have exposed the limits of international institutions and underscored a universal truth. Sovereignty must be defended through national capacity. Over the last two decades, Türkiye has turned this philosophy into policy.

The country's localisation rate in defense production has risen from 20% to over 80%, marking one of the most significant industrial transformations of the 21st century. Beyond hardware, Türkiye's defense sector has become

an engine of national resilience. 3500 companies, over 1000 skilled professionals, skilled and young professionals. Indeed, and 1400 active projects drive an export network spanning 108 countries. Last year alone, Türkiye's defense exports exceeded \$7 billion. Exports are expected to surpass \$10 billion threshold in a short period of time. This performance is in line with high value added economy targets, lifting also the civilian industries by spillover effects. Defense industries are not only critical for security, they are also very important for independent foreign policy as well as an economic structure which is more technological, which is based on high value added production.

Defense is not only about defense. Defense is also about the welfare of the people, and also international status of the state policies. Türkiye today ranks among the top three UAV producers and the 11th largest defense exporter globally, supplying 65% of the world's UAV exports in 2024. Indigenous platforms such as Bayraktar TB3, Kızılema, Kaan, Hürjet, Atak, TCG Anadolu, Atmaca, and Gökdoğan represent both technological achievement and strategic independence.

This week, the first Altay tanks were officially delivered to the Turkish Armed Forces, marking a historic milestone in Türkiye's defense modernisation efforts. Through Altay's production and development process, Türkiye has acquired advanced expertise in digital controls, AI assisted decision architectures, autonomous mobility capabilities, and next generation active protection suites. Building on these achievements, Türkiye is now preparing to develop even more sophisticated next generation land platforms, further strengthening its industrial and strategic autonomy.

The Steel Dome project, currently in phased development, aims to establish a multi-layered national air and missile defense network integrating radar, satellite and AI-supported interception technologies. It symbolises Türkiye's ambition to ensure full spectrum protection of its skies, complementing the Hisar, Siper, and Gökkuğ systems. This success was the outcome of a deliberate vision, one that combined national determination with a long term commitment to innovation and self-reliance.

Türkiye has become a nation that is no longer a follower, but one that is followed, a country developing advanced weapons systems, defence software, and electronic warfare modules closely observed even by major powers. Türkiye's strategic autonomy represents a national ethos

of self-determination and resilience, a conviction that living with dignity requires the strength to act independently when necessary.

Distinguished participants,

In today's complex security landscape, Türkiye's defence industry has evolved beyond a national capability. It has become a central instrument of diplomacy. Türkiye's expanding network of defense partnerships, stretching from Europe to Asia and Africa, reflects how defense cooperation can now complement and reinforce its foreign policy vision. The Eurofighter Typhoon agreement with the United Kingdom, the joint production of MİLGEM Corvettes with Pakistan and multi-domain cooperation with Indonesia in the KAAN 5th generation fighter program illustrate the strategic depth of Türkiye's engagement.

These initiatives have built an ecosystem of trust grounded in shared security goals and technological exchange. Defense diplomacy serves as a bridge between hard power and peace building. In this context of regional and global peace and security, we have always actively contributed to UN., NATO, and EU missions. Türkiye plays a pivotal role in countering terrorism in all its forms, from FETO and PKK, YPG to Daesh as one of the most persistent threats to regional peace and security. Türkiye's ability to design, produce and export advanced defence systems has provided it with a new dimension of diplomatic leverage, enabling it to mediate, de-escalate and contribute to the reconstruction in conflict-affected regions. From facilitating negotiations between Russia and Ukraine and ensuring the safe passage of grain shipments through the Black Sea, to contributing to Syria's post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction, and advocating for a just and lasting ceasefire and humanitarian relief in Gaza, Türkiye has consistently shown that security and diplomacy are not opposing domains, but mutually reinforcing responsibilities. In Gaza, unfortunately, the Netanyahu government is doing everything possible to break the already fragile ceasefire and is continuously looking for excuses to disrupt the existing situation, and we are very anxious about this attitude. The international community was already too late to interfere and provide a relatively peaceful environment for humanitarian assistance and for longer-term reconstruction of Gaza, but unfortunately, the situation is still fragile. The international community, the countries that have contributed to breaking this deal, should be closely involved in the situation. As

Türkiye, we are doing everything possible to uphold this ceasefire, to send enough and uninterrupted humanitarian assistance to Gaza. And also, we are ready to contribute to long-term reconstruction and also for permanent peace in the region through a two-state solution.

In all these efforts to share Türkiye's determination to transform strategic autonomy into a force for global security, this multi-dimensional approach transforms Türkiye's strategic autonomy from a doctrine of self-reliance into a practice of constructive engagement. Combining defense capability with humanitarian vision and diplomatic engagement, Türkiye acts as an active architect of regional and global stability. In this sense, defence diplomacy has become both the expression and extension of Türkiye's broader pursuit of strategic autonomy as a model that links national strength with international responsibility. Türkiye today holds the central position in shaping the global defense paradigm through its technological innovation, regional stability, vision and humanitarian diplomacy. Looking ahead, Türkiye will continue to deepen its strategic autonomy, reinforcing its security while contributing to the creation of fair, balanced and resilient international order.

We are aware of the fact that we are going through a transformation nowadays at the global level. The old order is dead, but there are no new structures, orders in trade, in diplomacy, in many areas, rule based international order is weakened and now there are two paths. One path is to go through this chaotic situation and look for individual countries all looking for their self-interest without any concern for the interests of others or the common interest. And the other path is to look for a new rule based order. Not maybe not the old one, but a revised one, a new world order, which is also based on equity, on international rules, on structures that will be inclusive for all parts of the world. And President Erdoğan, when he says that the world is bigger than five, this is not just the reform of the United Nations Security Council. This is indeed a call for a fairer global order economically, politically and more inclusive rule based global structures.

Distinguished participants through it is growing capabilities, principled, principled diplomacy, and steadfast commitment to peace and stability, Türkiye continues to pursue a vision of strength rooted in responsibility. At the dawn of the century of Türkiye, our approach to *Building Strategic Autonomy: Türkiye and the Global Defense Paradigm* embodies this

very understanding, ensuring nation resilience, which, contributing to global security and justice.

I sincerely hope that the deliberations of this forum will further advance this shared vision. We know that as Türkiye, we cannot create a world, a fairer world by our own individual efforts. We need alliances. We need more international dialogue, cooperation, participation, and partnership for realising this new order. This is not going to be one order imposed upon the world with a central pole. It will be more based on partnership. That is why it is very important to have such international gatherings and international perspectives for the future of our region and global conditions.

I would like to once again express my appreciation to the TRT family and all contributors to this meaningful event, and convey my best wishes for their continued success in representing Türkiye's voice with integrity and professionalism on a global scale.

Thank you very much.



# Highlights

## Carlo Marsili

Former Italian Ambassador to Türkiye

Ambassador Carlo Marsili is a veteran Italian diplomat with over 40 years of experience in international relations. Born in Cupramontana, he graduated in Political Science from the University of Padua and began his diplomatic career in 1970. He held key posts in Munich, Bangkok, Edinburgh, and Ankara, where he served as Political and NATO Counsellor. In Rome, he was Deputy Diplomatic Advisor to the Prime Minister and later served as Director General for Italians Abroad and for Human Resources.

He was Italy's Ambassador to Indonesia and later to Türkiye from 2004 to 2010. Deeply connected to Türkiye, he served as Honorary President of Ferrero Türkiye and now leads the Italy–Türkiye Association. He holds the Knight Grand Cross of the Italian Republic and the Order of the Republic of Türkiye.

Ambassador Marsili is the author of "Turkey Knocks at the Door" and holds an honorary doctorate from Ankara University.



- Türkiye has emerged as a compelling model for how middle powers can blend diplomacy, defence industrialisation, and regional influence to pursue a more independent security posture. By evolving from a defence importer to a prominent exporter, Türkiye is reshaping its role within NATO while simultaneously engaging diverse partners across regions from the Black Sea to Africa.
- Ankara's ability to navigate multiple spheres of influence—balancing NATO commitments with ties to BRICS, the SCO, and Russia—highlights its growing geopolitical agency. Its advancements in defence technology, including the rise of 'drone diplomacy,' have opened new avenues for partnership with key states such as Qatar, Ukraine, and countries across Africa, reinforcing Türkiye's position in the global defence marketplace.
- Italy and Türkiye share a natural convergence in the Mediterranean and Africa, making defence cooperation between the two countries both strategic and timely. In an era of chaotic multipolarity and an EU struggling with strategic direction, deeper Italian–Turkish coordination can strengthen Europe's security landscape while supporting Türkiye's rightful place as a major military power within the broader European framework.

## Murat Yeşiltaş

Professor, Social Sciences University of Ankara; Director, Foreign Policy Studies, SETA Foundation

Prof. Murat Yeşiltaş received his BA and MA in International Relations from Sakarya University in 2003 and 2009, respectively. He completed his PhD in Political Science and International Relations at Marmara University in 2012, with a dissertation titled “Locating Turkey: Geopolitical Mentality and the Army in Turkey.” He has held visiting researcher positions at Lancaster University’s Department of European Studies and International Politics (2008–2009) and Virginia Tech’s Institute of Government and International Relations (2010–2011). Currently, Prof. Yeşiltaş is a faculty member in the Department of International Relations at the Social Sciences University of Ankara. His research focuses on security studies, intelligence analysis, and strategic foresight, with expertise in geopolitical assessment, military analysis, actor profiling, scenario building, situation analysis, and war gaming simulation. He has conducted extensive field research in Syria, Libya, and Iraq, offering on-the-ground insights into regional conflicts, military strategies, and geopolitical shifts. In addition to his academic work, he is actively involved in policy-oriented research and think-tank initiatives, contributing to strategic analysis and scenario planning in national and international contexts.



- Türkiye’s pursuit of strategic autonomy is not merely about self-sufficiency in defence production, but about cultivating the ability to act independently and decisively when necessary. This approach is both a reaction to the uncertainties of global power competition and an adaptive strategy to safeguard national interests amid shifting geopolitical realities.
- Unlike the European Union’s fragmented approach to strategic autonomy, Türkiye has institutionalised this concept across multiple sectors from defence to economy, through a coherent and nationally driven framework. While absolute autonomy is neither achievable nor desirable, Türkiye seeks to become a functional partner within Europe’s evolving defence ecosystem, as reflected in collaborations with leading firms such as Leonardo and its engagement with the Eurofighter program.
- Türkiye’s technological revolution in the defence industry has redefined the regional military balance, transforming both the nature of warfare and the strategic posture of regional actors. From Libya to the South Caucasus and beyond, Türkiye’s indigenous platforms—particularly its drone capabilities—have demonstrated how national innovation can reshape geopolitical calculations and restore strategic equilibrium.

## Peter John Westmacott

Former British Ambassador to Türkiye, France, and the United States

Sir Peter Westmacott served as British Ambassador to the United States from 2012 to 2016. Following his diplomatic service, he spent a semester at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, teaching and writing.

Over his 43-year career in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, he also served as Ambassador to France (2007–2012) and Türkiye (2002–2006), with earlier postings including Iran before the 1979 revolution and a secondment to the European Commission in Brussels. He was Director for the Americas (1997–2000) and Deputy Under Secretary of State for the Wider World (2000–2001), and from 1990 to 1993, he was Deputy Private Secretary to HRH The Prince of Wales.

In the private sector, Sir Peter was an Independent Non-Executive at EY (2017–2022) and Chair of Tikehau Capital UK (2022–2024). He currently serves as a non-executive director of WE Soda, Ciner Glass, and Volex Plc.

He is a Distinguished Ambassadorial Fellow at the Atlantic Council, a Senior Adviser at Chatham House, and the author of *They Call It Diplomacy: Forty Years of Representing Britain Abroad*. Sir Peter is also an Honorary Fellow of New College, Oxford, and a regular contributor to radio and television news programmes.



- Europe today faces an increasingly unpredictable and perilous security environment, one in which smaller states can no longer rely solely on others for their defence. With renewed aggression on its periphery and waning U.S. engagement, Europe must shoulder greater responsibility, build credible defence capabilities, and develop shared industrial capacity. Türkiye's remarkable progress in localising its defence production from 20 to 80 per cent stands as an example of how strategic autonomy can translate into real strength.
- True strategic autonomy in Europe is not about isolation, but collaboration, working more effectively with partners like Türkiye and the United Kingdom to build collective self-reliance. The Eurofighter Typhoon partnership and expanding cooperation in aerospace and drone technologies exemplify how joint industrial initiatives can strengthen Europe's defence posture while reducing dependence on external powers.
- Türkiye occupies a uniquely pivotal position at the crossroads of critical conflicts from Ukraine and Syria to Gaza and the South Caucasus. Its ability to maintain dialogue with multiple actors, while actively contributing to regional stability, underscores its indispensable role in shaping the future security architecture of its neighbourhood. Türkiye's growing defence and diplomatic capacity make it an essential partner in any serious effort to restore balance and pursue peace across these volatile regions.

## Peter Millett

Former British Ambassador to Libya

Peter Millett CMG served as the British Ambassador to Libya from 2015 to 2018, where he played a key role in supporting the United Nations' efforts to negotiate and implement the Libyan Political Agreement. During his tenure, he developed strong relationships with major political, security, and economic actors in Libya and across the international community.

Prior to his posting in Libya, he served as British Ambassador to Jordan (2011–2015) and as High Commissioner to Cyprus (2005–2010). Earlier in his diplomatic career, he held postings in Venezuela, Qatar, Brussels, and Athens.

Following his diplomatic service, Mr Millett now works as a consultant and serves as Chairman of the Libyan British Business Council.



- Türkiye's decisive intervention in Libya not only stabilised the conflict but also demonstrated a sophisticated integration of military capability, political strategy, and economic diplomacy. By aligning defence innovation with commercial and diplomatic outreach, Türkiye set a model of strategic engagement that others, including the United Kingdom, can learn from.
- The framework Türkiye applied in Libya, combining hard power with political and economic strategy, is now shaping its role in Syria and Gaza. This reflects Ankara's evolving foreign policy vision: using defence capacity not just for security, but to foster stability and influence across the wider Middle East.
- Türkiye's growing leadership in humanitarian response, from Gaza to Africa, highlights the importance of anticipating crises rather than simply reacting to them. By pairing strategic foresight with humanitarian engagement, Türkiye offers a model for how partners can work together to prevent conflict and promote lasting stability.

## Session 2

# Syria's New Dawn: Charting a Course for Reconstruction and Stability



### Moderator

**Jaffar Hasnain**, Presenter, TRT World

### Speakers

**Hamzah Almustafa**, Minister of Information, Syrian Arab Republic

**Houda Atassi**, Co-Founder and Chairwoman, International Humanitarian Relief

**Karla Quintana**, Assistant Secretary General, Head of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria, United Nations

**Talha Köse**, Professor; President, Turkish National Intelligence Academy

# Key Takeaways

- Syria's reconstruction hinges on national dialogue, inclusivity, and social reconciliation, rather than a security-first or top-down approach.
- Nation-building, state-building, and peace-building must proceed simultaneously. Prioritising one over the others risks reproducing the authoritarian patterns of the past.
- Syria's media landscape is undergoing a historic transformation, shifting from state-controlled broadcasting to a public-media model. More than 400 private and independent outlets have already been accredited, alongside 3,000+ foreign media delegations.
- The missing persons' issue lies at the heart of Syria's transition. Nearly every Syrian family has a missing relative; uncovering the truth is essential for justice, healing, and long-term peace.
- Truth-seeking, accountability, and transitional justice will define the country's future. The greatest challenge is building trust among families, civil society, the government, and international actors to share information and connect fragmented data systems.
- Civil society is evolving from a humanitarian relief actor into a key partner in development, governance, and national dialogue. Its role in reconciliation and identity-focused discussions is expanding significantly.
- Deep mistrust between communities fuelled by decades of regime-engineered divisions remains a major barrier to normalisation. Rebuilding inclusive political, social, and security institutions is critical to overcoming this legacy.
- The National Dialogue process has been one of the most inclusive in Syrian history, engaging over 40,000 Syrians across provinces, ethnicities, generations, and social groups, and forming the basis for the new constitution and government.

## Summary of the Session

The session "Syria's New Dawn: Charting a Course for Reconstruction and Stability" highlighted that Syria's transition cannot rely solely on security measures or institutional rebuilding. Instead, the country's future depends on cultivating inclusive national dialogue, societal reconciliation, and the rebuilding of trust across deeply fragmented communities. Speakers emphasised that nation-building, state-building, and peace-building must advance together; none can succeed in isolation. They noted that the Assad regime's long-standing strategy of exploiting sectarian and identity divisions created a structural legacy of mistrust, which now presents one of the most significant challenges to reconstruction.

A second central theme was the centrality of truth-seeking and the missing persons file. With

nearly every Syrian family affected, locating the missing is not only a humanitarian imperative but also foundational to justice, accountability, and sustainable peace. The session also underscored the rapid transformation of Syria's media ecosystem, moving toward a public-media model that welcomes pluralism, freedom of expression, and independent reporting. Civil society's expanding role, from relief provision to development, governance, and dialogue, was presented as a cornerstone of the new Syria. Ultimately, the speakers converged on a shared conclusion: Syria's reconstruction will succeed only if it is inclusive, participatory, and rooted in collective trust-building and transparency, supported by both national and international actors.

# Highlights

## Hamza Almustafa

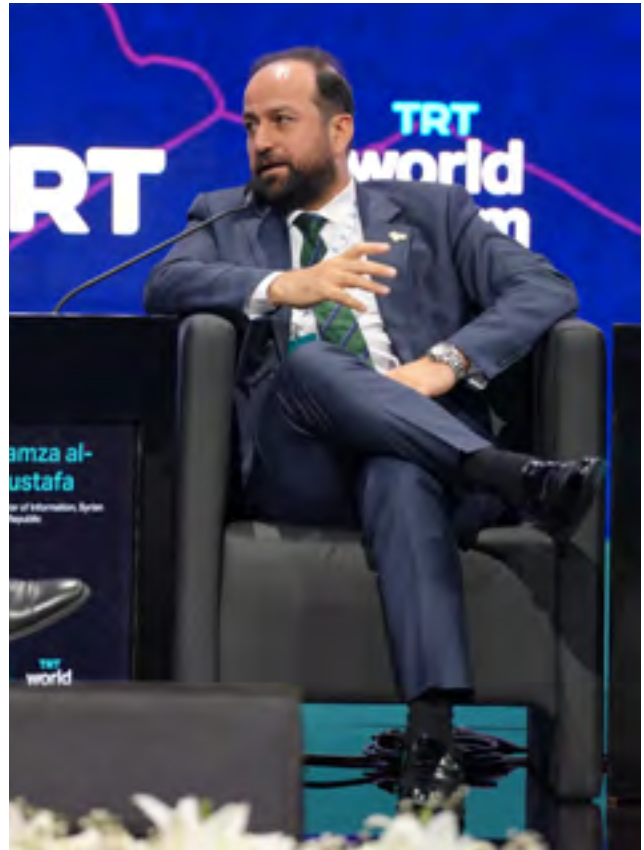
Minister of Information, Syrian Arab Republic

Hamzah Al-Mustafa is the Minister of Information in the Syrian Government led by President Ahmed Al-Shara. He is a former academic and media professional who previously served as Director-General of Syria TV.

Born in Hama in 1985, Al-Mustafa holds a B.A. in Political Science from Damascus University (2007), an M.A. in Political Science and International Relations from the Doha Institute (2017), and a Ph.D. in Social Sciences from the University of Exeter.

Before entering public service, he worked with the Sharq Center for Studies and Al-Watan newspaper, and at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, where he served as Managing Editor of Arab Policies. He was also Editorial Supervisor at Alaraby TV (2019–2020) and Director-General of Syria TV from 2020 to March 2025.

- During the years of conflict, the absence of an independent, objective media environment forced Syrians to rely almost entirely on social media to access news and share narratives. While this offered an outlet in the absence of state transparency, it also created fertile ground for misinformation, disinformation, and organized online manipulation. As we entered the transitional period, we were confronted with the immense challenge of rebuilding the information ecosystem from scratch. This is why one of our first priorities was transforming state-run media into a genuine public media system—one that reflects society in all its diversity, rather than simply broadcasting government narratives.
- Opening the media landscape has been a defining achievement of the new Syria. For the first time in decades, we established regulatory mechanisms that allow private, independent, and foreign media outlets to operate freely across the country. We have received over 600 applications for licensing and granted accreditation to more than 400 outlets in just nine months. Additionally, more than 3,000



foreign media delegations have visited and reported from Syria, enjoying full access to institutions and communities. This expansion of media freedom is not merely administrative; it reflects our commitment to safeguarding one of the core gains of the Syrian revolution—the right to speak, to question, and to hold institutions accountable.

- Inclusivity, national dialogue, and respect for diverse identities are principles that must guide not only political institutions but also the media sector. As part of this effort, we initiated the drafting of a comprehensive Code of Ethics rooted in dialogue with journalists, civil society, and professional associations. Our aim is to create a media environment where government, society, and even opposition voices can appear together, debate openly, and contribute to shaping the future. Public media should not serve as a mouthpiece for the state; it should reflect the full spectrum of Syrian perspectives. Only through such openness can the media play its rightful role in fostering unity, advancing reconciliation, and supporting a democratic transition.

