DECLARATION OF THE TURKISH NAVAL POWER

7th MARINE AND MARITIME SECURITY FORUM

Turkish Naval Power from Seas to Oceans

The 7th Marine and Maritime Security Forum, with the main theme of "Turkish Naval Power from Seas to Oceans," was jointly organized by TASAM National Defence and Security Institute as a co-event of the 11th Istanbul Security Conference, held on **November 27, 2025,** at the Wish More Hotel Istanbul.

The Forum attracted speakers and dignitaries from various countries and regions, representing diverse fields and sectors. Diplomatic representatives and delegations from different countries were also present. Local and international experts, academics, and diplomats delivered speeches and presentations. Relevant authorities from Turkey, Asia, Europe, America, and Africa were also represented at the Forum, and all sessions were followed institutionally.

The following important topics were discussed at the forum: **"New Perspectives and Regional Studies in Maritime Geopolitics", "Contemporary Threats and Maritime Crimes in Naval Security", "Current Trends in the Use of Turkish Naval Diplomacy", "Current Concepts in Maritime Capacity Building", "New Opportunities in Maritime Geoeconomics and Turkey", "Ocean Policies", "Environmental Security in Maritime Studies", "Digitalization Era and Emerging Threats in Global Maritime", "Use of Seas in Disaster Response and Maritime Bridge Strategies", "Marine Geoculture", "Energy Potential of the Seas and its Sustainable Use".**

The Forum decided that the following findings and recommendations should be brought to the attention of all relevant authorities and the public, within a vision that will further advance the current achievements and institutional capacities of all countries:

1. Seas are one of the fundamental spatial elements of the global system, encompassing approximately seventy percent of the Earth 's surface, with a large portion of the population living in coastal regions and most states having access to the sea. The fact that a very large part of world trade and energy transportation takes place over the seas makes maritime areas indispensable from an economic and strategic perspective. These characteristics make the seas not just a transportation route, but an arena that shapes the global order.

2. Historically, the seas have played a decisive role in the rise and fall of empires , and have been among the primary factors influencing the outcome of wars . In this respect , the seas are considered not only geographical but also cultural and civilization - building areas. Today, their influence on defense, security, and foreign policy continues.

3. Maritime security refers to a peaceful order in which risks and threats are controlled, navigation and trade are conducted safely, and environmental balance is protected. This concept encompasses not only military threats but also environmental, economic, and humanitarian risks. Therefore, maritime security is considered a multi - dimensional policy area.

4. The open and transnational nature of maritime areas makes it difficult for states to combat threats in this area alone. Problems such as smuggling, illegal immigration, environmental pollution, maritime accidents, and competition necessitate cooperation. In this context, maritime security stands out as an area requiring international networks and joint mechanisms.

5. While statistics highlighting the importance of the seas could be greatly increased, fundamentally, the surface of the water is a system of routes through which people, commercial goods, money, information, and cultures are constantly transported for societies. Therefore, there is no landmass on Earth that is not in contact with or interacts with the geography of waters in terms of security, economic, socio-cultural, legal, and psychosocial contexts. This is also true for human communities whose natural habitat is landmasses. Even people living in countries completely landlocked, with no borders with oceans or seas, interact with the geography of waters (hydrosphere) through climate, vegetation, and trade. This interaction has been the fundamental motivation driving civilization towards the seas for centuries.

6. Turkey's location, surrounded by seas on three sides, its long coastline, and its hosting of strategic straits make its maritime geopolitics extremely sensitive. Power rivalries, energy competitions, and maritime jurisdiction disputes in the Black Sea, Aegean Sea, and Eastern Mediterranean present significant risks and opportunities for Turkey. This situation has led to the seas occupying a central place in Turkey's security and foreign policy agenda.

7. At the same time, in Turkey, a country with a geography consisting of two peninsulas and surrounded by seas on six sides, the vast majority of the workforce is concentrated in coastal cities. Approximately 60% of Turkey's Gross National Product (GNP) is generated through trade relations in coastal cities. Furthermore, approximately 95% of industrial

production, raw material and manufactured goods exports and imports are carried out via sea through coastal cities. Most of Turkey's arable land is located on or near the coast, in areas connected to the sea. It should also be noted that the infrastructure facilities for tourism, a sector with a significant share in Turkey's GNP and often referred to as the "Smokeless Industry," are also mostly located in coastal areas and regions close to the sea. All this information shows that Turkey cannot turn its back on the sea, that it lives intertwined with it, and that its dependence on the sea is evident not only in political, military, and economic activities, but also in natural disasters and humanitarian aid operations.

8. The importance of Türkiye's maritime jurisdiction areas and the potential discovery of energy resources have become a decisive factor in the country's geopolitical strategies and energy policies. Turkey possesses extensive maritime jurisdiction areas in strategic seas such as the Mediterranean, Black Sea, and Aegean Sea. Its presence in these regions plays a significant role not only in meeting Türkiye's energy needs but also in regional and international relations. Primarily, Türkiye's maritime jurisdiction areas in the Mediterranean have been at the forefront of the agenda, especially in recent years. The discovery of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean has further strengthened Türkiye's strategic position in the region. However, at the same time, disagreements and conflicts regarding the delimitation of maritime boundaries in the region have also increased.

