TRT world forum 2026

A World Without a Center:

Who Leads When The Rules Run Out?

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EXPERT ROUNDTABLES

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SESSION 1 AFRICA

The Horn of Africa in Transition: Diplomacy, Geoeconomics, and Emerging Security Architectures

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In recent years, the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea have become one of the world's most strategically contested regions, sitting at the crossroads of global trade, energy security, maritime transport, and great-power rivalry. Attacks on commercial shipping, growing risks to energy supply, and intensifying competition over critical sea lanes have elevated the region from a source of chronic instability to a key arena in the evolving geopolitical order. At the same time, Ethiopia's pursuit of maritime access, tensions with Somalia, competition over ports and transport corridors, and the devastating conflict in Sudan have further unsettled an already fragile regional balance. Together, these developments highlight a region increasingly shaped not only by security challenges, but also by competing visions of regional integration, connectivity, and political influence. Against this backdrop, Türkiye has expanded its diplomatic, economic, security, and energy engagement, emerging as a more prominent regional actor.

This session will examine the changing geopolitics of the Horn of Africa through the interconnected issues of Red Sea security, maritime access, strategic infrastructure, and regional conflict. It will explore the Somalia-Ethiopia diplomatic process, the wider implications of the war in Sudan, competition over ports, trade corridors, and energy connectivity, and Türkiye's growing role across the region. Bringing together debates on maritime security, regional diplomacy, and geopolitical competition, the discussion will assess whether new forms of cooperation can emerge in one of the world's most strategically important regions, and how Türkiye is seeking to contribute to regional stability while advancing its own strategic interests.

Discussion Themes

- As security threats in the Red Sea intensify and maritime trade routes become increasingly contested, how can the global economic consequences of regional instability be contained?
- How are Ethiopia's pursuit of maritime access, competition over ports, and tensions with Somalia reshaping debates over sovereignty, connectivity, and regional cooperation?
- What impact is the conflict in Sudan having on Red Sea security, migration, regional stability, and the prospects for a sustainable regional security architecture?
- As Türkiye expands its diplomatic, economic, security, and energy engagement in the Horn of Africa, can its approach provide a sustainable model for regional diplomacy, conflict management, and long-term stabilisation?

SESSION 2 ASIA - PASIFIC

New Security Dynamics in the Asia-Pacific

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Amid a broader global trend towards militarisation, the Asia-Pacific is undergoing a profound transformation in its security landscape. China's expanding military capabilities, uncertainty surrounding U.S. security commitments, tensions over Taiwan, the evolution of partnerships such as the QUAD and AUKUS, and North Korea's advancing nuclear programme have all accelerated the region's return to hard-power politics. This shift is reflected in expanding defence budgets, military modernisation, and significant changes in national security policy, from U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and China's increasingly assertive posture, to Japan's gradual departure from its post-war security doctrine and growing defence investments by India and South Korea. President Trump's visit to Beijing has added a further layer of uncertainty, prompting questions about whether U.S. commitments to regional allies could become increasingly transactional within the broader context of U.S.-China relations. Together, these developments are reshaping the foundations of the region's security architecture.

This session will examine the evolving security dynamics of the Asia-Pacific from a regional perspective. It will explore the strategic calculations of regional actors, the significance of the Taiwan question, and the implications of renewed militarisation for the balance of power across the region. Rather than viewing the Asia-Pacific solely through the prism of U.S.-China rivalry, the discussion will focus on the region's own strategic priorities, security cultures, and evolving defence policies to better understand how its future security order is taking shape.

Discussion Themes

- To what extent is the Asia-Pacific undergoing a structural shift towards militarisation, and what are the principal drivers behind this transformation?
- If recent U.S.-China engagement signals a more transactional approach to American security commitments, how might regional states respond, and what would this mean for the region's strategic balance?
- What role will security partnerships such as AUKUS and the QUAD play in shaping the future regional security architecture and balance of power?
- How are countries such as Japan, India, and South Korea adapting their defence strategies and security doctrines in response to an increasingly contested regional environment?

Central Asia at the Heart of Eurasian Reordering

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As Eurasia undergoes a profound geopolitical and geoeconomic transformation, Central Asia is emerging as a pivotal hub linking Asia, Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Once viewed largely as a transit region, it has become increasingly important to the competition over trade corridors, energy networks, and supply chains that are reshaping Eurasian integration. As transport routes diversify and infrastructure investment accelerates, the region's strategic importance has grown alongside competition among regional and global powers. Within this changing landscape, Türkiye has expanded its engagement through initiatives such as the Middle Corridor, while the Organization of Turkic States is assuming a more prominent role in promoting political coordination, economic cooperation, and cross-regional integration across the Turkic world.

This session will examine how geoeconomics and evolving transport networks are redefining Central Asia's place in the emerging Eurasian order. It will explore the strategic importance of trade corridors, infrastructure investment, and energy connectivity, alongside competition surrounding routes linking Central Asia with the South Caucasus, Türkiye, and Europe. The discussion will also assess how geopolitical rivalries, efforts to diversify trade and energy flows, and growing demand for critical resources are transforming the region into a focal point of strategic competition, economic integration, and regional realignment.

Discussion Themes

- How is Central Asia's strategic role being reshaped by competing transport corridors, geoeconomic competition, and new forms of regional cooperation across Eurasia?
- How are critical minerals, including rare earth elements, transforming Central Asia's position within global supply chains and redefining the concept of mineral security?
- How do competing transport, trade, and energy corridors, including those passing through the South Caucasus and the Zangezur Corridor, shape regional alignments and patterns of economic integration?
- How does Türkiye's connectivity strategy influence, and adapt to, the evolving geoeconomic landscape of Eurasia?

Global Military and Defense Modernization: Power Shifts and Strategic Rebalancing

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Global military and defense modernization has become a defining feature of the contemporary international system, shaped by accelerating technological change, intensifying geopolitical competition, and the redefinition of deterrence in a multipolar world. Across different regions and political systems, states are increasingly pursuing parallel modernization efforts, making this trend a truly global phenomenon rather than one limited to major military powers. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Japan, and others are continuously upgrading their defense architectures, reflecting a broader effort to adapt to new strategic realities. In this context, middle powers are emerging as increasingly important actors in shaping regional security dynamics and contributing to broader processes of strategic rebalancing. Türkiye, as a middle power, exemplifies this trend through its ongoing modernization of defense capabilities and its growing strategic agency within an evolving international security environment, reflecting the wider role of middle powers in bridging regional security demands with global power shifts.

This session will examine the key drivers and implications of contemporary defense modernization across major, middle, and emerging powers. It will explore how technological innovation is redefining military superiority and transforming doctrines of warfare, how defense industrial policies are evolving in response to supply chain vulnerabilities, and how states are adapting to shifting deterrence dynamics in an increasingly complex security environment. The discussion will also address the risks associated with arms races in emerging domains such as cyber and space, as well as the growing role of private defense contractors and dual-use technologies. Ultimately, the session will assess whether ongoing modernization trends are contributing to a more stable balance of power or accelerating fragmentation and strategic competition within the global security order.

Discussion Themes

- How is accelerating technological change reshaping global military and defense modernization, particularly in relation to artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, cyber capabilities, and space-based assets?
- In what ways are shifting geopolitical dynamics and multipolar competition redefining deterrence and influencing defense modernization strategies among major and emerging powers?
- How are defense industrial policies and supply chain security concerns transforming national approaches to military readiness and strategic resilience?
- Do current trends in military modernization point toward a more stable global deterrence environment, or are they accelerating fragmentation and intensifying strategic competition in the international security order?

SESSION 5 GULF

The Day After the War: Toward a New Security Architecture?

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The post-October 7 period marked a critical turning point for the Gulf. Israel's war on Gaza triggered a wider regional escalation in which Iran emerged as a prominent actor, both through its proxies and through direct confrontations with Israel and the United States. This dynamic profoundly destabilized the regional security architecture. Gulf states increasingly found themselves exposed to the spillover effects of this escalation. As part of this asymmetric conflict, critical Gulf energy and connectivity infrastructure, as well as U.S. military bases in the region, came under attack. As the first crisis of its kind since the First Gulf War, it has intensified questions about the United States' traditional role as the Gulf's primary security guarantor. In this context, the future of the traditional "oil for security" formula underpinning Gulf-U.S. relations has become an increasing subject of debate.

This session will explore how the Gulf's future security architecture may evolve in light of these developments. It will examine whether a growing trust deficit toward the United States among Gulf states could encourage the diversification of strategic partnerships or deepen existing forms of cooperation. It will assess the future of regional multilateral frameworks, particularly the GCC and, more broadly, the Arab League, and consider whether the post-war environment is more likely to strengthen internal cohesion or deepen existing fractures. The discussion will also examine the future of Arab-Israeli normalization initiatives, including the Abraham Accords, as well as the potential roles of actors such as Türkiye and Pakistan in shaping the Gulf's evolving security landscape through defense industrial cooperation and emerging approaches to collective security.

Discussion Themes

- Following the war involving Israel and the United States against Iran, how might Iran-Gulf relations evolve, and what implications would this have for the regional security architecture?
- What future lies ahead for Arab-Israeli normalization in the post-war period?
- Will the collective action potential of the Arab League as a whole, and the GCC in particular, lead to greater internal cohesion or deepen existing fractures?
- What roles might actors such as Türkiye and Pakistan play, through defense industrial cooperation and collective security frameworks, in shaping the future of Gulf security architecture?

Rare Earth Elements: A New Medium for Global Power Competition

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Rare earth elements have become a central pillar of global technological competition and economic security because of their critical role in clean energy systems, semiconductors, electric vehicles, and defense technologies. As supply chains remain highly concentrated in a small number of countries, particularly in processing and refining, rare earths have increasingly become strategic assets within broader geopolitical and industrial rivalries. Recent developments, including export controls, resource nationalism, and state-led efforts to secure access to critical minerals, illustrate how these resources have become integral to economic statecraft and technological sovereignty.

This session examines the geopolitical and economic implications of rare earth dependency in an era of intensifying strategic competition. The discussion will explore how supply chain concentration shapes global power asymmetries, how states use critical minerals as instruments of leverage and resilience, and how diversification efforts, recycling initiatives, and alternative sourcing strategies may reshape future industrial and security architectures. It will also assess whether rare earths represent a temporary supply chain vulnerability or a structural feature of the emerging geopolitical economy.

Discussion Themes

- How has the growing concentration of rare earth extraction and, more critically, processing capacity influenced global technological competition, industrial policy, and economic security strategies?
- In what ways have rare earth elements become embedded in broader geopolitical competition through export controls, resource nationalism, and the weaponization of supply chains?
- How are states and industries responding to critical mineral dependency through diversification strategies, including alternative sourcing, recycling technologies, stockpiling, and material substitution?
- What does the current structure of rare earth supply chains reveal about long-term shifts in global economic governance and the balance between market forces and state intervention?

SESSION 7 RUSSIA - UKRAINE

A Conflict Without End: The Future of Russia-Ukrainian War

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More than four years after Russia's full-scale invasion, the war in Ukraine continues to redefine the nature of modern conflict and reshape global geopolitics. What began as a regional war has evolved into a broader struggle with far-reaching implications for international security, strategic deterrence, energy politics, and the future of the international order. The conflict has accelerated the use of drones, cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, and hybrid warfare, while exposing the limits of traditional military doctrine and diplomatic mechanisms. As cease-fire efforts remain uncertain and the risk of further escalation persists, questions surrounding strategic endurance, political legitimacy, and the sustainability of international support have become increasingly central.

This session examines the evolving political, military, and technological dimensions of the Russia-Ukraine war and its wider global implications. The discussion will explore the changing character of warfare, including the growing role of autonomous technologies, information warfare, sanctions, and attacks on strategic infrastructure, as well as the geopolitical consequences of prolonged conflict for regional and global stability. Bringing together perspectives from security, diplomacy, technology, and international law, the session will also examine how the war is reshaping contemporary understandings of deterrence, negotiation, and power in an increasingly fragmented international system.

Discussion Themes

- How is the Russia-Ukraine war reshaping the nature of modern warfare, particularly through the increased use of drones, cyber operations, artificial intelligence, and hybrid tactics?
- What does the prolonged nature of the conflict reveal about the limits of deterrence, military doctrine, and diplomatic crisis management in contemporary interstate wars?
- How do sanctions, energy politics, and information warfare function as strategic instruments alongside conventional military power in this conflict?
- In what ways is the war transforming global understandings of sovereignty, strategic stability, and the balance of power in an increasingly fragmented international system?

The New Strategic Landscape of the Levant

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Israeli expansionism is widely identified as one of the root causes of regional insecurity and instability, with increasingly visible effects across the Levant, particularly in Syria and Lebanon. Syria is currently undergoing a new state-building process following the overthrow of a decades-long Ba'athist dictatorship by opposition forces, while simultaneously confronting an Israel that has permanently annexed the Golan Heights, pursued a collusive approach with certain Druze communities, and contributed to prolonged instability in Lebanon through an extended cycle of conflict since 1982. This has created a second major axis of regional destabilization, compounding the shockwaves generated by the war against Iran and its impact on Gulf security. Challenges to territorial integrity and central authority, the most fundamental principles of statehood, continue to obstruct the Levant's prospects for lasting peace while undermining long-term development and economic growth across both the region and the Eastern Mediterranean as a critical energy hub and maritime corridor.

This session will examine Israeli expansionism across the Levant with a focus on current dynamics and future trajectories rather than historical background alone. Drawing on the cases of Syria and Lebanon, and adopting a regional perspective, it will assess the implications of persistent insecurity and instability while exploring potential pathways for de-escalation and resolution. By addressing the structural drivers of conflict while maintaining a forward-looking analytical lens, the discussion aims to identify the principal obstacles to long-term regional stability and strategic planning.

Discussion Themes

- How have Israel's expansionist actions in Syria and Lebanon reshaped the strategic and security landscape of the Levant, particularly during Syria's post-Assad transition?
- To what extent do challenges to territorial integrity and centralized state authority in Syria and Lebanon undermine prospects for long-term regional stability and state-building?
- How could persistent instability across the Levant and the Eastern Mediterranean affect regional economic development, connectivity initiatives, and broader geopolitical alignments?
- With Assad's fall dismantling Iran's land corridor and Hezbollah severely weakened, is Israeli expansionism in Syria and Lebanon exploiting a temporary power vacuum or entrenching a new strategic reality?

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