## Houda Atassi

Co-founder and Director of International Humanitarian Relief

Huda Al-Atassi is a humanitarian leader and co-founder of International Humanitarian Relief (IHR), with extensive experience in civil society coordination, peacebuilding, and development across the Middle East. She has been instrumental in advancing humanitarian responses for women, children, and internally displaced persons in Syria and beyond. Ms. Al-Atassi serves as a member of the Syrian National Dialogue Committee and sits on the board of the Union of Local Federations of Syrian Civil Society Organizations (ULFED) in Türkiye. She previously led the Union of Syrian Civil Society Organizations (UCSCO), representing more than 150 member groups, and has actively participated in numerous UN-facilitated consultations on Syria's future. Her leadership and dedication to humanitarian action have been recognised internationally. She received the Arab Women's Leadership Award (2015, Washington, D.C.) and the Save the Children Honor (2014, London) for her outstanding contributions to humanitarian work.



- During the years of conflict, civil society became the lifeline for millions of displaced Syrians—providing education, healthcare, cultural support, and essential services that the state could no longer deliver. Today, in a liberated and more open Syria, its mission is even more significant. Civil society must move from emergency relief to shaping development, reconstruction, and institutional renewal. This transition requires a new vision and expanded capabilities, enabling civil society actors inside and outside the country to contribute collaboratively to rebuilding the social and political fabric of Syria.
- For the first time in six decades, Syrians experienced an open, transparent, and unrestricted national dialogue. Speaking with more than forty thousand people from different provinces, sects, communities, and age groups revealed something profound: what unites Syrians is infinitely greater than what divides them. This process resulted in key outcomes, including the Constitutional Declaration and the formation of the new government. Yet perhaps its greatest achievement was restoring Syrians' ability to speak freely about the future they want—an ability denied to them by authoritarian rule for generations.
- Despite attempts by past regimes and certain political actors to entrench sectarianism and deepen divisions, Syrians fundamentally see themselves as one people with a shared history of coexistence that stretches back centuries. The national dialogue reaffirmed that Syrians have no desire to replicate models of sectarian fragmentation seen elsewhere. Instead, they aspire to build a system grounded in inclusive citizenship, collective identity, and mutual respect. The unity we witnessed throughout the dialogue process demonstrates that the foundations for a cohesive national future are far stronger than the divisions imposed on Syrians over the past fifteen years.

## Karla Quintana

Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria, United Nations

Karla Quintana of Mexico was appointed by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres as Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic in December 2024, assuming office in January 2025. A distinguished human rights expert and legal scholar, Quintana has extensive experience in international human rights law, transitional justice, and constitutional law. As Mexico's former National Commissioner for the Search of Missing Persons, she led efforts to address more than 100,000 disappearance cases and over 70,000 unidentified bodies. She established the National Registry of Missing Persons and developed key public policies promoting fieldwork, forensic interventions, and family participation. Previously, Quintana served as Head of the Victims' Federal Public Defence, advancing access to justice and reparations for victims of crimes and human rights violations. She also worked at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, litigating cases before the Inter-American Court, and as an Anti-Corruption Investigator at the World Bank. Quintana holds a Doctorate in Law (SJD) from UNAM, an LL.M. from Harvard University, and a Master's in Gender Studies from the University of Barcelona. She is fluent in Spanish and English, with working knowledge of Italian and French.



- When we arrived in Syria after the fall of the regime, we realized an undeniable truth: every Syrian has someone missing. Whether you take a taxi, visit a restaurant, or walk through a neighbourhood, people now feel free for the first time to speak openly about their loved ones. This is not only a humanitarian tragedy—it is a national trauma woven into the daily life of the country. Seeking the missing is, at its core, a search for truth. And truth is indispensable for reconstruction, accountability, and genuine peace-building. Without it, no society can rebuild its institutions or heal its collective wounds.
- Looking for the missing is a profoundly collective endeavour. No single actor—neither the government, nor civil society, nor international organisations—holds all the pieces of this immense puzzle. Families possess stories, memories, and testimonies; authorities hold archives and official records; international organisations offer technical expertise and scientific tools. But none of these matters without trust. The greatest challenge we face in every country, and especially in Syria, is building

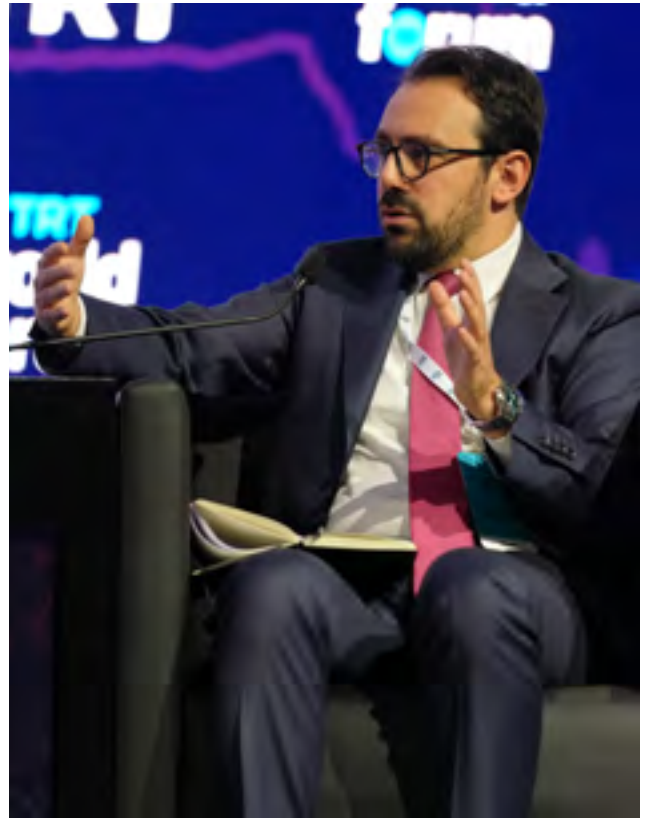
the trust required for these actors to share information, connect their systems, and work together. It is only through this unity of effort that we can hope to uncover the truth about the thousands who disappeared.

- The search for the missing is not simply a technical process—it is an ethical responsibility toward Syrians who endured unimaginable suffering. Displacement, poverty, trauma, and decades of repression have left many families without access to justice or support. As an independent institution, we place families at the centre of everything we do, because they were the ones who pushed the international community to act and ultimately created this mechanism. Today, Syrians are defining their own model of transitional justice, one that acknowledges their unique experiences and needs. Our role is to support them—inside and outside Syria—in their pursuit of truth, dignity, justice, and a future where no family must live with unanswered questions about their loved ones.

## Talha Köse

Professor; President, Turkish National Intelligence Academy

Professor Talha Köse is the President of the Turkish National Intelligence Academy. He previously served as Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Istanbul University and Ibn Haldun University, and as Director of the SETA Foundation's Brussels office. Dr Köse earned his PhD from the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR) at George Mason University in 2010, with a dissertation on the transformation of Alevi identity in post-1980 Türkiye. He was a research fellow at the Center for Global Islamic Studies at George Mason University and a visiting lecturer at both George Mason University and Maastricht University in the Netherlands. His research focuses on ethnic, sectarian, and identity-based conflicts; intercultural reconciliation; community mediation in Türkiye; Alevi issues; and conflict resolution approaches in foreign policy, particularly Turkish foreign policy.



- Achieving positive peace in Syria requires far more than restoring order or rebuilding state institutions from the top down. The real work lies in repairing the fractured social fabric and restoring trust among communities that were deliberately divided for decades. This can only be accomplished through an inclusive, bottom-up national dialogue that brings Syrians together to articulate shared norms, rebuild collective memory, and establish a foundation of legitimacy upon which the state can be reconstructed. Without this societal consent, any attempt at state-building risks reproducing the same authoritarian mistakes of the past.
- Syria faces three interconnected tasks: nation-building, state-building, and long-term peace-building, and none of them can be pursued in isolation. The country's institutions have been weakened, the bureaucracy fragmented, and the security sector hollowed out. At the same time, identity groups have been manipulated and turned against one another. If we prioritise only security or institutional reconstruction, we risk rebuilding an authoritarian system with little social legitimacy. A sustainable future requires synchronising these three agendas and grounding them in inclusive dialogue, consensus-building, and the participation of all segments of society.
- The deep divisions we see in Syria today did not emerge organically; they were engineered over generations—first through colonial policies, later through the Ba'ath regime's strategy of exploiting identity differences to consolidate power. These artificial divides were instrumentalised by various actors, including external powers, to maintain control and suppress dissent. Overcoming this legacy demands the creation of inclusive political, social, educational, and even military institutions that reflect the country's multicultural heritage rather than its imposed divisions. If Syrians can rebuild cross-cutting institutions rooted in trust and democratic participation, they can reverse decades of fragmentation and lay the groundwork for a unified, resilient nation.

## Session 3

# The Return of High-Stakes Diplomacy: Middle Powers and the Emerging Multipolar Order



### Keynote Speaker

**Hakan Fidan**, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Türkiye

### Moderator

**Adnan Nawaz**, Presenter, TRT World

### Speakers

**Akif Çağatay Kılıç**, Ambassador; Chief Advisor to the President on Foreign Policy and Security, Republic of Türkiye

**Amitav Acharya**, Distinguished Professor of International Relations, American University, Washington, D.C.

**Kılıç Buğra Kanat**, Professor, Penn State University; Research Director, SETA Foundation

**Thomas Greminger**, Director, Geneva Centre for Security Policy

**Thomas G. Weiss**, Presidential Professor Emeritus, Political Science; Director Emeritus, Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies, The CUNY Graduate Center

# Key Takeaways

- Middle powers derive influence from regional leadership Speakers stressed that today's middle powers—such as Türkiye, Indonesia, Brazil, and South Africa—are also regional powers whose ability to act globally depends on the strength of their regional legitimacy and networks.

- Middle powers bridge regional conflicts and global governance gaps With the UN Security Council increasingly paralysed, middle powers help connect regional conflict resolution with global stability through mediation, good offices, and flexible diplomacy.

- Historical legacies shape middle-power ambitions Many current middle powers were great powers or imperial centers in earlier eras, and this historical gravitas influences their diplomatic aspirations today.

Reforming multilateralism requires middle-power leadership and resources Middle powers can revitalise

- multilateral institutions by investing political capital, providing financial support, and stepping in when major powers withdraw or obstruct.

Access and expertise differentiate old vs. new mediators Traditional mediators (Norway, Switzerland) offer deep

- institutional experience, while emerging mediators (Türkiye, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia) bring superior political access and regional leverage. Their complementarity enhances global peacemaking.

Recent wars (Ukraine, Syria, Gaza) exposed the dysfunction of the current system These conflicts amplified public demands for reform, highlighted the UNSC veto problem, and pushed middle powers—especially

- Türkiye—to take more active roles in mediation and crisis diplomacy.

Türkiye exemplifies strategic balancing and practical diplomacy Türkiye's approach—maintaining dialogue with all sides, refusing sweeping sanctions, brokering the grain deal, yet taking clear positions when necessary—was

- repeatedly cited as a model of adaptive middle-power statecraft.

Growing global demand for conflict resolution creates new opportunities As conflicts multiply and global institutions stall, societies increasingly expect diplomatic solutions, creating space for middle powers to

- coordinate narratives, develop joint toolkits, and innovate new forms of mediation.



## Summary of the Session

The session “The Return of High-Stakes Diplomacy: Middle Powers and the Emerging Multipolar Order” emphasised the rising importance of middle powers in a global landscape marked by institutional paralysis and great-power rivalry. Speakers highlighted that middle powers such as Türkiye, Indonesia, Brazil, and South Africa draw strength from their regional influence, enabling them to act as bridges between local crises and global governance. Historical legacies also give these states diplomatic ambition and credibility. With the UN Security Council frequently gridlocked—especially evident in recent conflicts such as Ukraine, Syria, and Gaza—middle powers are increasingly serving as mediators, norm entrepreneurs, and advocates for institutional reform. Their ability to engage multiple sides without rigid alignment allows them to build consensus, facilitate dialogue, and sustain multilateral problem-solving where major powers fail.

Türkiye featured prominently as a case study of this rising diplomatic role. The speakers underscored its unique combination of regional access, political agility, and practical engagement—from closing the Turkish Straits during the Ukraine war to brokering the Black Sea grain deal while maintaining communication with both Kyiv and Moscow. This adaptability reflects a broader trend: public dissatisfaction with the existing international order is generating demand for conflict resolution and new diplomatic practices. Middle powers, with their growing expertise and ability to mobilise coalitions, are increasingly positioned to shape the future of global governance, propose reforms, and construct more resilient security architectures in an emerging multipolar environment.



# Keynote Speech by Hakan Fidan

## *Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Türkiye*

Hakan Fidan was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in Türkiye's latest Cabinet following the presidential elections on May 28, 2023.

Prior to his Cabinet appointment, he served as Director of the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) for 13 years, and briefly as its Deputy Director.

In other previous roles, Minister Fidan was Special Representative of the Prime Minister and the President, Member of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (2008-2010), and Deputy Undersecretary for Foreign Policy and Security of the Prime Minister (2007-2010). He also served as President of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) between 2003-2007.

He briefly taught at Bilkent and Hacettepe Universities.

Minister Fidan holds a bachelor's degree from University of Maryland University College in government and politics, and master's and PhD degrees in international relations from Bilkent University.

Born in Hamamönü, Ankara in 1968, he is married with three children.



Distinguished guests, esteemed participants,

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the TRT World Forum for providing this opportunity to address such a distinguished audience. The TRT World Forum has become one of the leading global platforms where issues shaping the international agenda can be discussed openly and constructively. More importantly, this forum provides us with a venue for unbiased discussion.

This is one of the things that we need very much these days. It is therefore once again to be here is a distinct honour and privilege for me. By taking this opportunity, I would like to briefly share with you our analysis of the current geopolitical context and our vision for the way forward. Last year at this very forum, some people might remember, I talked about our predictions on the intensification of strategic and geopolitical competition, increasing tensions, polarisation and failures of the international system.

Unfortunately, over the last year, what we witnessed, what we have seen, this analysis is only getting worse. The defining feature of today's international system, if we are to put it in a single word, certainly is uncertainty. Existing policies are shifting, and the parameters that once defined international politics have grown unpredictable. Global governance structures are losing functionality. Institutions created to maintain global stability and fairness are struggling to keep up with the speed and complexity of crises. The deepening set of paralysis of global order continues to erode trust in international institutions. This pushes nations towards unilateralism, creating a crisis of legitimacy in the global order.

Dear friends,

Behind the ongoing transformation lies a fundamental shift away from the unipolar world order, and what lies ahead will depend on whether we can build on multiple them or fall

back into destructive rivalries of unilateralism. Our vision is clear, we stand firmly on the side of cooperation, dialogue and inclusive multilateralism. In such turbulent times, our foremost duty is to uphold cooperation and solidarity for the common security and prosperity of future generations. The global challenges require collective action, shared responsibility and strategic foresight. We need to first and foremost revitalise a stronger, reformed international system based on global partnership and synergy.

This is the main remedy for effective global governance. To achieve that, we must restructure the international system along two main requisites. Reforming global institutions with a comprehensive and inclusive approach, and secondly, strengthening cooperation through regional ownership. The first requisite incorporates primarily the United Nations, which increasingly struggles to deliver on its founding promises while preserving the unique position of the United Nations.

We need to enhance its efficiency. The challenge we face today is not the absence of rules, but their unequal application. When principles are applied selectively, as you know, justice weakens, and legitimacy erodes. This is why reform is not a matter of preference. It's a moral and practical necessity. Türkiye, therefore, advocates a more democratic and representative UN Security Council that empowers the many rather than privileging the few.

A fairer regional representation would restore both legitimacy and vitality of the system. The fate of regional representation, therefore, is essential for our world. We must recognise that new centres of power and influence are emerging, and old hierarchies are being redefined. This transition, whether we define it as bipolar, multipolar, non-polar, multiplex, or polar-centric, it doesn't matter, reflects an international order still searching for its balance.

This should be understood as it is not a source of deepening confrontation, but as a basis for renewing multilateral cooperation and strengthening international institutions. Türkiye is working hard to manifest this through diverse voices, diplomacy and global engagement.

Dear guests, friends and esteemed participants,

The second requisite for the way forward toward a stronger and functioning international order is regional ownership, where multilateralism provides a framework for regionalism and ensures that the foundation crises do not arise in

a vacuum. They usually emerge from regional contexts and must be resolved through regional responsibility as solutions. When regional actors force the region and take real initiative, they generate trust, legitimacy and continuity across our neighbourhood. Türkiye has turned this principle into practice in the Balkans, for instance. We support reconciliation and dialogue among neighbours through the electoral and multilateral mechanisms, as well as mediation efforts in the South Caucasus.

We promote normalisation, connectivity and regional cooperation through inclusive platforms in the Middle East. We engage directly with partners to address security and humanitarian challenges. In the context of the Organisation of Turkic states, we, as you've been witnessing, deepen institutional cooperation among nations bound by shared history and geography. In Africa, we advance partnership

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**Our actions, grounded in multilateralism and regional ownership, will continue to shape the parameters of our shared future. These are not merely guiding principles, but practical instruments to ensure stability, justice, and prosperity in an evolving international landscape in the face of global challenges. Strengthening regional and international cooperation and forging genuine partnerships remains the only viable path in this regard. Türkiye will continue to uphold dialogue and diplomacy as a cornerstone of its foreign policy**

through development and capacity building based on mutual respect and shared benefit.

Each of these examples reflects the same conviction. Stability cannot be imposed. It must be cultivated. This is how we translate principles into outcomes by turning dialogue into trust and trust into stability. And once nations assume the responsibility for peace and prosperity in their own region, the global order grows even stronger through regenerated legitimacy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When these mechanisms falter, when justice becomes collective, and when accountability pays, the cost is never abstract. It is measured in human suffering, and this is the most visible in the Middle East. The erosion of legitimacy and paralysis of global governance have found the most tragic expression in Gaza. Guided by the moral and political vision articulated by President Erdogan, Türkiye has from the very outset undertaken intensive diplomatic efforts to stop the genocide and uphold justice.

We took the initiative to establish the OIC Arab League Contact Group. The contact group's efforts have significantly contributed to raising international awareness of the situation in Gaza. It has also played a crucial role in reversing longstanding one-sided positions, paving the way for advancing the recognition of a state of Palestine. This stands as a concrete example of how regional powers can develop solutions to crises in their own region and mobilise the international system toward action.

The meeting convened upon the initiative of President Erdan in New York on September 23rd between President Trump and the leaders of eight major countries is also a case in point. This dialogue in New York laid the groundwork for the consensus reached in Sharm el-Sheikh, marking an important step in the collective pursuit of peace. Although the ceasefire agreement remains fragile due to Israel's continuing aggression, it nevertheless offers a crucial opportunity to end the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

We must ensure its full implementation. At the same time, the ceasefire is certainly not an end in itself. It just, and lasting peace in the region can only be achieved through the realisation of a two-state solution. Therefore, in order to advance the momentum generated in Sharm el-Sheikh, we must make sure that Gaza is governed by Palestinians. The implementation of the process is carried out in a decisive

manner, with the active participation of all the relevant parties, as well as signatories.

The legitimacy and sustainability of the process are ensured through international institutions. Ladies and gentlemen, another example of Tunisia's critical contributions to regional and global peace and stability is our efforts to resolve the Russia-Ukraine War. As a country maintaining constructive dialogue with both sides, Türkiye has successfully facilitated a return to the negotiating table through the stomach process. Three rounds of talks produced tangible results, including prisoner exchanges and the reestablishment of direct dialogue between the parties. We firmly believe that diplomacy remains this whole a viable avenue toward a peaceful resolution in Ukraine. In this spirit, we reaffirm our readiness to host a fourth round of talks and a possible leaders' summit in Istanbul.

Esteemed participants,

Against this backdrop, our actions, grounded in multilateralism and regional ownership, will continue to shape the parameters of our shared future. These are not merely guiding principles, but practical instruments to ensure stability, justice, and prosperity in an evolving international landscape in the face of global challenges. Strengthening regional and international cooperation and forging genuine partnerships remains the only viable path in this regard. Türkiye will continue to uphold dialogue and diplomacy as a cornerstone of its foreign policy. We will continue to work with all partners who shared our vision of a fairer, more balanced and more representative international order with determination and responsibility. We will remain at the forefront of efforts to promote peace, stability and cooperation in our region and beyond.

Thank you for your attention.

# Highlights

## Akif Çağatay Kılıç

Ambassador, Chief Advisor to the President on Foreign Policy and Security, Republic of Türkiye

Akif Çağatay Kılıç studied economics and political science at the University of Hertfordshire in the UK. Following graduation, Kılıç held various positions in the private sector and served as an advisor and deputy chief of cabinet to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the current President of Türkiye.

He was elected as a Member of Parliament for Samsun Province in the 24th Parliamentary General Elections and has participated in numerous roles, including serving on the Turkish Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and as Chairman of the Türkiye-Germany Friendship Group.

Kılıç was appointed Minister of Youth and Sports in the 61st Government of Türkiye on December 25, 2013, and continued in this role under the 62nd and 63rd Governments. He was re-elected as an MP for Samsun in the 25th and 26th terms and served again as Minister until June 2017. In the 27th Parliamentary elections, Kılıç was elected from Istanbul Province and held various leadership positions, including Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. He is currently the Chief Advisor to the President and is fluent in German and English. Kılıç is married with two children.