9. Significant potential energy resources are also located within Türkiye's maritime jurisdiction areas in other seas such as the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea. The discovery of natural gas and oil reserves in these regions plays a significant role in meeting Türkiye's energy needs as well as in regional energy trade. Furthermore, the sustainable management of these resources will contribute to Türkiye's achievement of its environmentally and economically sustainable development goals. The discovery of energy resources in Türkiye's maritime zones has shaped the country's energy security policies. Turkey has increasingly focused on domestic resources to reduce energy imports and enhance energy supply security. In this context, the effective utilization of energy resources in maritime zones will help Türkiye achieve its energy security and economic development goals.

10. Given its geopolitical location and its crucial role in sustaining global maritime trade through its maritime communication lines (“SLOCs “) and critical maritime hubs, Turkey 's current foreign policy challenges are fundamentally rooted in maritime geopolitics.

Adding to this the fact that the country s'maritime economy potential is significantly underutilized, it becomes clear that Turkey has a long way to go in its determined and confident march towardsbecoming a maritime power.

11. Turkey has made significant progress in the defense industry, naval capacity, and domestic naval projects in recent years. National ship and submarine projects have increased the operational capabilities of the naval force. However, it is assessed that these gains have not been supported by a comprehensive maritime security strategy.

12. Turkey's approach to maritime security is characterized by a reactive understanding that focuses primarily on military elements and individual threats. A lack of institutional coordination and the absence of a centralized maritime management mechanism exacerbate this situation. This structure makes it difficult to develop long-term and consistent strategies.

13. Awareness and institutionalization regarding the maritime field are limited at the academic and intellectual levels. The number of experts and research centers in areas such as maritime law, maritime security, maritime history, and strategy is insufficient. This situation points to a structural problem defined in the literature as "maritime blindness."

14. To build a lasting capacity in maritime security, a holistic national maritime security strategy encompassing military, economic, commercial, and scientific dimensions is needed. This strategy should address environmental sustainability, maritime trade, energy security, and diplomatic cooperation together. Inter-institutional coordination and international cooperation are among the fundamental components of this approach.

15. On the other hand, many of the chronic problems that Turkey faces in foreign policy (Black Sea Naval Power Balance and the Montreux Straits Convention, Aegean Sea Issues, Maritime Jurisdiction Areas in the Blue Homeland, Blue Crimes, Mass Migration Waves, Security of Energy Transmission Lines, the Cyprus Problem, and the Fragile States Belt located south of the 36th North latitude) fall within the scope of maritime geopolitics because they are directly related to the seas. Increasing academic awareness of maritime geopolitics, identifying relevant requirements, defining objectives, securing needs, and continuing academic discussions on building maritime power capabilities to a level that will transform existing potential into economic prosperity are considered necessary for Turkey's national interests.

16. The 21st century has gained strong momentum in becoming the Century of Seas and Oceans. Most international crises, competitions, wars, alliances, and collaborations are

focused on the Narrow Seas, Inland Seas, and Marginal Seas surrounding the Eurasian Continental Island. For Turkey to gain a respected, effective, and strong position in the international community in the 21st century, it seems possible only through access to the Blue Civilization.

17. With the Industrial Revolution, the scale and speed of production increased, forcing states to geographically turn outwards to meet their needs for capital, labor, and raw materials. The continuity of production became possible not only with domestic resources but also with inputs accessible on a global scale. This process formed the material basis of classical geopolitics.

18. Western-centric development models were built on a capital-intensive structure; nation-states with limited land and raw materials tried to compensate for this deficiency by opening up to foreign geographies. This necessity separated geopolitics from political geography, transforming it into an independent field of thought. Thus, geography became a strategic variable determined by economic needs.

19. Friedrich Ratzel's approach, which treats the state as a living organism, conceptualized growth and expansion as the state's survival reflex. As production capacity increased, the search for new raw material areas and labor sources made geographical expansion necessary. In this context, spatial expansion has been linked to preventing crises of over-accumulation.

20. Early and incomplete interpretations of Darwinian evolutionary theory have been decisive in Ratzel's intellectual background. The portrayal of the state as an organism forced to adapt to its environment has led to the strengthening of environmental determinism. However, subsequent scientific findings on genetics, mutations, and evolutionary leaps have revealed the theoretical limitations of this analogy. This approach, based on an incomplete understanding of evolution, later paved the way for problematic and ideological uses of the concept of "Lebensraum." Geographical expansion has been detached from its historical context and transformed into a legitimizing discourse tool. Thus, classical geopolitical theories have become open to normative and power-centered readings.

21. The foundational approaches of classical geopolitics, such as Heartland, