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## **Peace and Stability in Turkey's Neighborhood**

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This article summarizes and synthesizes debates and results from a Global Leadership Forum workshop titled "Peace and Stability in the Neighborhood", which took place at Zifin Hotel in Giresun-Turkey, 10-12 June 2022, co-organized by GlobalAcademy and the School of Government and Leadership of Bahçeşehir University.

### **Global Threats and Opportunities**

Recent decades have been relatively unstable in world politics, especially since the end of the Cold War. Today's world is going through significant transformations that are difficult to make sense of for both the International Relations (IR) scholarly community and policymakers.

We should now recognize that international politics is a moving, rather than a stable, target. The IR community did not realize this fact, and we do not entirely understand the transformation we are going through. We need to think proactively and prepare to forecast international developments and prevent political catastrophes in our region and beyond. These platforms, such as this forum, are designed to achieve those aims. That is why this forum focuses on peace and stability in our region.

Global challenges are substantial, and they project real challenges to states, their citizens and the global society. In the next few years, more people are likely to die from climate change and food crises than from bullets and conflict. One such perfect storm is caused by the COVID19 pandemic and the consequent economic crisis with profound political implications. In the near future, political and financial problems, along with global food and energy issues, will dominate the agenda.

Countries are not individually responsible for the upcoming series of crises, as they cannot provide adequate responses by themselves. A multilateral approach and international cooperation are essential to tackle today's global problems. We recognize that the current global challenges require a significantly more collective approach.

### **Grand Questions Concerning Global Politics**

One of the most central issues in today's world politics is the global rivalry between the US and China. Many consider the rivalry between China and the US to be the main fault line in world politics. Global implications of this competition have been discussed for more than two decades. Especially IR scholars have been focusing on the US-China rivalry since they think great power rivalry is one of the main drivers of world politics. Especially American and Chinese academics and policymakers focus on this subject and try to explain and predict the rivalry's implications, ranging from Taiwan's status to spillover effects in the MENA region, Africa, and South America. However, in this part of the world (i.e., Turkey's neighbourhood and Europe), the US-China

rivalry, or the rise of China, is still not considered a primary issue. Neither for Europeans nor post-Soviet countries, China is the most critical topic.

Nevertheless, this lack of interest in China and the US-China rivalry has begun to change recently. For example, NATO official documents throughout 2022 include a critical China discussion from a European perspective, even though Russia and terrorism continue to be seen as the main threat to Europe. We will see more discussions on China in upcoming NATO and EU strategic papers. In other words, although China is not seen as a threat, from a Eurasian perspective, it is perceived as a challenge. Eurasian countries do not want a new Cold War with China. Still, they recognize the rise of China is a challenge (for differences in European and NATO attitudes towards China, see the latest [Strategic Compass](#) and [Strategic Concept](#) documents). Thus, it is imperative that, in the coming years, we will see more strategy documents from Eurasian countries about China.

On the other hand, Western institutions will undoubtedly continue to discuss Russia as a direct threat to Eurasian stability and security. Russia's invasion of Ukraine holds a significant destabilizing effect, which unified the Western alliance in its condemnation of Russia and balancing against it. From that point forward, Europe needs a more coherent policy against the Russian threat to find a precarious balance between preventing malicious Russian influence and containing Russian threats.

There is also a prominent political dimension to this east-west conflict: the autocracy-democracy dichotomy. Admittedly, many east-west disputes have this autocracy-democracy dimension. The future of international society depends not only on power distribution among great powers but also on the ongoing rivalry between democracies and autocracies such as Russia and China.

We should also consider that the autocracy-democracy issue may not be as black and white as some present it, but it is one of a continuum. Many states fall between fully democratic and autocratic regimes, and there are moves between them. One significant challenge is what to do with the countries that fall in between, like Turkey or Hungary, or the ones that move the divide between democracy and autocracy. The main challenge would be how to treat these governments and incorporate these countries, so they do not shift to less democratic modes of government. How can we best achieve democratic goals by integrating these countries into the current international system? Conflict with these countries based on existing problems may push them towards more autocratic regimes. Therefore, the international community should follow a precarious balance when dealing with these states.

### **Responses to Challenges: Transforming Alliances**

To face the current major political and security problems the world faces, most states turn to multilateral schemes and try to establish alliances.

As the remaining superpower, the US wants to maintain the current balance of power. The US will likely engage in a double containment strategy vis-a-vis the other great powers. That is, the US policymakers perceive a very competitive world politics and security environment, aiming to contain Russia and China at the same time. The Biden Administration's return to a more active leadership role in NATO and the US-EU cooperation against the Russian invasion of Ukraine

seems to support the argument that there will be a west-east competition, similar to the one the world witnessed during the Cold War. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has helped NATO and allies to get closer and resolve many differences in the face of the Russian military threat. However, the strength and unity of the Western alliance should also be monitored. There are significant doubts that Germany and France will continue to balance against Russia due to the invasion of Ukraine. A serious crack in the Western alliance, as an outcome of several factors, including Russian pressure on Europe, may give Russia the political support it needs to continue with the Ukraine invasion and beyond.