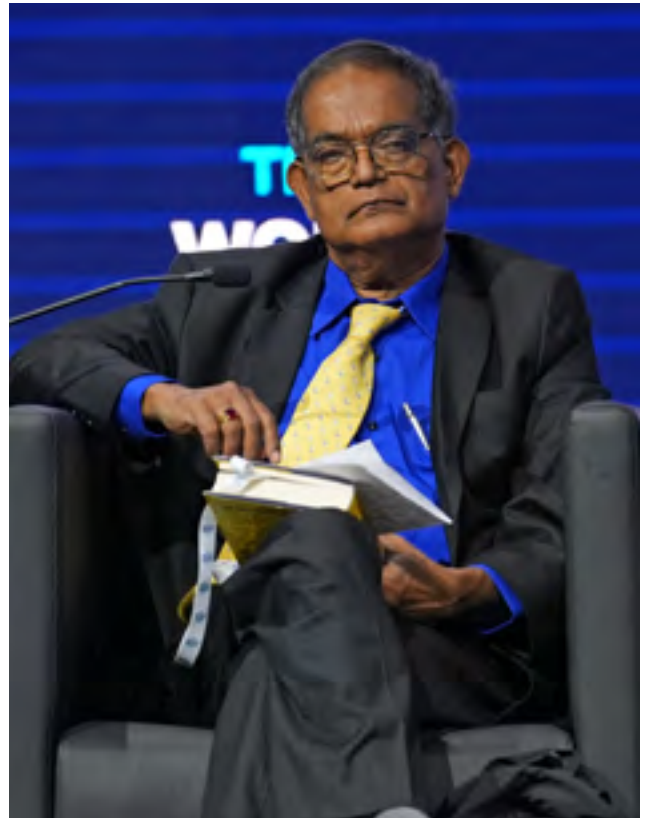
- 'The world is bigger than five' captures the global call for reform, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction with a static world order and the demand for structural change after decades of conflict.
- Successful mediation requires not only diplomatic effort but also a deep understanding of local social structures, historical context, and the lived realities of the societies involved.
- You make peace with your enemy. Although you may not accept certain things that have been done, the only way to stop the conflict is to get people to talk to each other—even if you sometimes have to swallow the hard pill.



## Amitav Acharya

Distinguished Professor of International Relations, American University, Washington, D.C.

Amitav Acharya is a Distinguished Professor and UNESCO Chair in Transnational Challenges and Governance at American University in Washington, DC. He previously held academic positions at York University (Toronto), the University of Bristol (UK), and was a Fellow at Harvard University's Asia Center and Kennedy School of Government, as well as a Christensen Fellow at Oxford University. Acharya served as President of the International Studies Association (ISA), the world's largest and most influential network for scholars of international affairs. He is the author of *The Once and Future World Order: Why Global Civilisation Will Survive the Decline of the West* (Basic Books). His writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Financial Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Foreign Policy*, among others. He is also a frequent commentator on international media outlets including BBC, CNN, CGTN, and Al Jazeera.



- Without the region, without taking the region with them, middle powers cannot do very much. What they do is bridge the regional–global divide, solving regional problems through mediation and good offices and contributing to global peace at a time when the UN Security Council is paralysed.
- Many middle powers today are great powers of yesterday. Türkiye was a great power; Indonesia had ancient empires. This is why they have ambition, because they were once great powers, and this is not a static concept.
- A classic example of what a middle power should do is to refrain from taking sides. You can be friends with China, and you can be friends with the U.S. You build consensus by not taking sides and by playing both sides on an equal footing, without calling names or pre-naming aggressors and victims.”



## Kılıç Buğra Kanat

Professor, Penn State University; Research Director, SETA Foundation

Kılıç Buğra Kanat is a Senior Fellow at TRT World Research Centre and the Research Director at the SETA Foundation, Washington, DC. He is also a Professor of Political Science at Penn State University, Erie, Pennsylvania. Kılıç Buğra Kanat was awarded the Outstanding Research Award and Council of Fellows Faculty Research Award at Penn State. He is the author of 'A Tale of Four Augusts: Obama's Syria Policy' (2015). He is co-editor of the edited volumes 'History, Politics and Foreign Policy in Turkey' (2011) and is a columnist.



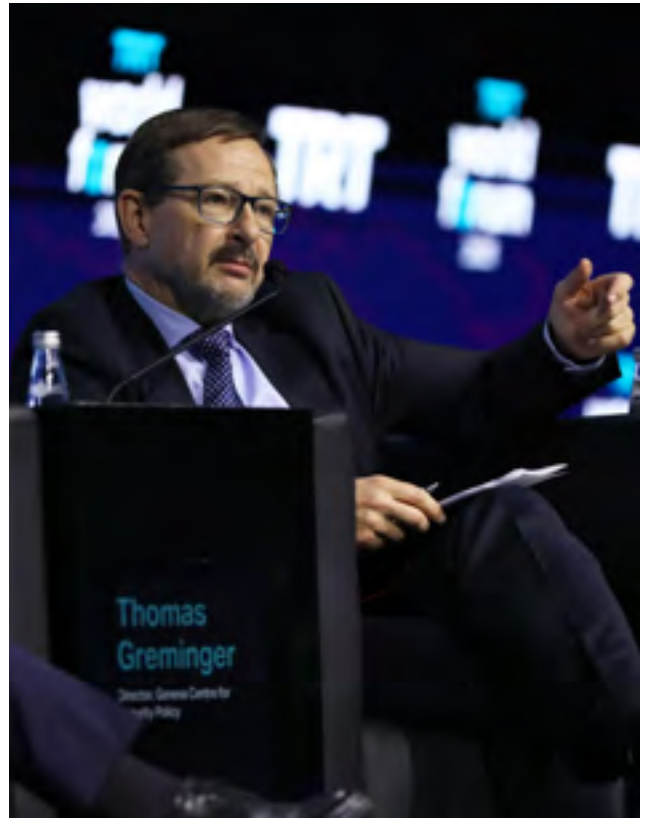
- The wars in Ukraine, Syria, and Gaza were the last nails in the coffin of extreme belief in the existing international system. At the public level, we see a surge in demands to fix the system.
- Balancing is strategic navigation; it needs skill, autonomy, self-confidence, and legitimacy. It is impossible to conduct these policies without credibility on the ground—the ability to build coalitions and bring warring parties together.
- There is now an increasing interest in conflict resolution, and countries with prior experience in mediation and facilitation should see this as an opportunity—to coordinate narratives, develop a policy kit, and understand how different conflicts require different tools.”



## Thomas Greminger

Director, Geneva Centre for Security Policy

Ambassador Thomas Greminger has served as Director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy since May 2021. From 2017 to 2020, he was Secretary General of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). As a career diplomat, he held various senior roles within Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, both in Bern and abroad. He holds a PhD in history from the University of Zurich and holds the military rank of Lieutenant Colonel (General Staff). Ambassador Greminger has published extensively on military history, conflict management, peacekeeping, development, and human rights.



- Middle powers play a crucial role in making multilateral systems fit for purpose, more efficient, and more effective, thereby enabling them to respond to global challenges.
- Neutral and non-aligned countries historically facilitated between superpowers, and today a new coalition of states is needed to assume a similar role in reconstructing European security.
- Complementarity among mediators lies in both access and expertise; expertise is built through decades of process knowledge, while access depends on personal relationships, regional influence, and strategic positioning.



## Thomas G. Weiss

Presidential Professor Emeritus, Political Science; Director Emeritus, Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies, The CUNY Graduate Center

Thomas G. Weiss is Presidential Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the City University of New York Graduate Center and Director Emeritus of its Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies. He is a Distinguished Fellow for Global Governance at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and a Global Eminence Scholar at Kyung Hee University in Korea.

A former Andrew Carnegie Fellow, Professor Weiss has served as President of the International Studies Association, Chair of the Academic Council on the United Nations System, Editor of *Global Governance*, and Research Director of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty.

Recipient of the International Studies Association's 2016 Distinguished IO Scholar Award, he has written extensively on international peace and security, humanitarian action, sustainable development, and the protection of cultural heritage.



- Paralysis in peacekeeping funding occurs when major powers significantly reduce the budget, highlighting the disproportionate control of the P5 over the UN's regular and peacekeeping budgets.
- Middle powers can dilute the influence of major powers by contributing more financially, which in turn could justify a greater voice in international decision-making.

- Pursuing initiatives like the International Criminal Court or landmine bans without the support of major powers has demonstrated that normative progress can be achieved and that middle powers have more room for manoeuvre than previously assumed.



## Session 4

# Journalism on the Frontlines: From Battlefield Risks to Algorithmic Suppression



### Keynote Speech

**Burhanettin Duran**, Professor; Head of Communications, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye

### Moderator

**Maria Ramos**, Presenter, TRT World

### Speakers

**Natalia Moseichuk**, Interviewer & Anchor for TSN; Author of the YouTube Project "Moseichuk+".

**Priyanka Navani**, International Correspondent, TRT World

**Sami Shehada**, Photojournalist, TRT Arabi

**Wael al-Dahdouh**, Director and Correspondent, Al Jazeera News Channel in Gaza

## Key Takeaways

- War reporting, while a fundamental pillar of public communication, has become increasingly perilous; protective gear like press vests and helmets no longer guarantee safety, with over 250 journalists reportedly killed in one specific conflict zone, Gaza.
- The digital age has introduced a subtle and powerful form of censorship, algorithmic suppression, where the truth can be buried by algorithms that hide, downgrade, or completely remove news stories and videos that reveal uncomfortable realities, creating a “digital dictatorship”.
- Modern “hybrid wars” go beyond traditional propaganda and news manipulation, turning truth itself into the primary target, where the message on a screen can be as dangerous as a weapon on the ground.
- Deliberate use of language and terminology is employed to shape perception, create sympathy for one side, and dehumanize the other (e.g., calling resistance “terror” and describing one group as “detainees” while the other are “hostages”).
- Panellists from conflict zones shared harrowing personal testimonies of loss, including Al Jazeera’s Wael Al-Dahdouh, who lost multiple family members, and TRT’s Sami Shehada, who lost a leg while reporting, yet remain committed to the truth.
- Journalists in Gaza face a unique struggle because they cover events within the tiny, densely populated area where they and their families live, forcing them to simultaneously seek security, information, and basic necessities like food and water.
- Journalists are adopting innovative methods to bypass suppression, such as Ukrainian reporters opening their own YouTube channels or featuring soldiers as journalists on air to maintain public resilience and share battlefield realities.
- There is a necessity to stand united in combating fake news, disinformation, and algorithmic suppression in the face of an emerging “military informational complex” formed by certain social media platforms, genocidal states, and technology companies. Türkiye’s Communication Directorate is working to establish an “infrastructure of truth” to ensure algorithmic justice.

## Summary of the Session

The session “Journalism on the Frontlines: From Battlefield Risks to Algorithmic Suppression” brought together frontline reporters and media leaders to expose the escalating dangers faced by journalists in modern war zones. Speakers emphasised that in today’s hybrid conflicts, truth itself is under attack, with journalists deliberately targeted on the ground and simultaneously silenced online through algorithmic suppression. From Gaza to Ukraine to Lebanon, panellists described how traditional protections such as press vests, media offices, or international norms have evaporated. They underscored a global trend where digital platforms, state actors, and military forces shape what the world sees—often burying evidence of atrocities.

Testimonies from Wael al-Dahdouh, Sami Shehada, Natalia Moseichuk, and Priyanka Navani illustrated the profound personal toll of this work: family members killed, limbs lost, colleagues tortured or disappeared, and newsrooms destroyed. Yet, each speaker reaffirmed their commitment to continue reporting as an act of responsibility to their people and to global public consciousness. Despite exhaustion, grief, and life-threatening conditions, they stressed the moral obligation to remain witnesses, asserting that without their work, crimes would go unseen and unpunished. The session concluded with a call for global solidarity, structural media reform, and stronger safeguards to ensure journalists can continue delivering uncensored truth from the frontlines.

# Keynote Speech by Burhanettin Duran

*Professor; Head of Communications,  
Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*

Prof. Burhanettin Duran was appointed Head of Communications of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye in July 2025. He is also a member of the Presidential Security and Foreign Policy Council, a position he has held since 2018. A distinguished scholar of political science and international relations, Prof. Duran earned his PhD from Bilkent University and his B.A. from Boğaziçi University. Over his academic career, he has served at Sakarya University, Istanbul Şehir University, Ankara Social Sciences University, and Ibn Haldun University, and was a visiting scholar at George Mason University.

Prof. Duran previously served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and as General Coordinator of the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA). His research focuses on Turkish foreign policy, Turkish political thought, democratisation, and transformations in the Middle East and Europe. He is the author and editor of numerous books and articles in leading journals, including *Middle Eastern Studies* and *The Muslim World*, and co-editor of volumes such as *Türkiye's Vision for Its New Century* and *The AK Party Years in Türkiye*.

Distinguished participants, members of the press,

I welcome you all once again to the TRT World Forum. I'm delighted to be here with you for this session titled "Journalism on the Frontlines". In this session, we will be discussing the challenges of war journalism. We listen to reporters who have bravely confronted them on the ground and risked their lives for the truth.

We are very pleased and honoured to have you all here. The current challenges of war reporting have never been more important. We wanted to ensure that this international forum, TRT World Forum, addresses the struggles of war journalists. We should also be humbled by their experience, and we still have a lot to learn from them. I look forward to listening to these courageous reporters who carry the marks and memories of the frontlines.



As you might all know, war journalism is among the most fundamental pillars of public communication today. It documents facts, offers context and helps us make sense of what's going on and when Violence obscures the truth in the most difficult times, such as those days. We are living through an increasingly unpredictable and dangerous era in which conventional conflict has returned.

The international order established after two world wars is now crumbling. It is a particularly perilous environment for our colleagues reporting from the conflict zones. Some of the most influential countries now declare the peace interval to be over. Now they are revising their defence budgets and threat perceptions, and with the expectation that there will be a war. Film producers ten years ago focused on fictional themes such as aliens and superheroes; now they are reintroducing the reality of conventional warfare. War, whichever side you are inevitably brings tragedy. Gaza, Ukraine, Kashmir, Syria, Sudan, all of these regions are just some of those that have endured the most ruthless face of conflict in recent memory. Seeking meaningful solutions to

crises with global implications is essential for humanity's welfare. The destructive power of modern technology means that even victors are never truly triumphant.

Destruction, loss, and trauma linger through generations. Please allow me to recall the words of our president, His Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has spared no effort to resolve regional and global issues and assumed every responsibility for peace. "No one can afford to ignore a problem, anywhere in the world, abstain from contributing to its solution, or postpone their contribution. For the sake of humanity's common future, everyone is obliged to shoulder responsibility." Guided by this understanding, we strive sincerely to fulfil our responsibility in regional and global affairs.

Distinguished participants,

There is an often-repeated truth about war. In war, the first casualty is the truth. Propaganda, counterpropaganda and news manipulations have accompanied warfare throughout history, but today's hybrid wars go much further. Truth has become a target. The message on a screen can now be as powerful and as dangerous as a weapon on the ground. We have all witnessed how some countries are using this information to shape perceptions and also hide facts, sometimes even denying images of starving infants in Gaza as mere fabrications. To kill the truth is to normalise and legitimise massacres, genocides, occupations and destruction. War reporters document cruelty and courage, oppression and resistance, helplessness and loss. Actually, they stand as critical pillars of global conscience and a sense of justice in the world. A war journalist's tools are a camera, a pen, a press vest, and a helmet. All of them represent courage and dedication. We have seen that all of them were part of courage in Gaza.

Yet, as we all know, they no longer guarantee safety. We still remember the Palestinian reporter in Gaza who took off his press vest and said during a live broadcast. "These do not protect us." Sadly, this was not an exaggeration. Unfortunately, more than 250 journalists have been deliberately targeted and killed by Israeli forces during this two-year-long genocide.

When truth becomes a target, those who tell the truth become targets, too. We saw this before in Rwanda, in Bosnia, and of course in Gaza. It was also war journalists who helped the world see the reality of genocides, and whose

reports later served as key evidence in international trials. I remember with mercy and salute those journalists who gave their lives in pursuit of the truth. May their souls rest in peace in heaven. And also, I thank the journalists here today who, despite extreme circumstances, continue to report on Gaza's reality and defend the public's right to know. They have been successful in drawing global attention to the genocide they witnessed. The international community, though quite late, has finally recognised Gaza's honourable resistance and legitimate cause. Many countries have even begun to support it. This awakening was possible with the courageous activities of the journalists. You all know the honourable example of the Palestinian journalist Saleh al-Jafarawi. His media account, which had millions of followers, was promptly deactivated following his death. The massacre of journalists' only sin was calling out Israel's war crimes on their social media accounts. He sacrificed his life and was silenced by the oppressors. But his example lives on. Silencing his account was an attempt to silence the truth itself. And this brings us to the new and dangerous form of censorship we call algorithmic suppression. In the digital era, the truth can be booted not by bullets, but by algorithms. News stories, photos, and videos that reveal uncomfortable realities can be hidden, downgraded, and completely removed from visibility. A story may technically exist online, but no one ever sees it. This is a subtle and powerful form of control, a kind of digital dictatorship. It decides what the world sees and what it ignores.

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**There is an often-repeated truth about war. In war, the first casualty is the truth. Propaganda, counterpropaganda and news manipulations have accompanied warfare throughout history, but today's hybrid wars go much further. Truth has become a target. The message on a screen can now be as powerful and as dangerous as a weapon on the ground.**

Distinguished guests.

For years, traditional media monopolies manufactured consent by distorting the truth to fit their political objectives. Now, powerful media organisations seek to preserve their dominance over the narrative by attempting to re-establish in the digital sphere the information hierarchies they built in the traditional media.

We have all seen how language is used to shape perception. When Israel attacks, it is called self-defence. When Palestinians resist occupation, it is called terror. Palestinians who are imprisoned or tortured are described as detainees, while Israelis held in conflict or hostages. When Palestinians were killed, the reports say they died. When Israelis die, the reports say they were killed. These words are not random. Actually, they create sympathy for one side and dehumanise the other.

Distinguished participants, governments, civil society, media organisations, and journalists have begun to discuss how we should respond to this algorithmic suppression. At a time when technological progress, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence, is advancing at an unprecedented pace, we must stand united in combating fake news, disinformation, and algorithmic suppression. In the face of an emerging military informational complex formed by certain social media platforms, genocidal states and technology companies, every actor bears significant responsibility. As the Communication Directorate, we are working to establish an infrastructure of truth to ensure algorithmic justice. Türkiye will be at the forefront of the fight to safeguard the truth, strengthen social resilience against fake news through media literacy and increase public awareness. I truly believe that a fairer and more truthful media world can only be built by communicators who are dedicated to honesty and humanity.

I know that it's not an easy mission, but it's a necessary one because only when truth survives, can justice prevail. Meanwhile, our journalists and war correspondents will continue to bring the realities of the field to the light and employing information shields against the weapons of disinformation through verification networks. Today, among us, journalists who have reported from Gaza, Ukraine and Lebanon, among others, they are bearing witness to wars and human tragedies.

Wael Al-Dahdouh, Al Jazeera's Gaza bureau chief, has both endured and documented Israel's atrocities as a Palestinian and as a journalist. Many members of his family, including his children and even his grandchildren, were killed in Israeli attacks. Sami Shehada, TRT Arabic's photojournalist and cameraman, was wounded and lost his leg while reporting on Israel's assaults against civilians. Despite the unbearable weight of such personal losses, they never wavered in their commitment to journalism and the truth. Yet they and many other fearless journalists continue to face censorship and algorithmic suppression when attempting to share their testimonies with the world.

Distinguished guests,

The circumstances we have discussed compel us to reconsider the extreme injustices in the global media order, including the digital sphere. As the Directorate of Communications, we view the establishment of a fair, conscientious and pluralistic media system as a necessity. The Century of Türkiye vision, put forward by our President, promotes a global media order centred on truth, justice and humanitarian values. In line with this vision, we are making every effort across our institutions. We also regard every journalist who upholds ethical and moral principles as a valued partner in this endeavour. I hope that this forum will give productive results in the communication field and I extend my deepest gratitude to the TRT family, the panellists and all the participants.

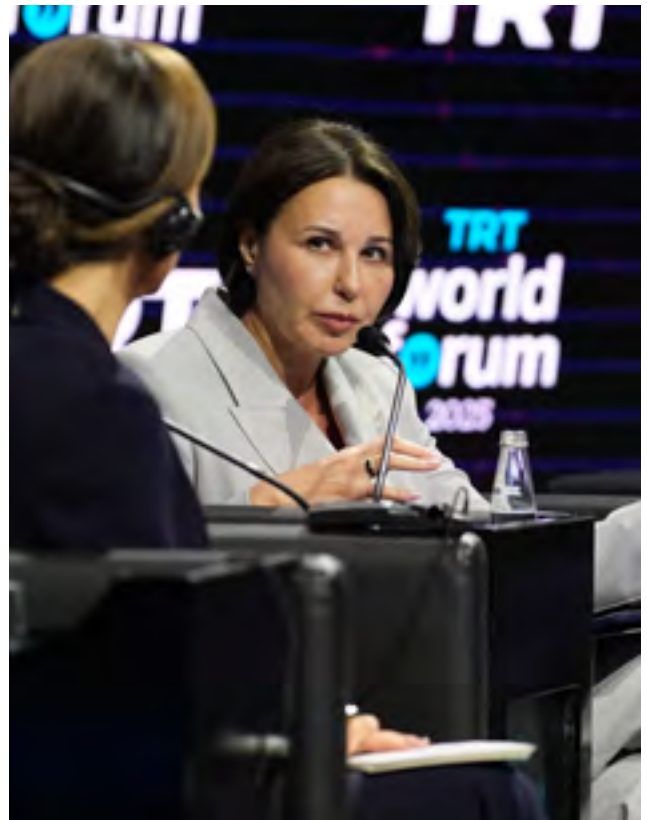
Thank you very much.

# Highlights

## Natalia Moseichuk

Interviewer & Anchor for TSN; Author of the YouTube Project "Moseichuk+"

Natalia Moseichuk is a leading Ukrainian journalist, interviewer, and anchor for 1+1's TSN, as well as the creator of the YouTube project Moseychuk+. With over 30 years in television, she is one of the country's most respected media figures, known for her focus on politics and international affairs. A two-time winner of the National Teletriumph Award (2013, 2018), Natalia was also awarded the Order of Princess Olga, III Class, in 2022. Since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, she has expanded her work to digital media, with her YouTube interviews surpassing 171 million views. Her guests include the presidents of Ukraine, France, and Poland; the founders of Baykar and developers of the Bayraktar UAV; top Ukrainian military commanders; and members of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council. Due to her reporting on Russian war crimes, Natalia was sentenced in absentia by the Russian Federation to five years in prison. Beyond journalism, Natalia actively supports education and humanitarian causes. She chairs the board of the Superhero School, curates the Global Teacher Prize Ukraine, and serves as an ambassador for the Iskra Dobra charity and the Foodtruck – Food Without Borders initiative.



- War is, in many ways, black and white. The aggressor in war is the enemy, and the victim can be any of us. Yet there are no rules in war, especially for journalists.
- This experience is part of a new reality with an old name: hell. Journalists are primary targets in this hell because we witness the crimes with our own eyes. That is why we are targets.
- We continue to tell our stories. At the start of the full-scale invasion I opened a YouTube channel to speak with our people, sustain their resilience, and explain what is happening... Ukrainian soldiers speak about the situation on the battlefields; they have become reporters in their own right.



## Priyanka Navani

International Correspondent, TRT World

Priyanka Navani is an international correspondent with TRT World, based in Istanbul. She has reported from more than a dozen countries, including Afghanistan during the rise of the Taliban and eastern Libya during the devastating floods of 2023. In 2024, she was the only English-language journalist to cover the full-scale, two-month Israel–Hezbollah war from South Lebanon. Priyanka Navani is an international correspondent with TRT World. Based in Istanbul, she has reported from over a dozen countries, notably Afghanistan during the rise of the Taliban and Eastern Libya during devastating floods in 2023. In 2024 was the only English-language journalist to cover the entire full-scale, two-month Israel-Hezbollah war from South Lebanon. She holds a Master’s degree from the London School of Economics. In her free time, Priyanka enjoys travelling with her husband, Nader, and spending time in the mountains of Lebanon, a country she proudly calls home.



- Every single Lebanese journalist would tell you that everything we learn and the bravery that we have is from Gazan journalists... that bravery, knowledge, and the resilience that the journalists in Gaza have has certainly carried over to other parts of the world.
- The moment you lose the emotion of sitting next to a man who has lost his leg, sitting next to a man whose entire family has been killed, sitting next to a woman who has been sentenced by Russia, that is when you lose the connection to your career.
- The reality is that while not on the same magnitude at all, Israeli tactics exist in other places than Gaza, and it is so important to shine a light on the massacres, the Israeli massacres that are happening in other parts of the world, where they are still killing journalists.



## Sami Shehada

Photojournalist, TRT Arabi

Sami Shehada is a veteran Palestinian photojournalist and cameraman with TRT Arabic. He began his career as a photographer in Gaza in 2008 and has since documented every major conflict to strike the Gaza Strip, including the wars of 2008, 2012, 2014, 2021, and the war that began on October 7, 2023. Through his camera, Shehada has captured the devastation and human suffering caused by war, often risking his life to show the reality on the ground. On April 12, 2024, while covering Israeli attacks on civilians in the Nuseirat Camp, Shehada was seriously injured when a tank shell struck him, even though he was wearing full press identification. The explosion resulted in the amputation of his leg. He remained conscious throughout the ordeal and narrowly survived after emergency surgery. After being prevented from travelling for more than a year, he was eventually able to leave Gaza for Türkiye, where, with the support of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and TRT, he continues his medical treatment.

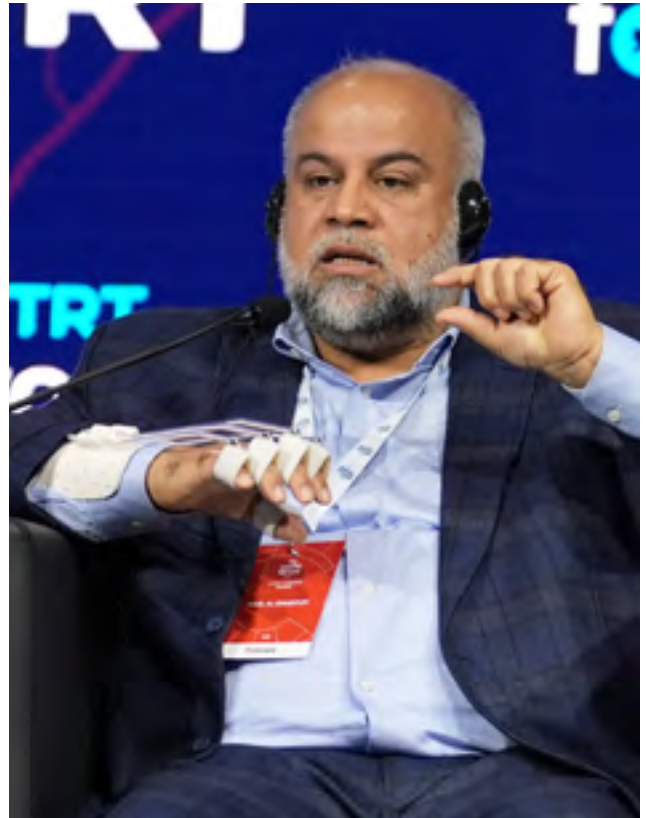
- For a moment, I hesitated between leaving work to go to my family or continuing my duty and arranging for them to get out. I called my wife and told her I would send a car to evacuate her while I stayed in the field. This is what it is like to be a Palestinian journalist.
- The camera is part of a photographer's life, so even then I asked, "Where is my camera?". I had carried my severed leg with me when I crawled ... The first thing I begged the doctor was, 'Please, return my leg'.
- We wore flak jackets, helmets, press markings, and even the car was clearly marked so everyone could see we were journalists. As soon as we arrived in an open area, we were targeted by a tank shell... The missile landed about two meters from me. Shrapnel severed my leg instantly.



## Wael al-Dahdouh

Director and Correspondent, Al Jazeera News Channel in Gaza

Wael Al-Dahdouh is a Palestinian journalist and Al Jazeera's bureau chief in Gaza, with over 27 years of experience covering Gaza and occupied Palestine. He is a veteran, award-winning journalist recognised for his dedication and courage in reporting under extremely challenging circumstances. Wael has endured profound personal loss while continuing his work. Numerous members of his family were killed by Israeli airstrikes, including his wife, infant grandson, young children, and several relatives, during the attack on the Nuseirat refugee camp on 25 October 2023. On 15 December 2023, while reporting near Haifa School in Khan Younis with cameraman Samer Abu Daqqa, they were struck by an Israeli missile; Abu Daqqa was killed, and Wael sustained serious injuries. His eldest son, journalist Hamza Al-Dahdouh, was later killed by an airstrike in Khan Younis on 7 January 2024. Despite these tragedies, Wael has become widely recognised for his resilience and determination to continue reporting, earning him the nicknames "the Mountain of Gaza" and "the Jacob of his era." He has been honoured by numerous institutions and publications as Person of the Year for 2023–2024. In recognition of his extraordinary courage and commitment to press freedom, Wael received the 2024 John Aubuchon International Press Freedom Award from the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. He has also been honoured by Reporters Without Borders, Amnesty International, and other esteemed organisations worldwide.



- Being a journalist in the Gaza Strip specifically is different from being a journalist anywhere else. It means you are facing a profession fraught with difficulties, and sometimes even creating difficulties. But when you are a journalist in the Gaza Strip, it necessarily means you are risking your life and continuing this mission.”
- It's not easy to reconcile being a journalist with being a father, a grandfather, a brother, a relative, or anything like that. It's not easy to find a moment when you're trying so hard to be professional and maintain the highest standards of professionalism in such a sensitive time. But suddenly you find yourself forced to become part of these events. Part of this annihilation.
- But the only great consolation is that we survived and are sitting here before you today, just to share with you a few words about what we have endured and the painful price we have paid... Therefore, ensuring justice for them is absolutely essential and must be everyone's responsibility. And I believe it is our responsibility as human beings to work towards holding accountable those responsible for all this suffering and pain.

## Session 5

# Beyond Techno-Feudalism: Democratising AI Innovation, Governance and Access



### Keynote Speaker

**Mehmet Fatih Kacır**, Minister of Industry and Technology, Republic of Türkiye

### Moderator

**Matthew Moore**, Presenter, TRT World

### Speakers

**Belen Sanz Luque**, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, UN Women

**Ejup Maqedonci**, Minister of Defence, Republic of Kosovo

**Kenzo Fujisue**, Professor at Keio University, Visiting Professor at the Technical University of Munich, Adjunct Professor at the India Institute of Technology, Former State Minister of Communication, and Former Senator of Japan

**Tommaso Valletti**, Professor of Economics, Imperial College Business School

## Key Takeaways

- Artificial intelligence has become the defining force behind national competitiveness, independence, and global influence, transforming from a tool of innovation into a determinant of sovereignty.
- A handful of U.S. and Chinese tech giants dominate the AI ecosystem, from chips and models to data and cloud, creating monopolistic control that marginalises smaller nations and innovators.
- The session stressed the urgent need for an inclusive, human-centred, and ethical AI framework that safeguards cultural diversity, ensures transparency, and prevents algorithmic bias.
- Türkiye's National Technology Initiative aims to anchor AI development in justice and responsibility, expanding compute infrastructure, education, and national data capacity to lead as a developer, not merely a consumer.
- Speakers urged governments to treat AI infrastructure as essential public utilities, requiring proactive regulation, interoperability, and publicly accountable innovation ecosystems.
- Women remain disproportionately excluded from the digital economy and AI workforce, reinforcing existing inequalities through biased data, design, and online abuse.
- Because AI's raw material is data rather than physical resources, smaller countries can participate meaningfully if they invest early in governance, standards, and domestic capabilities.
- Middle powers such as Türkiye, Japan, and South Korea can forge regional alliances to diversify AI development and balance U.S.–China dominance.

## Summary of the Session

The session “Beyond Techno-Feudalism: Democratising AI Innovation, Governance, and Access” examined how artificial intelligence is reshaping global hierarchies and creating new dependencies in technological power. It emphasised that AI has evolved from a tool of innovation into a central force defining national independence and competitiveness. Participants discussed the urgent need for human-centred and ethical governance models that ensure AI development remains inclusive, transparent, and culturally diverse. Türkiye's National Technology Initiative was highlighted as an example of a comprehensive strategy that seeks to balance innovation with responsibility, expanding national computing capacity, education, and data infrastructure to position the country as a producer of AI technologies rather than a passive consumer.

The discussion further explored how concentrated ownership of AI infrastructure risks creating a “digital feudalism,” where access to essential innovation inputs such as chips, data and cloud systems is restricted by monopolistic players. Speakers underscored that treating AI infrastructure as a public utility could help democratise innovation and protect smaller states from dependency. The conversation also addressed gender inequality in the digital economy, noting that exclusion from AI development perpetuates systemic bias. Participants argued that smaller and mid-sized nations can still play a meaningful role by investing early in governance, ethical frameworks and regional cooperation. The session concluded that true democratisation of AI requires collective leadership uniting regulation, inclusion, and technological capacity to ensure that intelligence serves humanity rather than hierarchy.

# Keynote Speech by Mehmet Fatih Kacir

## *Minister of Industry and Technology, Republic of Türkiye*

Mehmet Fatih Kacir served as the Deputy Minister of Industry and Technology, appointed on July 31, 2018, through a Presidential Decree. In this role, he was responsible for overseeing the National Technology Move and strategic transformation policies within the ministry. During his tenure as Deputy Minister, Kacir assumed various critical roles, including chairing the TEKNOFEST Executive Board, leading the Steering Committee of the DENEYAP Turkey project, and heading the Technology-Oriented Industry Move Program Committee. He also played a crucial role in the development of the Research Infrastructure Monitoring and Competence Evaluation Committee and chaired the National Technology Entrepreneurship Council. Before his role as Deputy Minister, Kacir actively participated in non-governmental organizations, serving as the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Turkey Technology Team Foundation (T3 Foundation). He played a significant role in the establishment of initiatives such as DENEYAP Technology Workshops, the Future Technology Stars Program for exceptionally talented students, Science Centers, Entrepreneurship Centers, and the renowned Aviation, Space, and Technology Festival, TEKNOFEST.



Distinguished Participants, Esteemed Guests,

It is a great honour to address you at TRT World Forum 2025, a globally recognised platform where ideas meet action and dialogue shapes the future. Since its foundation, the Forum has become a vital arena for policymakers, scholars, and thought leaders to exchange perspectives on the challenges that define our age. Today, as global challenges grow increasingly interconnected and more complex, such dialogues are not merely valuable — they are indispensable.

Dear Guests,

Technology has become the defining language of our age. It is rewriting the rules of the economy, industry and even human interaction. As the pace of innovation accelerates, the stakes grow higher. Technology now not only defines a nation's competitiveness but also its independence, prosperity and resilience. Therefore, what once was a race for innovation

has now become a battle for technological power. At the very heart of this transformation lies artificial intelligence.

More than a decade ago, the phrase "software is eating the world" captured the rise of the digital age. Today, that statement has taken on a new meaning: AI is eating the world. With its rapidly growing capacity to process data and deliver deep analytical insight, AI is driving transformation across an extraordinary range of fields. It has become one of the most powerful engines of innovation, productivity, and global competitiveness. For governments, AI offers a historic opportunity to design smarter public services, strengthen strategic foresight, and make data-driven decisions that improve citizens' lives. For businesses, it opens the door to new models of value creation by increasing efficiency, enhancing quality, and enabling innovation on a scale never seen before.

Yet beyond these achievements lies an even greater responsibility: to ensure that this technological revolution remains human-centred, inclusive, and ethical. The development of artificial intelligence today is steered by a small number of global tech giants whose ambitions are often guided by profit and market competition. Their market dominance and soaring valuations are clear indicators of the growing concentration of digital power.

Aside from this, there is a growing divide between the United States, China, and the rest of the world in AI development and deployment. As the relationship between technology corporations and public authorities has grown deeply interdependent, governments increasingly shape AI markets through policy and export control. On the other hand, corporate capabilities themselves are becoming instruments of statecraft and geopolitical negotiation. AI is no longer merely a tool of innovation, but a lever of power in international relations. This global order risks marginalising

many nations in an AI-driven future, leaving them without a voice in shaping the global AI landscape.

There is an urgent need for a more balanced, inclusive and collaborative global ecosystem where technology connects nations instead of dividing them. Unfortunately, the world has not yet established an inclusive framework to ensure that artificial intelligence is developed and used in a safe, fair and responsible way, accessible and beneficial to all. Even when humanity faces deep moral crises, such as the tragedy we have witnessed in Gaza, the world cannot show a united stance. If we cannot find consensus on the value of human life itself, how can we expect to agree on the ethical limits of artificial intelligence? Yet the absence of unity does not mean the risks are fading. AI now has the power to manipulate what we see, what we believe, and even what we feel. Deep fakes, synthetic media, and biased algorithms blur the line between truth and illusion, between justice and justification. Many widely used AI models fail to understand the nuances of different languages and cultures. This not only leads to cultural erosion, but also to a silent form of digital domination — where some voices are amplified, and others are erased. Our collective response will determine whether artificial intelligence advances global welfare or deepens existing divides.

Turning away from its rapid development is not a solution. What we need now is to guide this technology with wisdom, responsibility and a shared sense of humanity. Our collective responses will also determine whether AI becomes a tool for empowerment and progress or a mechanism of control and exclusion. Under the National Technology Move, we are committed to guiding the artificial intelligence revolution for the benefit of humanity, grounded in the principles of justice, compassion and responsibility. At the same time, we are determined to turn this transformation into an opportunity for our nation by strengthening our technological capacity. We are aligning our production systems, education policies and technology infrastructure with this vision.

Within this framework, we established the Artificial Intelligence Institute under the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye, TÜBİTAK, to advance cutting-edge research, drive innovation and strengthen cooperation between academia, industry and government. We firmly

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**Technology has become the defining language of our age. It is rewriting the rules of the economy, industry and even human interaction. As the pace of innovation accelerates, the stakes grow higher. Technology now not only defines a nation's competitiveness but also its independence, prosperity and resilience. Therefore, what once was a race for innovation has now become a battle for technological power. At the very heart of this transformation lies artificial intelligence.**

believe that Türkiye's ability to reap the benefits of the AI revolution lies in its young people. Under major initiatives such as TEKNOFEST, the world's largest aerospace and technology festival, Deneypap Technology Workshops and the Sector on Campus program, we equip our youth with the skills required for the age of artificial intelligence.

We understand that robust and advanced data processing infrastructure is fundamental to the successful development and deployment of AI technologies. Through the ARF Supercomputer and the expanding TRUBA – Türkiye National Science e-Infrastructure, as well as our participation in the EU MareNostrum 5 Consortium, we are enhancing our computational power and accelerating ground-breaking projects in science and engineering. We have also launched two major initiatives to accelerate this transformation. Through the HIT Data Centre Call, we will support the establishment of new-generation data centres in Türkiye. We will expand our national data centre capacity from 250 megawatts today to 1 gigawatt by 2030.

In parallel, the HIT Artificial Intelligence Call will scale our AI compute capacity. It will speed up digital transformation across all domains, from industry and finance to health care and public service. By fostering large-scale AI and cloud investments, we aim to ensure that Türkiye becomes a leading developer, not only a consumer, of artificial intelligence technologies. At the same time, we are committed to building a global governance framework that places ethics, transparency and accountability at its core, guiding how AI is developed and deployed. In this spirit, we look forward to working with partner nations to create AI solutions that reflect diversity, respect cultural nuances and serve the needs of a truly global society.

Distinguished Participants,

As we look toward the future, we must ensure that artificial intelligence does not become an instrument of domination, but a force for empowerment and equality. We cannot allow technology to create new hierarchies of power where a few control the data, the algorithms, and ultimately, the destiny of humanity. The future we design with artificial intelligence will mirror the intentions we embed within it. If we guide it with greed, it will divide us. If we guide it with wisdom, it will unite us. Let us build an AI-driven future that strengthens

democracy, protects freedom, and serves humanity. A future not ruled by machines, but shaped by conscience, collaboration, and courage. As I conclude my remarks, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed to the realisation of TRT World Forum 2025, and to all participants who continue to enrich this global dialogue with their insight and vision.

Thank you.



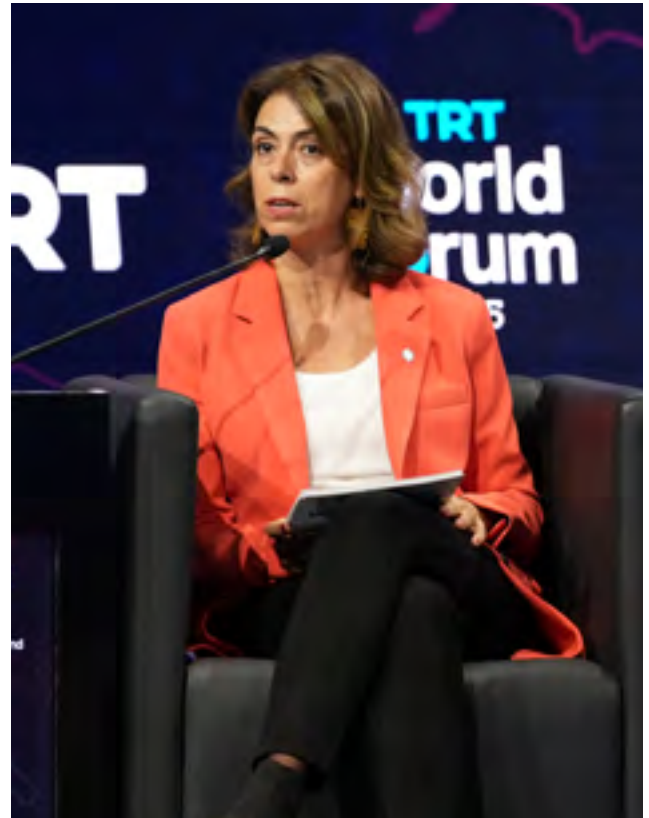
# Highlights

## Belen Sanz Luque

Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, UN Women

Belen Sanz Luque has over 20 years of experience in development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian action, with a focus on gender equality and human rights. She currently serves as UN Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, based in Istanbul, Türkiye. Previously, she was UN Women Country Representative in Mexico, leading one of the organisation's largest offices in the Americas and co-hosting the Generation Equality Forum. Before that, she served for five years as UN Women Country Representative in Colombia, playing a key role in the UN's support to the historic peace process between the Government and the FARC-EP, and later as Acting UN Resident Coordinator during the implementation of the gender-inclusive peace accords. Earlier, Ms. Sanz was Chief of Evaluation at UN Women Headquarters in New York and Chair of the UN Evaluation Group. Before joining the UN, she worked for Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Head of Evaluation and Gender Advisor. She holds a MA degree in Social Anthropology from the University of London and Evaluation of Public Policies from the Complutense University of Madrid.

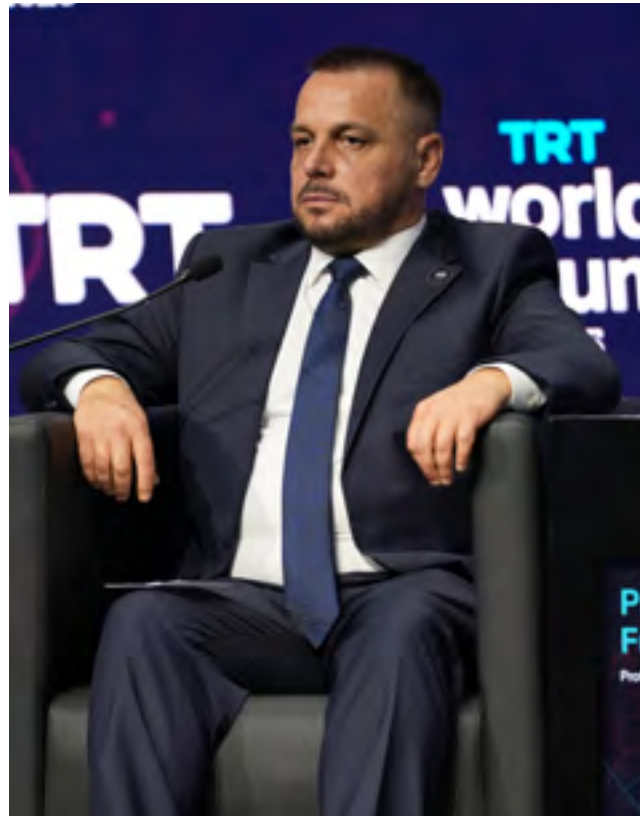
- The digital revolution mirrors our inequalities; women are being left behind in both access and design.
- Forty-four per cent of AI systems already demonstrate gender bias; this is not incidental, it is systemic.
- AI must become a driver of inclusion, placing women as creators, not just consumers, of technology.



## Ejup Maqedonci

Minister of Defence, Republic of Kosovo

Ejup Maqedonci was born on May 9, 1977, in Pristina, Kosovo. He has served in the military since 1998, when he voluntarily joined the Kosovo Liberation Army and was appointed Battalion Commander. Following the end of the conflict, he was commissioned as a Captain in the Kosovo Protection Corps in 1999, where he led the Search and Rescue Battalion for over 12 years. He later served as Chief of the Logistics Section of the KSF Civil Protection Regiment and Chief of Staff of the KSF Rapid Reaction Brigade. A graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (2013) and a Superior Graduate of the U.S. Army War College (2019), Maqedonci holds master's degrees in Military Arts and Science and Strategic Studies. After returning from the U.S., he was promoted to Colonel. He was appointed as Chief of the Department for Operations and Training at the KSF General Staff, where he was a key planner for the multinational exercise DEFENDER Europe 21. In 2021, he also served as Military Advisor to the Prime Minister of Kosovo. He retired from active service in July 2023 and was appointed Minister of Defence of the Republic of Kosovo on August 8, 2023.



- Unlike the industrial revolution, AI's raw material is data, not minerals, and this gives small nations a chance.
- Artificial intelligence must never act without a human hand guiding its consequences.
- Now is the moment for smaller states to act before AI's evolution leaves them unprepared.



## Kenzo Fujisue

Professor at Keio University, Visiting Professor at the Technical University of Munich, Adjunct Professor at the India Institute of Technology, Former State Minister of Communication, and Former Senator of Japan

Dr Kenzo Fujisue has over 18 years of policy-making experience as a member of Japan's Senate and previously served as State Minister of Communication and Internal Affairs. Earlier in his career, he spent 13 years at the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, where he developed extensive expertise in innovation and science and technology policy. A graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School and MIT Sloan School of Management, Dr. Fujisue has established a global academic network, holding appointments as Adjunct Professor at the Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad and the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), and Visiting Professor at the Technical University of Munich. He has also been affiliated with the Oxford Internet Institute and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

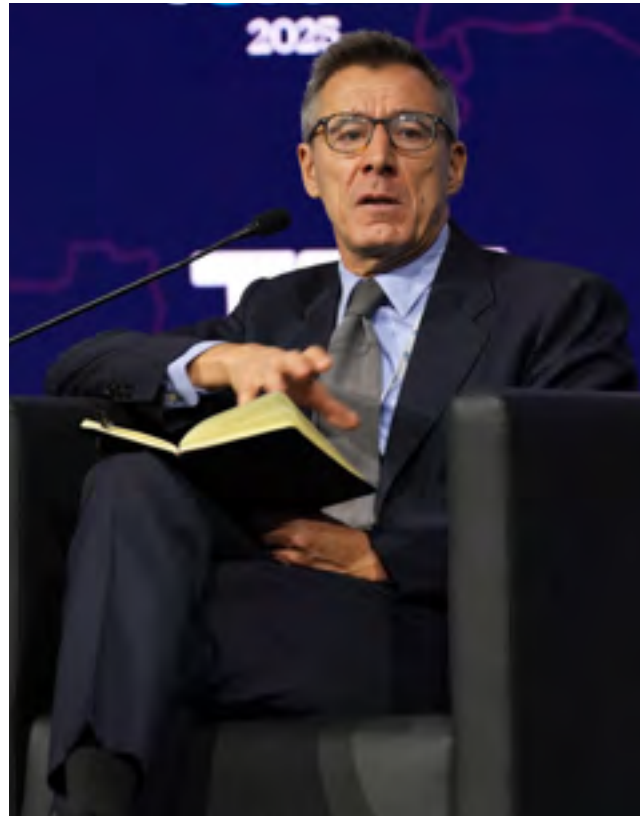
- The U.S. and China control over 80% of global AI capacity. This imbalance cannot define the future.
- Türkiye and Japan can lead a coalition of technological middle powers.
- Regional collaboration is the only way to ensure AI innovation serves all nations, not just the few.



## Tommaso Valletti

Professor of Economics, Imperial College Business School

Tommaso Valletti is Professor of Economics at Imperial College London and Adjunct Professor at the Norwegian School of Economics. He is Director of the CEPR Research and Policy Network on Competition Policy and serves as a Non-Executive Director on the board of the UK Payment Systems Regulator. From 2016 to 2020, he was a board member of the UK Financial Conduct Authority. Between 2016 and 2019, he served as Chief Competition Economist at the European Commission, overseeing the economic analysis of major merger cases such as Deutsche Börse and London Stock Exchange, Dow and DuPont, Bayer and Monsanto, Microsoft and LinkedIn, and Siemens and Alstom, as well as key state aid and antitrust investigations involving Google, Qualcomm, Mastercard, and VISA. He holds degrees in engineering and economics, including a PhD from the London School of Economics, and has published widely on industrial economics and competition policy.



- What is emerging is not a textbook monopoly, but digital feudalism—where entry itself becomes impossible.
- We must regulate AI infrastructure like water, an essential utility serving the public, not monopolies.
- Policy choices shape innovation; it must serve humanity rather than deepen inequality.



## Session 6

# International Law in Retreat in Palestine? Turning Crisis into Reform



### Moderator

**Ghida Fakhry**, Presenter, TRT World

### Speakers

**Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf**, Former Member and President, International Court of Justice

**Ahmed Assaf**, PhD; General Supervisor of Official Media, State of Palestine

**Humza Yousaf**, Former First Minister, Scotland

**Nuh Yılmaz**, PhD; Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to Damascus

# Key Takeaways

- While institutions such as the ICJ clearly affirm the illegality of Israel's presence in the occupied territories, there is no executive mechanism to ensure compliance, and the UN Security Council has become increasingly dysfunctional.
- The burden of enforcing international law should not rest on one or two major powers; the entire UN membership has equal responsibility, as historically demonstrated by the collective Global South push that delegitimised colonialism.
- Speakers emphasised that Israel operates with impunity due to political protection within the current international order, receiving treatment no other state would receive for comparable violations.
- The U.S.-designed post-WWII system no longer reflects the multipolar realities of today, enabling selective application of norms and shielding certain states, especially Israel, from accountability.
- Despite over a thousand UN resolutions favourable to Palestine, none have been implemented, demonstrating a long history spanning from the Balfour Declaration to 1948 and 1967 of international law failing the Palestinian people.
- While the public worldwide overwhelmingly demands justice, governments remain complicit, providing arms, diplomatic cover, and political protection to Israel even amid allegations of genocide.
- Speakers agreed that real change requires organized public pressure, stronger leverage from Arab and Global South countries, and long-term investment in future legal, political, and civic leadership committed to universal application of international

## Summary of the Session

The session interrogated whether international law is truly “in retreat” in the context of Palestine, with Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf firmly rejecting the notion that legal norms have weakened. Instead, he argued that the crisis lies in enforcement: international law remains intact, but institutions, most notably the UN Security Council, have become paralysed by political divisions. Israel's ongoing occupation, ruled illegal by the International Court of Justice, demonstrates this gap between legal clarity and the absence of mechanisms to ensure compliance. Yusuf stressed that responsibility for enforcement lies with all 194 UN member states, not just a handful of powerful actors, reminding the audience that transformative changes, such as the delegitimation of colonialism, were historically driven by collective action from the Global South.

Other speakers painted a more alarming picture of structural decay in the international legal order. H.E. Dr Nuh Yilmaz argued that the system, designed for a previous era of American dominance, no longer reflects today's multipolar world and has enabled Israel's exceptional impunity. H.E. Dr. Ahmed Assaf highlighted over a century of unimplemented resolutions and legal failures, from the Balfour Declaration to the present genocide allegations, reinforcing Palestinian perceptions that international law has consistently abandoned them. Humza Yousaf emphasised the growing disconnect between global public opinion mobilised in massive protests worldwide and political elites who remain complicit in Israel's actions. The session concluded that meaningful reform requires both immediate mobilisation to halt atrocities in Gaza and long-term investment in new generations of leaders capable of restoring universality, credibility, and equality to the international legal system.

# Highlights

## Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf

Former Member and President, International Court of Justice

Judge Abdulqawi A. Yusuf is a former Judge of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, Netherlands. Elected to the Court in November 2008, he served until September 30, 2025. During his tenure, he held the positions of President of the Court (2018–2021) and Vice-President (2015–2018). Judge Yusuf is a member of the Institut de Droit International and has previously served as Chief Legal Counsel for several intergovernmental organisations, including UNESCO and UNIDO. He is the founder of the African Institute of International Law (AIIL) in Arusha, Tanzania, and the African Yearbook of International Law. A distinguished scholar, Judge Yusuf has authored numerous publications on international law and holds a PhD. in International Law from the Graduate Institute of International Studies (IUHEI), Geneva.



- We should not accept the idea that states can create new norms or modify existing ones simply through their actions. The law—whether domestic or international—does not retreat.
- The illegality of Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territories is clear; the challenge lies not in the law itself but in its enforcement, as international law lacks an executive branch.
- We must not lose confidence in the law simply because some institutions are dysfunctional; all 194 UN member states share responsibility for enforcing it.



## Ahmed Assaf

PhD; General Supervisor of Official Media, State of Palestine

Minister Ahmed Assaf is the General Supervisor of Palestinian Official Media, overseeing the Palestinian Public Broadcasting Corporation and serving as Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Palestinian News & Information Agency (WAFA), Al-Hayat Al-Jadida newspaper, the National Printing Press, and the Palestinian Satellite Institution (PALSAT). He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science and has extensive experience in establishing and developing media institutions, media operations, and organizational structures. Minister Assaf is an influential political figure, serving as a member of the Central Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and as an elected member of the Revolutionary Council from the Seventh General Conference of Fatah (2016–present). He previously served as the official spokesperson for Fatah (2009–2016) and currently chairs the Board of Directors of the Martyr Ziad Abu Ein Foundation. At the regional and international levels, Minister Assaf holds several prominent leadership roles, including Vice President of the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), Vice President of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Radio and Television Union, and Vice President of the Union of News Agencies of the OIC (UNA-OIC). He also chairs multiple committees across official institutions and organizations in the Arab, regional, and Islamic arenas. An experienced diplomat and media strategist, Minister Assaf has actively participated in numerous international conferences and high-level summits on politics and media, representing Palestinian media interests and fostering institutional development across the region.



- International law has failed miserably to deliver justice for the Palestinian people; not a single one of the thousands of UN resolutions in their favour has been implemented.

- From the Balfour Declaration to 1948 to 1967, international law was absent at every critical moment, allowing dispossession, occupation, and systemic injustice.
- Israel acts as if it is above the law, and until the world applies international law to Israel as it does to others, the Palestinian question will never be resolved.



## Humza Yousaf

Former First Minister, Scotland

Humza Yousaf MSP served as Scotland's First Minister from March 29, 2023, to May 7, 2024. Upon his appointment, he became the first Muslim to lead a Western, non-Muslim majority nation, Scotland's youngest First Minister at age 37, and the first person of colour to hold the post. Time Magazine described him as an "extraordinary leader" and a "trailblazer." Over twelve years in ministerial roles, Yousaf served as Minister for External Affairs and International Development, Minister for Transport, Cabinet Secretary for Justice, and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care. In 2012, he made history as the first Muslim and first person of colour to serve in the Scottish Government. He continues to represent Glasgow Pollok in the Scottish Parliament, having been re-elected in 2021 with an increased majority. His areas of interest include foreign affairs, conflict resolution, mental health, positive masculinity, climate justice, and combating racism and hatred in all forms.

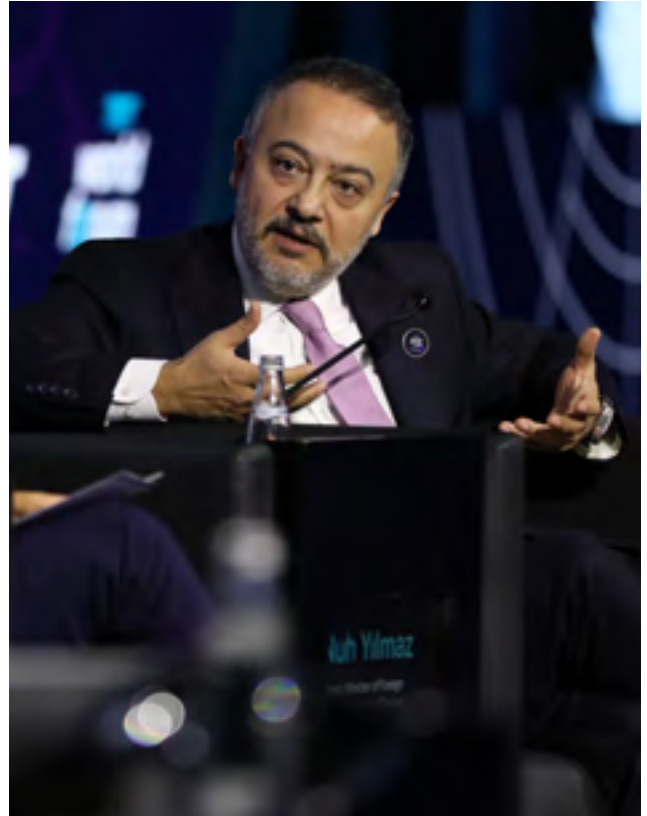
- Israel is led by a man wanted by the ICC and is responsible for tens of thousands of civilian deaths, yet not a single Israeli official has been held accountable.
- Global public opinion is shifting, millions march for Gaza each week, but politicians remain in the wrong place; real change requires organising, mobilising, and using democratic power.
- International law must apply universally whether to Palestinians, Sudanese, Ukrainians, Europeans, or Israelis and Arab nations, especially in the Gulf, must leverage their influence to ensure this.



## Nuh Yılmaz

PhD; Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to Damascus

Dr Nuh Yılmaz was appointed as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye on May 17, 2024. Before this role, he served as Chairman of the Centre for Strategic Research (SAM) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and as Chief Adviser to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Before joining the Ministry, Dr Yılmaz worked at the Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) for a decade, holding key positions such as Press Adviser, Head of the Strategic Analysis Department, and Director of MIT's Talent Centre. Dr Yılmaz's career spans journalism, academia, and policy analysis. He has worked as a journalist, columnist, and foreign policy analyst at various media outlets, universities, and research institutions. He has taught at Marmara University, Trent University, and George Mason University on topics including visual theory and the history of communication. Additionally, he hosted and produced the television program *Brifing Odası*, which focused on foreign policy and security. Dr Yılmaz was the founding Director of the SETA Washington D.C. Office from 2008 to 2011 and has been a visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). In 2020, he completed the Senior Course at the NATO Defence College in Rome.



- Israel, as part of the system, is treated differently; it possesses the authority to act without accountability, something no other state would be permitted.
- Türkiye has pushed every limit of the international system from uniting Muslim and Arab countries to blocking Israel within NATO in order to halt genocide and forced migration in Gaza.
- The current world order, designed around American supremacy, can no longer produce solutions; the system allowed genocide to happen, and without a new order, real change is impossible.



## Session 7

# Economic Frontlines: Trade Conflicts and the New Global Rivalries



### Keynote Speaker

**Mehmet Şimşek**, Minister of Treasury and Finance, Republic of Türkiye

### Moderator

**Auskar Surbakti**, Presenter, TRT World

### Speakers

**Andrew Caruana-Galizia**, Head of Europe and Eurasia and Member of the Executive Committee, World Economic Forum

**Henry Huiyao Wang**, Founder and President, Center for China and Globalization (CCG)

**J. Humberto Lopez**, World Bank Country Director for the Republic of Türkiye

**Jan Bohanes**, Senior Counsel, Advisory Centre on WTO Law (ACWL)

**Jane Kelsey**, Emeritus Professor, University of Auckland

**Rashid Kaukab**, Senior Specialist, Trade and Sustainable Development, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

## Key Takeaways

- Intensifying global trade tensions are reshaping economic relations, with countries experiencing divergent impacts depending on their export structures, strategic vulnerabilities, and position within shifting supply chains.
- The session underscored that Türkiye's direct exposure to U.S. tariff measures remains limited, yet broader uncertainty, from falling development assistance to rising defence expenditures, continues to challenge emerging market stability.
- The erosion of global cooperation has heightened concerns about the world's ability to manage transnational risks such as climate change, pandemics, and sovereign debt crises.
- Recent signs of stabilisation in U.S.–China relations indicate a mutual recognition that full-scale economic decoupling is unrealistic and harmful, signalling a shift toward managed competition rather than open confrontation.
- China's expanding role in green technology, manufacturing, and overseas investment is reshaping global value chains and altering the balance of economic influence across regions.
- Structural asymmetries embedded in the neoliberal-era rules-based trading system have produced long-term contradictions, contributing to political backlash, institutional paralysis, and renewed protectionism.
- The growing use of national-security frameworks to justify trade measures has weakened predictability in global markets and accelerated the shift toward a fragmented, power-driven economic order.
- Developing countries must prioritise sustainable development within their trade strategies, leveraging regional initiatives and domestic reforms to convert global disruptions into long-term opportunities.

## Summary of the Session

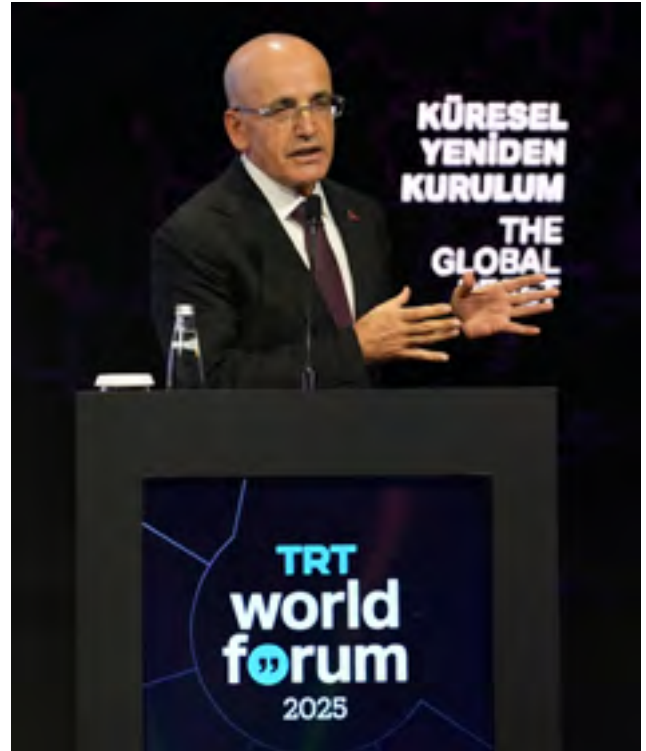
This session explored how geopolitical competition is transforming the global trade landscape, with a particular focus on the widening economic rivalry between major powers and its implications for emerging economies. Participants emphasised that contemporary trade conflicts extend far beyond tariff disputes, reflecting deeper structural tensions rooted in supply-chain dependencies, strategic vulnerabilities, and shifting patterns of economic influence. While Türkiye's direct exposure to U.S. tariff actions remains relatively modest, speakers highlighted that broader uncertainties such as declining development assistance, rising defence budgets, and persistent post-pandemic fiscal pressures pose complex challenges for developing countries operating within an increasingly volatile global environment. The discussion also underscored how global risks, including climate change and potential future pandemics, continue to intensify even as the institutional capacity for international cooperation steadily erodes.

Speakers further examined how the multilateral trading system is struggling to adapt to these geopolitical shifts, noting that many of its current challenges stem from long-standing imbalances embedded during earlier phases of globalisation. They discussed the growing reliance on national-security-based trade measures, which has blurred the boundaries between economic policy and strategic competition, weakening predictability and accelerating fragmentation. Despite recent high-level diplomatic engagement between the United States and China, panellists noted that deeper mistrust continues to constrain prospects for meaningful reform. Against this backdrop, the session highlighted the need for developing economies to re-centre sustainable development within their economic strategies, strengthen regional cooperation, and pursue more resilient, bottom-up approaches to shaping their position in an emerging multipolar trade order.