The West's balancing acts are reciprocated by Russia and China, which seem to cooperate against the US and Western influence in the world. These two states' joint policy declarations in the last year appear to confirm the prediction that Putin and Xi work together to balance American and Western influence in the world. Putin's visit to China right before the Ukraine invasion and their joint declaration seemed like a policy document confirming "an eastern alliance" formed by Russia and China against the West. Other major powers also appear in world politics, such as India, whose political inclinations are uncertain. India is becoming the fourth greatest military power in the world, with no clear sign of alliance with Western governments.

Observers are concerned that Russia's invasion of Crimea and, later, its attempt to invade the rest of Ukraine may give China the necessary courage to move against Taiwan and achieve unification (*Ukraine War Quagmire Prompting China Rethink on Taiwan*, 2022). Chinese President Xi Jinping declared that "unification" will be completed before 2049, in less than three decades. Such annexations like Crimea by Russia pose dire consequences. These annexations may lead to similar behaviour by other actors, such as Taiwan by China.

### **Responses to Challenges: International Organizations and Multilateralism**

The future of the international system is uncertain and subject to great debate recently. The current liberal world order seems to be shaken by recent challenges. It is fair to say that the current international regime does not seem as stable as it was half a century ago. Actors are breaking its principal rules, such as Russia invading Ukraine. Other revisionist actors pose strong criticisms against the international regime and its rules.

Some observers think these criticisms are unfair: the current UN system aims to prevent system-transforming wars between great powers. In this sense, the current international system established in 1945 has been successful since there has not been a great power war since the end of World War II. International law and institutions have brought a new kind of stability to the system. The UN system has worked efficiently in terms of applying international law, international organizations, and diplomatic resolutions to problems since the end of World War II. But participants also recognize the insufficiencies, lack of democratic institutions, and representation in the current international regime.

Relatedly, another significant challenge is to discuss whether an international system based on values can be created. There are clashing opinions on that. Some argue it is impossible to create a value-based system, given the narrow self-interests of all governments. Some argue we already

live in a value-based system where members voluntarily bind themselves to international law and institutions. The debate between the proponents of these views is not likely to end soon.

### **Unconventional Threats in World Politics**

Multiple unconventional threats threaten the global system, such as the COVID19 pandemic, economic crises, and the looming food shortages. How will these developments affect world politics, its markets, and citizens? It seems that with the war in Ukraine, we are fast approaching a food crisis, especially in poorer regions of the world. Many underprivileged countries will not be able to feed their population, which will, in turn, have immense social, economic, and political consequences. China has been hoarding grain for about a year (Watanabe & Munakata, 2021). More than half of the grain in the world was bought by China in the last year. This may add to the food problem, and significant food shortages may bring catastrophic effects to the developing world and beyond.

Environmental problems and climate change are also likely to have an all-encompassing effect on world politics and societies. Climate change and its implications will be very relevant, aggravating existing problems if not addressed adequately. The only possible way to tackle these problems appears to be relying on international cooperation and institutions, though these institutions seem to be failing more and more recently.

Finally, domestic conflicts within major powers are likely to threaten global stability, such as those involving the Uyghurs in China and Muslims in India. These are also likely to be sources of less conventional conflicts in the world.

### **Multi-Faceted Crises in the Middle East and North Africa**

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been influenced by social upheavals, revolutions, wars, and crises in the last decade. It seems like there is a never-ending crisis in the MENA region, which is neither closed nor isolated. Every political incident taking place in the MENA has global as well as regional implications.

MENA conflicts are interconnected. There are shared underlying sources of these conflicts. External penetration of the region by major powers and regional actors prolongs the conflicts (for different examples, see Krieg, 2016; Lawson, 2021). The fighters recycled from winding down conflicts appear to flame conflicts in other regions. Regional and global arms transfer to fighting sides causes conflicts to become protracted. Moreover, these conflicts have spillover effects, destabilizing surrounding areas and beyond (Salloukh, 2017). For example, the conflict in Libya has already spilt over to Sahel countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan in Asia and Europe in the form of terror attacks.

There are some structural and non-structural variables to observe that will shape the dynamics of conflict in the MENA. Climate change is one of them. MENA is exceptionally sensitive to climate change because of a lack of fresh water for the population; droughts, fires, and famine worsen yearly. Second is the financial outflow to warring groups in the region and whether more powerful actors will be able to supply resources to conflicting parties. In addition, poverty, economic

hardship and lack of food sources are likely to feed revolutionary trends. The situation of Kurds is a separate subject but very influential in MENA politics, holding potential for spillovers. These structural factors, both conventional and unconventional, would shape stability in the region.