# Keynote Speech by Mehmet Şimşek

*Minister of Treasury and Finance, Republic of Türkiye*

Mehmet Şimşek, currently serving as the Minister of Treasury and Finance, served as Türkiye's Deputy Prime Minister for Economic and Financial Affairs from 2015 to 2018. Representing the AK Party, he was elected to the Parliament for three terms (2007, 2011, 2015). During his tenure as Minister of Finance (2009-15) and Minister of Economy (2007-09), Şimşek championed structural reforms and prudent macroeconomic policies, contributing to Türkiye's resilient position amid various domestic and external shocks. His leadership in enhancing a credit guarantee scheme played a crucial role in steering Türkiye away from recession following the 2016 failed coup attempt. His earlier roles included positions at Merrill Lynch in London, Deutsche-Bender Securities in Istanbul, UBS Securities on Wall Street, and as a senior economist at the US Embassy in Ankara. Şimşek holds a B.S. in Economics from Ankara University, where he also worked as a research assistant. He earned an M.Phil. in Finance and Investments from Exeter University. Acknowledged for his influence, Foreign Policy listed him among the 500 most powerful individuals globally in 2013. Emerging Markets magazine honoured Şimşek as the "Finance Minister of the Year for Emerging Europe 2013."



Good afternoon everyone,

I'm delighted to be back at TRT World Forum. It's a great pleasure. I remember I was here again at the beginning of the final session. I think, despite the fact that this is the final session, there's a great crowd here, which means the subject must be pretty interesting. Look, I have a presentation to set the scene. But I will also try to squeeze a few slides on the Turkish economy. I couldn't miss this opportunity. So it isn't just about the global trade fragmentation.

Well, uncertainty has never been so high. If you look at some metrics, so clear, global policy uncertainty has peaked. It looks like it is off the chart, and the sentiment, surprisingly, is still constructive because the world economy has been quite resilient. The question is, can this be sustained? If we look at, relative to past global growth is relatively more modest. You know, if you take a five-year forecast, it's running at about 3% compared to pre-global financial

crisis, and growth rates of about 4.5-5% are our five-year projections. Why? There are plenty of challenges and plenty of headwinds. Trade fragmentation or protectionism is the top. But of course, we are also faced with high global indebtedness and, ageing world population. AI, of course, has huge promises, but at the same time, it could also be quite disruptive. Climate disaster seems like a reality. And finally, of course, everywhere you look, you have some form of geopolitical tension or conflicts.

If I were to cover, some of these clearly, protectionism is the new normal. While we may have occasional kind of like, relief, like what we've had between China and, United States, but clearly the secular trend is that protectionism is here to stay. Why? The root cause is relatively simple. There is an emerging superpower in manufacturing in global trade across the board, and that's China. But of course, we also have the established powerhouses such as the United

States. Look at this simple chart. You know, 20 years ago, China accounted for less than 9% of global manufacturing. Today it's over 30%. And if the current trend is sustained, it could be as high as 45%. These are huge numbers. So who lost ground?

Well, the West in general has lost ground. The US is down from 22% to about 11%. The European Union is down again by almost 10% points. Japan similarly by about 10% points. So clearly this is the root cause. If you look at, you know, relative to 20-25 years ago, again China dominates the world trade in terms of the number one trading partners of so many more countries.

Again, if you look at global manufacturing exports, China dominates. You know, it was barely 1% of global exports. You know, if you go back to the 80s today, it's more than 20%. So this has implications. Manufacturing employment is shrinking in the West. The West, in general, has lost a quarter of its manufacturing to Asia and mainly to China. And more importantly, if you look at real wages in advanced economies, real wages have been stagnant. No real increase, while emerging market real wage growth is there. Now that is the source of social and political backlash when it comes to globalisation, when it comes to rules-based global trade, why? Very simple. When you lose manufacturing jobs, when you lose manufacturing, you also lose quite a few or quite a bit of services associated with that.

So it's not just low-end manufacturing. So clearly that's the source of tension. And that's not going to change. And therefore, protectionism is here to stay. Fixing this system is very difficult because, you know, this is about the established Western ecosystem losing ground to rising emerging markets, mostly to China. So, how does Türkiye feature?

We seem to be relatively less vulnerable. Why? Because 62% of our exports go to countries with which we have free trade agreements. 80 more than 80% of Turkish exports go to our immediate neighbourhood, meaning near geographies and friendly countries like Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. So clearly, that makes us less vulnerable. But we are not immune. One other thing that makes us relatively less vulnerable is that exports to GDP are relatively modest. Exports of services to GDP by international standards are more significant. And protectionism has not yet infected

the services train. And that's why Türkiye is relatively less vulnerable now. We see opportunities here because if globally we are going to continue to fragment, we might as well focus on regional integration.

Türkiye sees regional integration as an antidote to global fragmentation. And that's why we are enhancing regional connectivity. We are seeking new FTAs, like with GCC countries, or upgrading existing ones, like with the UK or the European Union. And of course, we are investing in supply chain resilience. If you look at this map, it's pretty simple. The new Development Road is now a project that is likely to move forward. It's going to connect the entire GCC to Iraq, to Türkiye and to Europe and all the way to China. Türkiye enjoys a significant component of Middle Corridor, and the new Development Road corridors go to Türkiye, and that's key to regional integration through connectivity. As I said, we're doing well in services. Our surplus this year is going to be about \$65 billion. This is the net services surplus. Well, we will have \$80B to \$90B of trade gap. In tourism, we're very big. We are among the top five, construction again similarly, medical tourism, education is up and coming and creative industries. According to The Economist magazine, we are the third largest exporter of soap operas. So, clearly, we have a relatively again, resilient Turkish position. We're more reliant on domestic demand to grow and services

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**Türkiye sees regional integration as an antidote to global fragmentation. And that's why we are enhancing regional connectivity. We are seeking new FTAs, like with GCC countries, or upgrading existing ones, like with the UK or the European Union. And of course, we are investing in supply chain resilience.**

exports. And that's where countries should be. And I think that's where you should look at, you know, if you're looking at where to invest and where the prospects are better, that's how I would look at it.

Another major issue is high global indebtedness. The global debt-to-GDP ratio has gone up dramatically over the past 25 years and currently stands at 324%. If you decompose it and look at it by country groups, Türkiye is 89%. Emerging markets to 142% and the world 324%. What does this mean in the real world? Well, it means a lot of countries are going to struggle to spare money for infrastructure, education, and healthcare if they're going to have to pay more to service their debt. But Türkiye is lucky in that sense because its debt-to-GDP ratio is pretty low. And secondly, we are actually building fiscal space to transform Türkiye, to implement structural reforms, to invest in productivity-enhancing infrastructure, AI readiness, and green transition. An ageing population is another major problem. I know this is not your theme, but I wanted to remind you that it's not just global trade. Many other factors are clearly interrelated. So an ageing population is going to become a major drag on global growth and, of course, on global fiscal outlook. Türkiye again is lucky. We still have a 20-year window of opportunity before we talk about, you know, losing, window, I mean, demographic window of opportunity. We still have a huge untapped potential in terms of women's labour force participation rate and we're taking steps to enhance female labour force participation rate.

There are opportunities as well here. The silver economy is likely to increase the size from \$5.5 trillion to \$8.5 trillion. We think we're better positioned to provide medical services to global, you know, citizens as well as provide elderly care in Türkiye to global citizens. AI is a huge theme, I know, and I think this is the only area where the world would cooperate, where we could get immense, you know, potential for boosting productivity and prosperity for everyone, but that's unlikely to happen because there is protectionism here, too. And that's why this is likely to lead to geographic disparities, more income and wealth inequalities, unfortunately.

Is Türkiye ready? Well, we are ahead of emerging markets in terms of AI readiness. And we are investing very heavily in fibre capacity, 5G+, and Hyperscaler data centres. So we're

doing all the right things. So the opportunity here clearly for our industry is that we can leapfrog, for example, we've done it in the defence industry. We could do it elsewhere. So this is where we are focusing right now to boost productivity across all sectors. And as I said, leapfrog into high-tech industries and build competitive digital talent. Global warming is real. We are investing heavily in irrigation \$90 billion over the past 20 years. We are pushing the green transition aggressively. That's really key. So we are speeding up renewable adoption. We've made significant progress, but more obviously is needed. And we think we could play a significant role in green tech. Why? Because, according to a study, green tech potential, you know, meaning green tech, if you look at complexity in Türkiye, in terms of solar, wind, geothermal, etc., in terms of equipment, we're apparently in the top ten. So we're trying to take advantage of this. And of course, again, global clean energy investments are going to be quite significant for quite a while. And we want to play a role as a country that provides not only equipment but also provides, you know, to whole services associated with it.

Conflicts remind us that there's going to be defence expenditures. Defence expenditures are going through the roof everywhere. That is a secular theme. Well, we have huge capabilities. And a few decades ago, meaning roughly 2-3 decades ago, we were among the top importers. Now we are the 11th or 10th largest exporters. So clearly, there are opportunities here, but we would prefer peace and stability in the region because we would benefit more. We want to rebuild the region rather than, you know, make a, you know, make money out of defence equipment. And so if and when peace and stability become the norm, Türkiye would be the biggest beneficiary in terms of its capacity to deliver reconstruction in the entire region.

Here is the final part of my presentation, and I couldn't avoid this because of such a great crowd. I have to tell you a little bit about the program we are implementing. Well, our program is simple. We're trying to achieve price stability, strengthen fiscal position, and narrow current account deficit. Huge progress across the board. Structural transformation is key to making all these sustainable. And of course, you know, better income distribution.

We have three phases, and we are currently in the second phase of the program. Progress is significant. Let me skip this. Inflation is falling. We would like to get back to single digits soon. Hopefully, it will happen over the next couple of years. We are moving up the value chain. If you look at the Harvard Economic Complexity Index, you know, we're doing all the right things. And high-tech and medium-tech exposure as a percentage of total exports is rising. Türkiye is likely a candidate. It used to be. We kind of like, for the past decades have slowed. Now we are regaining momentum. We want to be back as a major regional hub for foreign direct investment, because you're talking about including foreigners in Türkiye.

The population is about 90 million, \$1.6 trillion, GDP \$18,000 per capita. That puts us among the very few large markets. FDI has gone up by almost 20-fold over the past 20 years. But we think there is significant upside. We are hoping to achieve investment grade over the next few years. We've seen 2 to 3-notch rating upgrades over the past couple of years, and we want to maintain the relative outperformance of the Turkish economy.

If you look at the past 20 years real GDP growth rate has averaged about 5.4%. And if you take 2002 as your base year, that's when President Erdogan assumed office. That reflects the performance under President Erdogan's leadership. As you can see, Türkiye is the red line. You know, in real terms, our GDP has gone up from, you know, 100 to over 300 compared to emerging markets, which are about 298.

You may think that is a slight outperformance. But if you exclude China and India, obviously, these are very large countries. Then, of course, the outperformance becomes quite visible. And that would be the yellow line. So if you compare the red line versus the yellow line, the outperformance is quite substantial.

To conclude. I think the theme that was left for the last session is going to stay with us for quite a while. Last year, I quoted Antonio Gramsci. Some of you may have been here, and some of you may not. Gramsci, back in the 1930s, in his prison cell, wrote extensively. And one of his quotes is

"The old world is dying, and the new world is struggling to be born. Now it is the time of monsters.

Well, the post-WW2 rules-based multilateral system is under huge strain because it no longer serves well to those who invested in it and created it. And therefore, until we get a new world with new rules, I guess we're going to continue having to live with more uncertainty, volatility, complexity and ambiguity. So the world's VUCA moment will continue for a while.

Thank you very much.

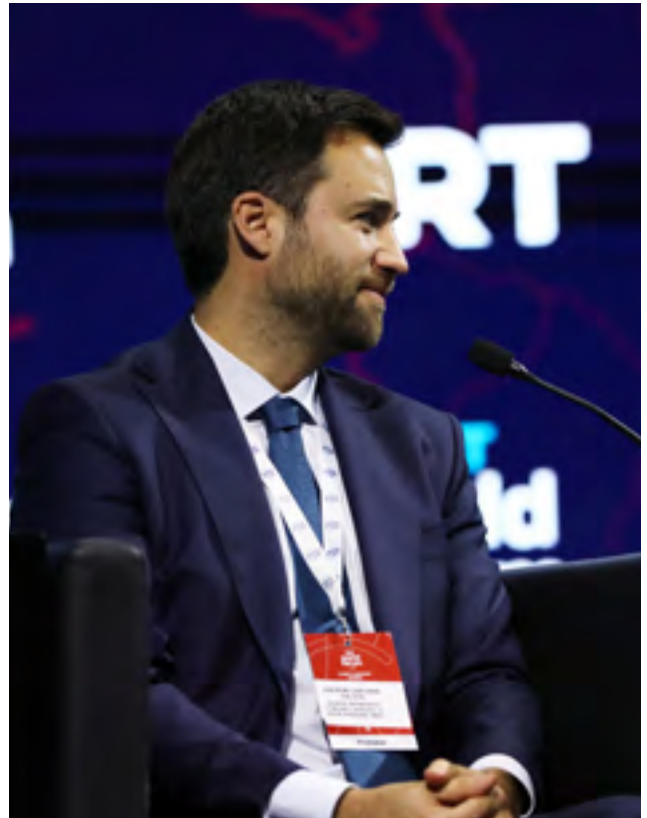


# Highlights

## Andrew Caruana-Galizia

Head of Europe and Eurasia at the World Economic Forum and Member of the Executive Committee

Andrew Caruana-Galizia is Head of Europe and Eurasia and a Member of the Executive Committee at the World Economic Forum. He joined the Forum in 2018 as a Global Leadership Fellow, leading initiatives on geopolitics, South Asia, and the Asia Pacific. Before this, Andrew served as a career diplomat from 2012 to 2017, with postings as Deputy Head of Mission in Berlin and Deputy High Commissioner in New Delhi. He also worked as an advisor at the European Parliament. He is a co-founder of the Daphne Caruana-Galizia Foundation, established in memory of his mother, and is a joint recipient (with his brothers) of the Magnitsky Human Rights Award and the Anderson-Lucas-Norman Award for their work on justice and press freedom. He holds an MA with distinction from the College of Europe in Bruges.



- The geopolitics of cooperation have shifted dramatically, even though the need for cooperation itself has not. Global risks—from pandemics to climate pressures—do not respect borders, yet the connective tissue that once enabled states to anticipate and manage these crises together has grown dangerously thin.
- A profound concern today is the erosion of trust among major powers, which undermines the systems designed to help states mobilise collectively in moments of crisis. The weakening of this connective fabric means that preventative action becomes harder precisely when global shocks are becoming more frequent and more complex.
- Even in an era defined by geopolitical rivalry, a baseline of cooperation remains possible through targeted sectoral initiatives and smaller diplomatic groupings. If the international community can preserve this minimum level of trust, it may carry enough institutional memory and resilience to rebuild stronger frameworks once the current period of turbulence subsides.



## Henry Huiyao Wang

Founder and President, Center for China and Globalization (CCG)

Dr Henry Huiyao Wang is the Founder and President of the Centre for China and Globalisation (CCG), a leading Chinese think tank ranked among the world's top 100 and the only one in China with United Nations Special Consultative Status. He previously served as Counsellor to the State Council of China and Vice Chairman of the China Association for International Economic Cooperation under the Ministry of Commerce. Dr Wang is Director-General of the Alliance of Global Talent Organisations, Vice Chairman of the China Public Relations Association, and a Director of the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs. He sits on the Steering Committee of the Paris Peace Forum and advisory boards of Duke Kunshan University and the Richard Ivey Business School. He earned his PhD from the University of Western Ontario and the University of Manchester and has been a Senior Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School and a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution. Author of over 100 books, Dr Wang frequently speaks at major international forums—including the World Economic Forum and Munich Security Conference—and contributes to leading media such as the Financial Times, Bloomberg, and The New York Times. After years of escalating tensions, both the United States and China appear to have recognised that complete economic decoupling would inflict severe and mutual harm. The recent high-level engagements signal a shift toward stabilisation, reflecting a shared understanding that managed competition is preferable to a destructive cycle of retaliation.



- After years of escalating tensions, both the United States and China appear to have recognised that complete economic decoupling would inflict severe and mutual harm. The recent high-level engagements signal a shift toward stabilisation, reflecting a shared understanding that managed competition is preferable to a destructive cycle of retaliation.
- China's rise in green technologies, electric vehicles, advanced manufacturing, and global infrastructure investment is reorganising value chains across continents. This transformation is not merely economic—it reshapes geopolitical influence by creating new dependencies, opportunities, and competitive arenas worldwide.
- The future of great-power competition will increasingly be contested in the domains of green development, technological innovation, and economic resilience rather than through traditional military confrontation. This shift places enormous importance on long-term strategic planning and forward-looking industrial policy.

## J. Humberto López

World Bank Country Director for the Republic of Türkiye

Mr. Humberto López is the World Bank Country Director for the Republic of Türkiye. He previously served as Director of Strategy and Operations for Eastern and Southern Africa, supporting the Vice President in shaping and implementing strategies across 26 countries, overseeing a portfolio of more than 350 projects valued at over \$60 billion. Before that, he was Director of Strategy and Operations for Latin America and the Caribbean, and served as Acting Vice President for the region from September 2019 to June 2020. He has also been Country Director for Central America and Director of the Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Department for Latin America and the Caribbean. Mr. López has published widely on fiscal policy, exchange rates, and economic growth, and is the editor of three books on free trade, migration and remittances, and investment climate and growth. He was the lead author of the World Bank's 2006 Latin America flagship report on growth and poverty reduction. Prior to joining the World Bank, he was a professor of economics at the University of Salamanca, Spain, and a visiting professor at Louisiana State University. He holds a PhD in Economics from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy.



- Trade tensions rarely generate uniform outcomes; their effects depend not only on a country's export exposure but on how its competitors respond and how global supply chains reconfigure themselves under stress. For Türkiye, this means that even modest direct exposure to U.S. tariffs can intersect with broader global uncertainties, making economic resilience an increasingly strategic priority.
- Although Türkiye sends only a small share of its exports to the United States, emerging economies as a whole are entering a period of fiscal fragility, shaped by shrinking development assistance, rising defence expenditures, and unprecedented debt burdens. These conditions demand policies that restore predictability at the national level while strengthening resilience against external shocks.
- With more than one billion people expected to enter the global labour market over the next quarter century, job creation will be central to avoiding social tension and preserving stability. Ensuring fiscal discipline and designing forward-looking economic strategies remain imperative as countries navigate a highly volatile global environment.

## Jan Bohanes

Senior Counsel, Advisory Centre on WTO Law (ACWL)

Dr Jan Bohanes is Senior Counsel at the Advisory Centre on WTO Law (ACWL), where he advises over 80 developing country governments on their rights and obligations under World Trade Organisation (WTO) law. His work includes providing legal advice, assisting in dispute settlement proceedings before WTO tribunals, and training government officials. Before joining the ACWL, Dr. Bohanes served in the Secretariat of the WTO Appellate Body, where he advised WTO appellate judges, and previously practiced as an associate attorney at Sidley Austin LLP. An accomplished scholar, he has published extensively on international trade law and teaches at leading institutions, including the World Trade Institute in Bern and the Geneva Graduate Institute (2016–2025).

- National-security exceptions in trade agreements were historically treated with great restraint, yet their expanded use in the last decade risks blurring the line between legitimate security concerns and economic protectionism. This shift has profound implications for predictability in global markets and for the integrity of the multilateral system.
- If national-security measures become entirely self-judging, without objective guardrails or third-party review, the foundational principles of the rules-based system begin to erode. A trading order governed by subjective and unilateral interpretations cannot provide the stability required for long-term economic planning.



- One proposed solution—managed retaliation—offers a structured way to respond to security-based trade measures without adjudicating their legality. While far from perfect, such innovations may help prevent spirals of escalation, provided that they are accompanied by renewed trust among WTO members.



## Jane Kelsey

Emeritus Professor, University of Auckland

Dr Jane Kelsey is Professor Emeritus of Law at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and a leading expert in international economic regulation. She holds degrees from Victoria University of Wellington, Oxford University, the University of Cambridge, and the University of Auckland. Since 1990, Dr Kelsey has closely monitored WTO processes, as well as mega-regional and bilateral trade negotiations. In addition to her extensive academic publications, technical reports, and international presentations, she advises several developing country governments. In 2023, she served on the Ideation and Advisory Board to the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade for the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi.

- The so-called rules-based trading system did not emerge neutrally; it was shaped by the power politics of the neoliberal era, embedding structural asymmetries that are now surfacing as political backlash. The contradictions built into this system are becoming increasingly visible as global trade governance struggles to respond to contemporary challenges.
- By focusing heavily on individual leaders or short-term political cycles, we risk overlooking the deeper socioeconomic grievances that drive public discontent with globalisation. These underlying pressures—from inequality to resource exploitation—are the true forces destabilising the trading system, and they demand far more honest engagement.
- Neither the unilateral approach seen in recent years, nor superficial reform efforts, nor emerging multipolar alternatives have yet placed justice at the centre of global trade governance. Without addressing the systemic inequities facing developing and least-developed countries, any attempt to 'fix' the system will fall short.



## Rashid Kaukab

Senior Specialist, Trade and Sustainable Development,  
International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Rashid S. Kaukab is a Senior Specialist in Trade and Sustainable Development at the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). He is also a Senior Fellow at the Diplo Academy in Geneva and lectures at the International Institute in Geneva (IIG). Mr Kaukab has extensive experience in international trade and development policy. He previously served in the Government of Pakistan, including as Counsellor on trade and economic issues at Pakistan's Mission to the UN and WTO in Geneva. He has also held senior positions at the South Centre (1998–2007), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (2007), and CUTS International Geneva (2008–2023). His research and publications focus on trade and sustainable development, the environment and climate change, digital trade, and global economic governance.

- For decades, the global trade agenda has acknowledged the importance of sustainable development, yet translating these commitments into binding rules has proven extraordinarily difficult. This gap reflects deeper structural problems in how trade priorities are set and whose interests they ultimately serve.”
- Periods of global shock, though disruptive, also create openings for countries to rethink their trade strategies. By aligning trade policy with domestic socioeconomic and environmental objectives, developing economies can transform turbulence into an opportunity for long-term, equitable growth.”
- Even when major global players deprioritise development concerns, developing countries cannot afford to do the same. Sustained advocacy, regional cooperation, and bottom-up policy design are essential to ensuring that development remains central to the future of global trade governance.”



# Expert Roundtable Sessions

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## Session 1

# Contested Futures: Conflict and Reconciliation in East Africa



## Moderator

**Grace Kuria**, Senior Producer, TRT World

## Speakers

**Nicholas Kay**, Adviser, CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation

**Patrick Youssef**, Regional Director, ICRC Africa

**Reno Omokri**, Former Special Assistant to the President of Nigeria

**Róisín Drury**, Political Advisor, Office of the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, Delegation of the European Union to Kenya

## Discussants

**Ali Engin Oba**, Ambassador (Ret.) Professor, Çağ University

**Alper Özbilen**, PhD, Chairman of the Board, East African Business Association (EABA)

**Amjad Al-Nour**, Filmmaker, Journalist, and TV Presenter

**Charles Kayonga**, Ambassador of Rwanda, Ankara

**Fatih Akbulut**, President, Turkish African Business Association

**Joao Salvador Dos Santos Neto**, Ambassador of the Republic of Angola

**Kazım Çavuşoğlu**, Deputy General Manager for East Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye

**Mehmet Köse**, Chairman of the Board, Afrika Vakfı

**Stephen Cahill**, United Nations World Food Program Türkiye Director and Country Representative

**Tunç Demirtaş**, Researcher, SETA

**Yunus Ete**, Secretary General, World Honorary Consulates Association; Honorary Consul of the Kingdom of Lesotho to the Republic of Türkiye

# Key Takeaways

- Structural inequalities, exclusionary governance, and externally imposed borders remain the root causes of conflict across East Africa, despite evolving global power dynamics. Sustainable peace requires addressing these historical and institutional legacies rather than relying on short-term crisis management.
- Peace must be redefined beyond ceasefires and political settlements to include justice, inclusivity, and equitable economic development. True reconciliation depends on transforming the social and economic conditions that perpetuate violence.

The changing nature of warfare, driven by new technologies such as drones and AI, demands adaptive regional mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution. Traditional diplomacy alone is no longer sufficient in addressing hybrid threats.

- African-led solutions are more legitimate and durable than externally driven interventions. Empowering regional organisations and local communities to own peace processes was identified as essential to breaking cycles of dependency.
- Economic interdependence and regional cooperation can serve as strong deterrents against conflict. Building shared prosperity was seen as the most practical path toward a peaceful and connected East Africa.

## Summary

The Expert Roundtable “Contested Futures: Conflict and Reconciliation in East Africa” explored the evolving landscape of conflict, governance, and reconciliation across the region. Participants reflected on the paradox of a continent endowed with immense natural and human resources yet burdened by persistent instability, fragile institutions, and recurring cycles of violence. The discussion focused on structural causes of conflict, the shortcomings of international peacebuilding, and the urgent need to develop Africa-led approaches to sustainable peace.

Speakers highlighted that while global power shifts and new technologies have transformed the way wars are fought and perceived, many of the underlying drivers of conflict in East Africa remain unchanged. Historical grievances, externally imposed borders, exclusionary politics, and competition over natural resources continue to sustain violence. It was emphasised that these structural conditions cannot be addressed through short-term interventions or externally designed peace agreements. Instead, inclusive governance, local participation, and regional ownership were identified as key ingredients for meaningful reconciliation.

Another major theme was the contrast between crisis management and conflict resolution. Several interventions noted that peace efforts in Africa too often focus on containing violence rather than resolving its root causes. Despite the proliferation of ceasefires and peace accords, armed confrontations have increased significantly across the continent in recent years. The participants argued that peacebuilding frameworks must move beyond temporary security arrangements and integrate social justice, anti-corruption measures, and equitable economic development.

The discussion also drew attention to the changing nature of warfare. The spread of drones, artificial

intelligence, and cyber technologies has blurred the lines between combatant and civilian, making conflicts more complex and less predictable. Participants underlined the need for regional organisations to adapt to this evolving security environment and to coordinate policy responses that go beyond traditional diplomacy or military engagement.

A recurring point of consensus was that “peace” must be redefined. Genuine peace, participants argued, cannot be reduced to the mere absence of war. It must entail structural transformation — eliminating systemic inequality, promoting inclusive governance, and building trust between communities. Economic integration and regional cooperation were cited as practical tools to reduce the incentives for conflict, as countries with shared prosperity are less likely to resort to war.

Historical and sociological dimensions were also examined. Many noted that postcolonial African states were founded within artificial borders that fragmented ethnic and linguistic communities. As a result, nation-building remains incomplete. Case studies from within East and West Africa were cited to demonstrate that fostering a shared national identity — through education, civic service, and regional solidarity — can strengthen resilience against internal conflict.

In conclusion, the session underscored the necessity of reimagining Africa’s peace architecture. Sustainable reconciliation requires more than international mediation; it demands that African societies themselves take ownership of peace processes. By addressing governance failures, promoting regional solidarity, and prioritising justice and inclusion, participants agreed that East Africa can move from a cycle of contested futures toward a shared vision of lasting peace.

## Session 2

# From Victimhood to Resilience: The Path to Justice in Gaza



## Moderator

**Tarek Cherkaoui**, PhD; Manager, TRT World Research Centre

## Speakers

**David Hearst**, Co-founder and Editor in Chief, Middle East Eye

**Graeme Groom**, Consultant Trauma and Orthopaedic Surgeon, King's College Hospital

**Jamal Elshayyal**, Director, Al Jazeera 360

**Laila El-Haddad**, Award-winning Author, Social Activist, Policy Analyst and Journalist

**Wadah Khanfar**, President, Al Sharq Forum

## Discussants

**Abdullah Baabood**, PhD; Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Waseda University

**Ali Amir**, Managing Director, Middle East Eye

**Fadi Zatari**, PhD; Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University; Deputy Director, Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA)

**Haydar Oruç**, Researcher, Middle East Institute, Sakarya University

**İsmail Numan Telci**, Professor, Department of International Relations; Lecturer, Middle East Institute; Sakarya University

**Nasri Khalil Abu Jaish**, PhD; Ambassador of the State of Palestine to the Republic of Türkiye

**Ramazan Erdağ**, Professor, Faculty Member, Eskişehir Osmangazi University; SAM Academic Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Selim Öztürk**, PhD; Associate Professor, Turkish National Police Academy

# Key Takeaways

- The Gaza war has exposed the paralysis of global governance, revealing how post-1945 institutions fail to uphold their own legal and moral standards.
- Participants described Gaza not only as a humanitarian tragedy but also as a catalyst for re-evaluating the credibility of the global system and the principles that sustain it.
- Public opinion, particularly among younger generations in the West, is shifting sharply against long-standing narratives that marginalised Palestinian perspectives.
- Türkiye's principled diplomacy and consistent advocacy for humanitarian access and accountability were highlighted as examples of how middle powers can contribute to de-escalation and inclusive dialogue.
- Speakers stressed that Palestinians should not be praised merely for resilience; genuine progress requires accountability, recognition of sovereignty and sustained reconstruction efforts.
- The future of the Palestinian cause depends on renewing political institutions to ensure unified, legitimate representation in any post-conflict framework.

## Summary

The session examined the ongoing war in Gaza as a profound test of the contemporary international order. Participants viewed the crisis not only through the lens of humanitarian devastation but also as evidence of a deeper structural breakdown in global governance. Institutions created to protect civilians and uphold human rights were seen as largely ineffective, undermining the credibility of international law and eroding trust across much of the Global South.

Several speakers described Gaza as a turning point that forces a reckoning with the moral contradictions of the post-war system. The inability of the United Nations, the International Criminal Court and major Western powers to prevent or restrain mass civilian suffering has, they argued, weakened the foundations of what was once termed a “rules-based order.” For many, this moment marks the transition toward a more fluid, contested and multipolar world in which moral authority is no longer monopolised by a single bloc.

Türkiye was frequently mentioned as an actor seeking to navigate this transition constructively. Its balanced diplomacy, maintaining dialogue with multiple sides while advocating for humanitarian relief and respect for international law, was seen as an example of responsible middle-power engagement. Türkiye’s calls for a permanent ceasefire, support for reconstruction in Gaza and emphasis on international accountability resonated with many participants as pragmatic steps that combine moral clarity with diplomatic realism.

The discussion also underscored the widening gap between official narratives and public sentiment worldwide. A generational shift, amplified by social media and independent journalism, has made it increasingly difficult to suppress images of suffering or to frame the conflict solely in terms of counter-terrorism. Protest movements and student activism in Western capitals suggest that public empathy is reshaping the moral landscape, even as governments maintain cautious policies. Participants noted that this shift reflects a growing demand for equality in the application of international law, whether in Gaza, Ukraine, or elsewhere.

Beyond the geopolitical dimension, the conversation turned to the question of Palestinian agency and political representation. Resistance movements retain substantial domestic support, reflecting both frustration with existing leadership and enduring commitment to self-determination. Yet many argued that without a legitimate, unified political structure, efforts toward reconstruction or diplomacy risk repeating the failures of previous peace processes. Political renewal within the Palestinian system was seen as essential to any sustainable settlement.

Speakers agreed that reconstruction will require a coordinated international approach that prioritises accountability, humanitarian access and long-term economic recovery. Emphasis was placed on moving from narratives of endurance to actionable justice, ending impunity, rebuilding infrastructure and restoring hope for a viable state. Participants suggested that regional cooperation, particularly involving Türkiye and Gulf partners, could create practical frameworks for aid delivery, governance support and economic reintegration.

The session concluded that the Gaza crisis is both a mirror and a magnifier: a mirror reflecting the erosion of moral authority in international politics, and a magnifier revealing the urgency of reform. While the global system appears fragmented, new opportunities are emerging for inclusive diplomacy led by states willing to act on principle. In this context, Türkiye’s engagement, rooted in dialogue, humanitarian leadership and advocacy for international law, was cited as evidence that middle powers can play a stabilising role in an increasingly divided world.

Ultimately, participants agreed that the Palestinian question has moved from the margins to the centre of global consciousness. Whether this awareness can be converted into institutional reform and lasting peace remains uncertain, but the demand for accountability, equality and dignity is reshaping the contours of world politics, and will define the legitimacy of any future international order.

## Session 3

# Cultural Diplomacy and Shared Identity in Central Asia: Pathways to Regional Engagement and Connectivity



## Moderator

**Jaffar Hasnain**, Presenter, TRT World

## Speakers

**Aktoty Raimkulova**, President, Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation; Former Minister of Culture and Sports, Republic of Kazakhstan

**Azamat Zhamankulov**, Former Minister of Culture, Information, Sports and Youth Policy, Kyrgyz Republic

**Djoomart Otorbaev**, Former Prime Minister, Kyrgyz Republic

**Eduards Stiprais**, EU Special Representative for Central Asia, European Union

**Sultan Raev**, Secretary General, TÜRKSOY

## Discussants

**Ahmet Furkan Özyakar**, PhD; Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Atatürk University

**Kürşat Yıldırım**, Professor, Istanbul University; Author; Member, UNESCO International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilisations

**Najiba Mustafayeva**, Assistant Professor, Bahçeşehir University

**Orkhan Valiyev**, Associate Professor, Khazar University

**Tolga Bilener**, Associate Professor, Director, Galatasaray University's Center for Strategic Research

**Vural Kural**, Senior Economist & Executive Secretary and Treasurer, International Association of Operative Millers (IAOM)-Eurasia

**Yaşar Sarı**, Professor, İbn Khaldun University

**Yuliya Biletska**, Assistant Professor, Karabuk University

# Key Takeaways

- Cultural diplomacy and economic connectivity are mutually reinforcing drivers of stability in Central Asia. Enhanced mobility, education, and trade cooperation can transform shared identity into a foundation for lasting regional engagement.
- A shift from soft power projection to genuine cultural partnership is reshaping international relations in the region. Mutual understanding and co-creation are emerging as more effective than traditional nation-centred diplomacy.
- Türkiye's cultural engagement exemplifies an inclusive and identity-affirming approach, contrasting with more transactional external influences. Shared language, traditions, and media cooperation have deepened a sense of regional solidarity.
- Reviving historical narratives and preserving cultural heritage are essential for strengthening post-Soviet nation-building. These efforts provide continuity between past and future, anchoring modern development in shared memory.
- Young generations and digital transformation are redefining how culture connects societies across Central Asia. Investing in creative industries and cultural innovation was viewed as key to sustaining connectivity and regional trust.

## Summary

The session focused on the evolving dynamics of cultural diplomacy and shared identity across Central Asia, exploring how history, culture, and economic connectivity intersect to shape the region's future. Participants emphasised that Central Asia has undergone a remarkable economic and cultural transformation over the past two decades, achieving annual growth rates between 6–11% and emerging as a vibrant hub of young, educated, and digitally skilled populations. The region's strategic geography linking China, Russia, Iran, India, and the Turkic world has been further enhanced by new railway corridors that have made Eurasian trade faster and more cost-efficient, strengthening interregional cooperation and peace.

Several speakers underlined that cultural and economic ties are deeply intertwined. Türkiye's recent initiative to facilitate work opportunities for citizens of Turkic-speaking countries was praised as a step that could significantly deepen people-to-people connectivity. This was contrasted with ongoing bureaucratic challenges faced by Central Asian workers in other regions, highlighting the need for harmonised and equitable mobility frameworks.

Beyond economics, discussions turned to cultural diplomacy as a means of building trust and sustainable cooperation. Speakers distinguished traditional “nation-driven” cultural diplomacy, often centred on soft power projection and international cultural relations, which prioritise mutual understanding and co-creation. The European Union's approach was cited as an example of the latter: promoting diversity and cooperation rather than a singular cultural narrative. Through programs like Erasmus+ and European Film Festivals, the EU aims to support local cultural capacity while respecting the region's unique heritage.

Participants also discussed the subtle and multifaceted presence of external actors in Central Asia. While Russia's influence continues through cultural and economic channels, China's approach was described as economically assertive yet culturally restrained—“buying silence rather than shaping identity.” In contrast, Türkiye's engagement was viewed more positively: rather than imposing influence, it has encouraged a rediscovery of shared language, traditions, and

confidence in local identities. Turkish television dramas, joint media productions, and educational initiatives were highlighted as organic forms of cultural diplomacy that strengthen regional solidarity.

A key segment of the discussion examined the role of historical narratives in post-Soviet identity formation. Participants agreed that the revival of local heroes, myths, and traditions has become central to nation-building efforts. Cultural heritage projects, such as mosque restorations and historical site renovations in the Caucasus, were cited as examples of how collective memory reinforces a “unified cultural space.” Such initiatives were framed not only as preservation efforts but as sustainable bridges between past and future, contributing to peace and mutual understanding.

Representatives from regional organisations stressed that culture and shared identity constitute the foundation of diplomacy in the 21st century. “Real diplomacy begins with culture, not negotiation,” one participant observed, emphasising that poetry, art, and storytelling transcend borders and foster empathy. Speakers from the Turkic world echoed that sentiment, describing cultural diplomacy as a process of connection rather than competition, built on equality, respect, and innovation.

In closing, the session highlighted that the future of regional cooperation in Central Asia lies in balancing tradition and modernity, preserving cultural heritage while embracing digital transformation. Young generations were seen as key actors in this endeavour, driving creative cultural exchange and sustaining a shared sense of belonging across the region.

## Session 4

# European Security Architecture: Between Institutional Overlap and Strategic Necessity



## Moderator

**Yusuf Erim**, Presenter and Executive Producer at TRT World

## Speakers

**Hillary Briffa**, PhD; Senior Lecturer in National Security Studies Education, King's College London

**Jonathan Githens-Mazer**, Professor, Political Analyst; Former Adviser, NATO and the UN

**Rick Fawn**, Professor of International Relations, University of St Andrews

**Valeria Giannotta**, PhD; Academic and Scientific Director of the Observatory on Türkiye, CeSPI, Rome

## Discussants

**Adam McConnel**, Journalist, Academic

**Ahmet Tekin**, Jean Monnet Scholar in European Studies

**Amina Smits Akılma**, Researcher, TAV

**Halil Kürşad Aslan**, Professor, İstanbul Medipol University

**Haluk Doğan**, Assistant Professor, Yalova University

**İdlir Lika**, Associate Professor, Ibn Khaldun University

**Özgür Ünal Eriş**, Jean Monnet Chair; Professor of European Politics, İstanbul 29 Mayıs University

**Selver B. Şahin**, Professor, Boğaziçi University

# Key Takeaways

- Türkiye is emerging as a key global actor with a strategic vision, particularly in regions like Libya, Ghana, Nigeria, and the Sahel, which many European states overlook due to myopia.
- The European security framework relies on distinct institutional roles; NATO providing military hard power, the EU focusing on soft/regulatory power and resilience, and the OSCE maintaining diplomatic channels; necessitating synchronisation rather than merging or duplicating mandates.
- Practical partnerships, such as the cooperation between Italy's Leonardo and Türkiye's Baykar, offer a transactional and pragmatic model for integrating critical defence technologies into the European system, bypassing political hurdles encountered at the EU-wide level.
- The entire European security debate is fundamentally structured within the overarching US–China rivalry, challenging European states to strategically position themselves and find ways to advance their interests without being compelled to align strictly with one side.
- Beyond state defence, securing Europe increasingly requires protecting fundamental liberal values, democratic identity, and the welfare standards of citizens, as erosion in these areas fuels the rise of populist right-wing parties, creating internal security threats.
- Instability within Europe, such as unresolved issues in the Balkans (specifically the recognition of Kosovo) and ongoing maritime disputes in the Mediterranean, provides opportunities for external powers to interfere and destabilise continental security.

## Summary

The session focused on the complex and evolving nature of the European security architecture, examining the tension between institutional mandates and strategic necessities, particularly in light of current geopolitical shifts. Participants agreed that the architecture is at a crossroads, marked by critical fault lines revealed by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and increasing polarisation. The discussion explored the strengths and limitations of the existing framework, which relies on NATO, the EU's CSDP, and the OSCE.

A significant portion of the conversation was dedicated to Türkiye's crucial and often misunderstood strategic role. It was noted that Türkiye possesses a strategic vision and influence in regions such as North Africa and the Sahel, which many European countries, preoccupied with domestic politics, have allowed to decline. Several speakers highlighted the importance of Ankara as a key actor with a global vision. Specifically, the recent "golden age" of Italian-Turkish relations was discussed, exemplified by the partnership between Italian defense industry giant Leonardo and Turkish company Baykar, facilitating the integration of Turkish defense systems into European territories and showcasing a successful model for bilateral engagement.

Participants debated the effectiveness and future of the institutional structure. There was broad consensus that the current arrangement involves a deliberate division of labour: NATO is the pillar for hard power, military alliance, and deterrence, while the EU is better equipped for soft power, regulatory influence, and civilian resilience. The consensus favoured coordination rather than consolidation of these bodies, treating the security structure as an ecosystem where each component serves a distinct, specialised function. The OSCE was specifically championed as an unsung hero and indispensable transatlantic platform for confidence building, arms control, and maintaining diplomatic channels, even amid tensions with Russia.

The broader context of great power rivalry was introduced as the lens through which European security must be understood, noting the competitive struggle between the US and China. One perspective suggested that the US's required pivot to Asia necessitated Europe stepping up its defense capabilities, logical given the

importance of military powers like Türkiye. However, other contributors stressed the challenge for the majority of states to navigate this competition without being forced to choose a side, advocating for a focus on finding independent development paths.

The conversation also turned inward, scrutinising Europe's internal security challenges and identity. Speakers highlighted that crises, such as the conflict in Ukraine, have been a profound shock, revealing a widespread myopia in Europe regarding the possibility of large-scale conventional war. Discussions covered the practical obstacles to collective defence, including tremendous bottlenecks in continental infrastructure needed to move military logistics across Europe. Internally, unresolved regional disputes, such as the non-recognition of Kosovo by four NATO members and maritime zone disputes involving Greece, Türkiye, and Italy, were identified as critical points of vulnerability.

Finally, the dialogue explored the evolving definition of security and the erosion of values. It was argued that the EU's focus on hard power and defense risks overshadowing its soft power objectives such as protecting welfare standards, fundamental values, and human rights, which historically made the EU attractive. The rise of populism, driven partly by identity politics and uncontrolled migration waves, was seen as a major internal threat, creating a dilemma where European countries risk losing the core elements that define the European project. A specific concern was raised regarding deep-rooted Orientalism and prejudice against Muslim societies, which acts as a major barrier to fully integrating Türkiye into the European mindset despite its strategic necessity.