The resolution of these issues requires more diplomacy, mediation, and the inclusion of civil society. Great power politics, regional rivalries and regional great powers' conflicting policies negatively influence MENA developments.

### **The situation in the North and European Order**

The European security environment has changed significantly with the war in Ukraine. A new security architecture is likely to emerge from the effects of this conflict. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and challenges by the COVID19 pandemic have integrated and transformed Europe with its institutions, including the European Union and NATO. Western approaches and responses result from strategic necessities, which in return are transforming Europe. However, there are discussions that Europe and the West are not as unified. Would there be more unification, a step towards deeper integration? In the case of the EU or NATO, unanimity or decision-making structures constitute a limitation.

On the other hand, the EU acted immediately against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Versailles Declaration proved itself as a founding document. Yet, membership applications of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia pose significant new challenges to the EU. In addition to the changing and challenging politics of the EU, new applications for NATO membership, Sweden and Finland, will contribute to the transformation of Europe. War in Ukraine contributed to the strengthening of the European pillar of NATO. However, NATO-EU relations, and transatlantic cooperation, are a more complicated issue with the discussions on strategic autonomy and the EU's preparations for the Strategic Compass. In other words, relations are not as one of a paragon as one would expect.

The Strategic Compass paper by the EU is a lengthy document. Weak references to Turkey constitute an important problem. A brief reference to NATO is not satisfactory either. However, the good news is that the EU has finally identified its capacity and the level of ambition in its international relations and security domains with this document and will be responsible for small-range operations. This means the EU will still need NATO for strategic purposes for the foreseeable future. Besides these concerns on security, the nuclear issue also poses a critical challenge. NATO holds to its deterrence-oriented nuclear position, assuring allied European states on trusting the US nuclear umbrella against possible nuclear threats it mentions in the Strategic Concept.

Finally, it is recognized that climate change and electronic warfare pose challenges to states that cannot be addressed adequately individually. NATO's Strategic Concept acknowledges that climate change not only threatens the welfare of the members but also can lead to conventional insecurities by exacerbating conflicts or feeding into their causes. Similarly, the EU recognizes the direct and indirect challenges climate change can pose and calls for multilateral cooperation. In addition, while conscious of the rivalries China can lead to, it recognizes the value attached to cooperating with China on such a global problem.

As for cyber security, both NATO and the EU recognize the threats posed to their members by state and non-state actors and call for cooperation in this realm. While China is seen as a direct threat in the NATO document and the Strategic Compass, it seems the EU pursues a more positive stance towards accepting the Chinese capabilities and in dialogue. However, despite their different perspectives vis-a-vis Chinese cyber capabilities, the EU also calls for cooperating with NATO in the realm of cyber security.

## **Recommendations**

The conference participants concluded that multilateralism, in general, holds the potential to improve several of the problems the region suffers. In addition to security threats from armed actors, threats from climate change and refugee issues can be better addressed through multilateral cooperation within the frameworks of global and regional international organizations. Many security and economic threats can be tackled with the existing frameworks such as the EU, NATO and BSEC. To achieve these aims, common threats must be met with strength and existing membership in these organizations must be preserved and expanded as necessary. While the EU and NATO will lead these efforts, some specific actors, such as Ukraine, Poland, Romania, and Turkey, are considered essential as global players or international institutions since they face direct security threats and other regional concerns.

It seems that the Black Sea region will continue to focus on the rivalry between East and West and between democracies and autocracies. Thus, Western allies should find ways to protect themselves against Russia's use of energy resources as a threat. 2022-2023 winter will be an interesting test case for Europe to determine whether it is possible to decrease dependency on Russian oil and gas.

Like-minded states in the West should also recognize the challenges in explaining to their public that the difficulties experienced by war in Ukraine are justified and should be seen as an investment for a free future. More trust in the democratic system must be restored through economic development and security provisions for populations.

New threats such as disinformation and its harmful effects on democracy must be recognized (Kornbluh et al., 2020). Also, it should be accepted that policies against disinformation can be conducted better when done multilaterally. As recognized by NATO's Strategic Concept, interference in domestic affairs by other states poses the risk of causing a democratic deficit in the allied countries. Such threats, too, would be better addressed if the actors pool their resources. Indeed, given that most anti-democratic groups favour the in-group vs out-group dimensions, cooperation among states would present an obstacle against the appeal of such narratives in the first place. To sum up our points, we argue that multilateralism holds the potential to address several of the domestic, transnational, and international problems regional states currently suffer.

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