Ultimately, the session underscored that Europe faces a strategic moment requiring preparation and action to defend its values and interests against external threats, rather than becoming consumed by internal debates over the nuances of liberalism or identity politics.

## Session 5

# The Ukraine Conflict: Diplomacy Amid the Fog of War



## Moderator

**Yashini Padayachee**, Presenter, TRT World

## Speakers

**Alexandra Vacroux**, Vice President for Strategic Engagement, Kyiv School of Economics

**Jagannath Panda**, Head, Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA); Executive Editor, ISDP

**Mohamad Safa**, Executive Director and Main Representative of PVA at the United Nations

**Olga Trofimtseva**, Former Deputy Minister of Agrarian Policy and Food of Ukraine on European Integration

**Sergiy Kyslytsya**, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ukraine

## Discussants

**Ali Engin Oba**, Ambassador (Ret.); Professor, Çağ University

**Eren Günhan Ulusoy**, Chairman, International Association of Operative Millers (IAOM)

**Merve Suna Özel Özcan**, Associate Professor, Kırıkkale University

**Michelangelo Guida**, Professor, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Istanbul Medeniyet University

**Rahman Nurdun**, PhD; Vice President, TİKA

**Stephen Cahill**, United Nations World Food Program Türkiye Director and Country Representative

**Thomas Greminger**, Director, Geneva Centre for Security Policy

**Valeri Morkva**, Assistant Professor, Cappadocia University

**Yuliya Biletska**, Assistant Professor, Karabuk University



## Key Takeaways

- Diplomatic endeavours, such as the Istanbul and Antalya talks and the Black Sea Grain Initiative, have proceeded in parallel with high-intensity military confrontation, confirming the persistent relevance of negotiation even when parties are actively engaged in warfare.
- The fundamental design of the United Nations Security Council is currently unable to address the conflict effectively because a permanent member is a belligerent, significantly undermining the validity of the post-Second World War international architecture.
- Food security has been increasingly highlighted as a basic determinant of socio-economic and political stability, with food being deliberately used as a weapon during the conflict, making initiatives like the Black Sea Grain Initiative vital yet fragile.
- Conflicts are settled when military outcomes convince the fighting parties that they cannot achieve their goals, meaning that genuine progress in negotiations is primarily driven by developments on the battlefield rather than solely by economic pressure.
- Deliberate linguistic manipulation, such as referring to the aggression as a “special military operation” or the use of highly divergent interpretations of international law, prevents the establishment of common ground and meaningful rules of engagement necessary for effective negotiation.
- While a military cessation may halt fighting, it will not erase the existential threat posed by the aggressor state without significant internal political change, and the war has broad geopolitical consequences, including influencing anticipated conflicts in the Indo-Pacific.

## Summary

The session explored the complex, evolving trajectory of the war in Ukraine, focusing specifically on the concurrent operation of high-intensity conflict and diplomatic efforts. Participants scrutinised how major diplomatic initiatives, including the Istanbul and Antalya talks and the crucial Black Sea Grain Initiative, have influenced the conflict dynamics and broader peace prospects.

A central theme was the dysfunctionality of the international system and major international organisations, particularly the UN Security Council. It was observed that the Council's structure, which allows a permanent member involved in a conflict to exercise veto power, renders it incapable of approving meaningful decisions on Ukraine. This failure is seen by some as completely and irrevocably undermining the validity of the post-Second World War security architecture. While acknowledging that the UN cannot be 'cancelled,' speakers noted that public dissatisfaction with multilateralism is high, and meaningful reforms remain elusive despite efforts like resolutions on veto accountability.

The discussion emphasised the shift in focus from traditional state security (borders, sovereignty) to human security, arguing that wars affect people, families, and communities, often being fought in schools, homes, and hospitals. This paradigm shift necessitates asking how to protect the people within a state, rather than just the state itself.

A significant portion of the conversation was dedicated to food security and the use of food as a weapon. Speakers highlighted that access to food is a basic determinant of social, economic, and political stability globally, and there is a disturbing trend of food being used as a "hunger weapon". The Black Sea Grain Initiative was cited as a critical example of cooperation achieved under complex circumstances, facilitated by brokers like Türkiye. However, it was noted that attempts were deliberately made to sabotage the initiative, demonstrating the difficulties in implementing rules even when humanitarian efforts are involved. It was clarified that the issue is not a global scarcity of grain, but rather the weaponisation of food and the deliberate interruption of supply

chains. Türkiye's geographical positioning and effective negotiations were credited with making the supply chain operational.

Analysis of negotiation dynamics revealed profound challenges. It was posited that wars usually conclude not through decisive victory, but through negotiation, a process that can take years. However, negotiations only advance when information from the battlefield convinces one side they cannot meet their goals, removing their incentive to continue fighting. Economic devastation has been considerable (estimated reconstruction costs up to a trillion dollars), but economic factors alone have not driven one side to the negotiation table. A key barrier to meaningful engagement is the deliberate use of contradictory terminology and interpretations of international law by one party. For instance, one side uses 'special military operation' to avoid internal legal accountability for launching aggression. It was argued that, due to the nature of the current regime, the fate of the conflict rests largely in the hands of a single individual, complicating traditional negotiation frameworks.

Regarding the long-term future, participants stressed that stopping the fighting is not synonymous with achieving peace, as a ceasefire does not eliminate the reasons for the war. The conflict was framed not merely as a war about land, but a neo-colonial effort aimed at restoring a historical empire and deliberately destroying the identity, culture, and independence of the opposing nation. Therefore, without a process of internal political change in the aggressor state, a concept some believe European capitals fear due to potential destabilisation, the threat will remain imminent. Concerns were also raised about specific war crimes, including the systematic abduction and forcible transfer of children, which meets the definition of genocidal intent. Finally, the session concluded by noting that the fallout from the conflict has significant implications for global stability, connecting the European security architecture to potential future conflicts, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region concerning issues like Taiwan and the South China Sea.

## Session 6

# The Gulf Amid a Fragmenting Global Order: Vision, Rivalry and Fault Lines



## Moderator

**Tarek Cherkaoui**, PhD; Manager, TRT World Research Centre

## Speakers

**Abdullah Baabood**, PhD; Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Waseda University

**Hae Won Jeong**, Assistant Professor of International Relations, Abu Dhabi University

**Rob Geist Pinfeld**, PhD; Lecturer in International Security, King's College London

## Discussants

**Ahmet Furkan Özyakar**, PhD; Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Atatürk University

**Ali Kaya**, PhD; Researcher, the Graduate School of Global and Area Studies (GSGAS), Leipzig University

**Helin Sarı Ertem**, Associate Professor, Istanbul Medeniyet University

**İsmail Numan Telci**, Professor, Department of International Relations; Lecturer, Middle East Institute; Sakarya University

**Kaan Devecioğlu**, PhD; Coordinator, North African Studies, ORSAM (Center for Middle Eastern Studies)

**Ulaş Kutsi Çezik**, PhD, Lecturer in the Department of International Relations, Karadeniz Technical University

**Yunus Turhan**, Associate Professor, Hacı Bayram Veli University



## Key Takeaways

- Persistent mistrust among Gulf states continues to impede efforts to establish a cohesive regional security framework, with rivalries and differing threat perceptions preventing meaningful integration.
- Despite fluctuating confidence in Washington's reliability, Gulf leaders remain structurally dependent on U.S. security guarantees, reflecting decades of investment in military and diplomatic ties.
- Türkiye's pragmatic diplomacy, growing defence industry, and balanced relations with both Western and regional actors position it as a flexible partner for selective Gulf states such as Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait.
- Contrasting approaches toward Islamist movements—Doha's engagement versus Abu Dhabi's and Riyadh's rejection—continue to shape alliances and hinder collective Gulf decision-making.
- Structural conditions that created NATO—shared trauma, a singular external threat, and institutional maturity—are absent in the Gulf, making a comparable defence pact improbable in the near term.
- Joint investment in defence localisation and post-conflict reconstruction offers a pragmatic route to building confidence, linking economic interdependence with gradual political cooperation.

## Summary

The Gulf region stands at a crossroads between dependency and diversification as states seek new formulas for collective security amid widening geopolitical uncertainty. Despite repeated calls for integration, deep mistrust within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) continues to obstruct progress toward a unified security framework. Historical grievances—most notably the 2017 blockade of Qatar—exposed the fragility of intra-Gulf solidarity and reinforced a pattern of states prioritising sovereignty and regime survival over institutional cooperation.

Participants noted that the long-discussed idea of a “Gulf NATO” remains more rhetorical than real. The model that underpinned NATO’s creation, total war, a common existential threat, and shared democratic norms, finds no equivalent in the Gulf. Instead, the region operates through overlapping bilateral pacts, limited joint exercises, and ad hoc coalitions. These arrangements deliver short-term deterrence but fail to produce the strategic coherence or predictability required for collective defence.

At the centre of this architecture remains the United States. Even as confidence in Washington’s consistency has eroded, its military presence and political cover remain indispensable. Gulf capitals have invested heavily in U.S. protection, cultivating an asymmetrical dependency that endures despite frustration over Washington’s selective engagement, from its muted response to Houthi drone strikes to perceived indifference during Israeli–Iranian escalations. Most agreed that no viable substitute yet exists, although diversification toward Asian and regional partners is visibly under way.

In this context, Türkiye’s growing diplomatic and industrial footprint has drawn considerable attention. Its assertive foreign policy, operational record in Libya and Syria, and support for Qatar during the blockade established a reputation for agility and effectiveness. For several Gulf states, Türkiye’s success in developing indigenous defence capabilities—especially in drones and aerospace—offers a practical model for their own localisation strategies. As a NATO member that enjoys legitimacy across the Muslim world, Türkiye occupies a dual space: Western-aligned yet regionally resonant. However, lingering rivalry with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, coupled with suspicions regarding Ankara’s ties to Islamist movements, continues to temper wider enthusiasm.

Ideological fault lines over political Islam remain central to regional polarisation. Qatar’s view that engagement with groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood or Hamas can moderate them contrasts sharply with the UAE’s and Saudi Arabia’s securitised approach, which treats such movements as existential threats to state stability. This divergence shapes not only intra-GCC dynamics but also attitudes toward Türkiye, often perceived as ideologically closer to Doha’s outlook.

Beyond ideology, economics emerged as the most realistic domain for confidence-building. Joint reconstruction projects in post-conflict areas—particularly Syria and Gaza—were cited as opportunities for trust through shared benefit. Türkiye’s construction expertise and the Gulf’s capital surplus form a natural complementarity, capable of producing tangible results where political dialogue has stalled. Participants suggested that pragmatic cooperation on infrastructure, logistics, and defence industrialisation could create the economic interdependence necessary for a more stable relationship.

The discussion also situated Gulf dynamics within a broader transition toward multipolarity. While some questioned whether the emerging order is truly multipolar or merely transitional, there was consensus that middle powers—including Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—are exercising greater agency. Yet this autonomy remains constrained by competing pressures from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing. Faced with calls to “choose sides,” most regional actors are expected to maintain strategic flexibility, preferring a calibrated balance between alliances rather than exclusive alignment.

Ultimately, participants concluded that a formalised Gulf defence organisation is unlikely to materialise soon. Deep-rooted mistrust, divergent ideologies, and asymmetric power relations continue to limit collective frameworks. Nevertheless, incremental cooperation—in defence localisation, humanitarian aid, and economic connectivity—offers a pragmatic foundation for future stability. Gulf security, at least for the foreseeable future, will rest on a mosaic of bilateral arrangements and issue-based partnerships rather than a single integrated system. By prioritising economic interdependence and maintaining diplomatic agility, Gulf and middle-power actors alike may gradually convert competition into managed coexistence, laying modest but credible groundwork for a more resilient regional order.

## Session 7

# Trump's America: Unpacking the Transformation



## Moderator

**Yusuf Erim**, Presenter and Executive Producer at TRT World

## Speakers

**David Brewster**, Senior Research Fellow, National Security College, Australian National University

**Ebrahim Rasool**, Ambassador, Republic of South Africa; Former South African Ambassador to the United States

**Gürol Baba**, Professor, Social Sciences University of Ankara

**Peter Trubowitz**, Professor of International Relations and Director of the Phelan United States Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science; Associate Fellow, Chatham House Royal Institute of International Affairs

## Discussants

**Adam McConnel**, Journalist, Academic

**Altay Atli**, PhD; Academic, Koç University

**Ferhat Durmaz**, Assistant Professor, Ankara University

**Merve Suna Özel Özcan**, Associate Professor, Kırıkkale University

**Özgün Erler Bayır**, Professor, Istanbul University

**Pınar Artıran**, PhD; Academic, Bilgi University

**Pınar Dost**, PhD; Non-resident Fellow, Atlantic Council Türkiye Program

**Selver B. Şahin**, Professor, Boğaziçi University

**Tolga Sakman**, PhD; Chairman, Center for Diplomatic Affairs and Political Studies (DİPAM)



## Key Takeaways

- US foreign policy is uniquely shaped by the individual leader, requiring foreign governments to formulate a specific “Trump policy” alongside traditional US policy, as all decisions are judged in terms of the leader’s personal benefit, attention, power, and profit.
- Unlike the first term, the administration is highly centralised—described as the most centralised since Richard Nixon—and staffed primarily by loyalists to prevent the policy “blocking coalitions” that previously constrained the President.
- Traditional alliances based on partnership and commitment have been replaced by transactional diplomacy, which particularly harms long-standing US allies who rely less on specific deals and more on the established relationship.
- Beneath the rhetoric, many seemingly irrational policies, such as aggressive tariffs and shifts in regional focus, are often guided by a strategy aimed at securing access to critical minerals and rare earth elements to regain US dominance in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- The strain placed on the international order by the US shift compels middle powers to assume roles as stabilisers, forging new alliances and relationships among themselves to mitigate global instability.
- The current trend is driven by a broader global movement toward nationalism and identity-driven politics, suggesting that the US aims to first demolish the existing post-Cold War liberal international order, which it views as non-functional, before attempting any systematic rebuild.

## Summary

The conversation centred on navigating the unique challenges posed by a US foreign policy described as driven primarily by the individual at the helm, demanding that countries develop a specific “Trump policy” rather than solely focusing on the traditional state policies of the United States. This approach is defined by the leader’s absolute focus on self-interest—namely, power, attention, and profit—rather than conventional geopolitical strategy. Crucially, the current administration has been structured to maximise the leader’s control; speakers noted it is highly centralised, perhaps the most so since Richard Nixon’s era, and loyalists have replaced potential internal opposition, eliminating the “blocking coalitions” that existed during the first term.

The underlying worldview guiding this policy posits that the world remains unipolar, leading to an aggressive strategy focused on leveraging US capabilities and hard power while being willing to sacrifice commitments. A key policy shift identified is the abandonment of soft power inheritance in favour of hard, transactional engagement. This shift has fundamentally changed US relations, moving them from solidarity-based partnerships to metric-driven transactional arrangements. This change disproportionately affects long-standing allies who relied on the institutional relationship, forcing them to quickly pivot to a deal-making mentality. South Africa faced significant diplomatic pressure to withdraw its International Court of Justice (ICJ) case against a U.S. ally, while simultaneously being subjected to propaganda campaigns related to domestic social issues. This episode illustrates the tangible costs of transactional foreign policy, particularly in terms of public health funding and trade access.

A central, though often hidden, “method in the madness” was identified as the strategic pursuit of critical minerals and rare earth elements, which are deemed necessary for the US to regain dominance in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This geoeconomic driver explains seemingly irrational diplomatic pressures and tariff policies across various regions, targeting countries rich in materials like platinum and chromium. Furthermore, the US foreign policy focus is

strategically shifting resources away from the Middle East and Europe to the Indo-Pacific, recognising China as the primary long-term adversary.

In response to this disruption, middle powers are increasingly being forced to act as guarantors of international stability. They are eschewing reliance on traditional multilateral frameworks in favour of forging new, flexible “webs of relationships” among themselves. For instance, Türkiye is pursuing a “drifting hedging” strategy, strengthening ties with bodies like BRICS+ and ASEAN while navigating its complicated bilateral relationship with the US, which is now characterised by “geoeconomic conditionality”. The international system is moving away from binding rules and formal treaties towards coercive negotiation tactics and non-enforceable “napkin deals,” where parties primarily seek leverage and immediate domestic political gains. This environment underscores that countries must focus on their own capabilities and form alliances with like-minded partners to navigate the emerging, uncertain order.

## Session 8

# From the Margins to the Mainstream: The Global Rise of the Far Right



## Moderator

**Matthew Moore**, Presenter, TRT World

## Speakers

**Farid Hafez**, Researcher, William and Mary University; Co-editor of Islamophobia Report

**Klaus Jürgens**, Director, Economyfirst Limited, London; Communication Strategist

**Rizwaan Sabir**, Lecturer in Criminology, Liverpool John Moores University

**Zara Mohammed**, Former Secretary General, Muslim Council of Britain; Consultant, Z-M

## Discussants

**Ali Kaya**, PhD; Researcher, the Graduate School of Global and Area Studies (GSGAS), Leipzig University

**Amina Smits Akılma**, Researcher, TAV

**Halil Kürşad Aslan**, Professor, İstanbul Medipol University

**Hamdullah Baycar**, Assistant Professor, Karadeniz Technical University

**İdlir Lika**, Associate Professor, Ibn Khaldun University

**İbrahim Emre Yanık**, Research Officer, Ibn Khaldun University

**Kübra Betül Biçen Gören**, Assistant Professor, Turkish National Police Academy

**Yücel Bulut**, Associate Professor, Karadeniz Technical University



## Key Takeaways

- The idea that the far right is simply moving “from the margins to the mainstream” was questioned, with some arguing that far-right roots have always been present, latent or potent, within mainstream political parties, often kept “under the carpet”.
- A critical perspective argued that political analyses often suffer from “race amnesia” and “colonial amnesia,” which prevents a deep engagement with the structural and historical roots of racism underlying far-right phenomena.
- State institutions, particularly in the UK, contribute to the far right’s framing by implementing policies like the Prevent programme and other counter-terrorism measures that securitise the Muslim community, treating them as an “inherent threat”.
- The rise of far-right sentiment is viewed by some as fundamentally linked to a “crisis of whiteness” driven by the inevitable demographic change in Western nations.
- When minority figures enter political power, they often face pressure to “reproduce whiteness” or leave their “political agency and autonomy at the door,” thereby risking the loss of respect from the communities they seek to represent.
- The far right successfully leverages digital platforms for unprecedented visibility and legitimacy, utilising skilled communication strategies and presenting a “respectable” image to gain traction among those disillusioned with conventional politics.

## Summary

The session focused on the profound transformation of the global political landscape caused by the far right moving into mainstream political systems, coalition governments, and executive offices. The initial discussion analysed the shift in political boundaries, where the far right successfully leveraged digital platforms and global anxieties to achieve visibility, power, and legitimacy. This movement is fuelled by public disillusionment, economic anxiety, and cultural grievances, promoting nativism, authoritarian reflexes, and hostility towards globalisation and pluralistic norms.

A central theme addressed how far-right actors navigate existing systems while attempting to undermine inclusive norms. One contribution critiqued academic language, such as ‘right-wing populism,’ arguing that it often ignores the underlying historical continuity between the far right and the centre right. This oversight is particularly attributed to a “racial amnesia” and “colonial amnesia” embedded within white Western European political analysis, preventing discussions from addressing the core structural roots of racism. It was suggested that the current political moment represents a deeper crisis—specifically, a “crisis of whiteness” rooted in demographic changes, manifesting as fear over national identity and power asymmetries. The end of the Cold War was also cited as a structural factor that allowed centre-left parties to shift rightwards, opening an opportunity space for cultural and identity-based politics, including ethno nationalism, to rise.

The conversation delved into the specific challenges within the UK, noting that the rise of the far right is coupled with a securitised agenda, primarily targeting Muslim and brown communities through counter-terrorism policing and regulation. One panellist recounted an incident where a major Muslim representative body was nearly labelled an extremist organisation by the government, highlighting how the state itself may deal with communities in ways that feel antagonistic. It was argued that the moral panic constructed in media and amplified by social platforms allows far-right propaganda to work in partnership with the state’s securitisation policies, creating an impression of threat and discord. The perception among some

Muslim communities is that while politicians may offer “performative” gestures like Eid messages, this is contradicted by the lack of equal rights and the threat of arrest during protests, illustrating a “double game” in politics.

Regarding tactics, the discussion highlighted that modern far-right representatives are no longer always shouting or behaving like typical extremists; instead, they employ sophisticated communication experts and dress like the mainstream, focusing on issues like national purpose to gain traction. Digital media plays a crucial role in enabling this normalisation, allowing for the rapid dissemination of disinformation and fostering a climate where citizens become susceptible to simplified, extremist solutions.

The issue of political agency for minorities was explored through the example of high-profile Muslim politicians. It was observed that to attain powerful positions, minority figures are often required to assimilate culturally and politically, reproducing certain norms and leaving their “political consciousness” regarding issues like global justice at the door. This creates an invidious position where those who compromise their political authenticity may lose respect within their own community, whereas a figure like Nigel Farage benefits from appearing authentic because the system inherently caters to a white-supremacist model.

Finally, the dialogue broadened to the material consequences of the far right’s rise, pointing out that anti-immigrant discourses—which are not confined to Europe but are seen in places like Pakistan, Iran, and Türkiye—result in migrant deaths and violence. Populist movements successfully weaponise immigration by dehumanising people in a global crisis, framing them as “agents of terror” or a financial burden, thus banking on a community that cannot speak for itself and creating a shrinking space for civil society to advocate for the disenfranchised.









# Memories from TRT World Forum 2025



















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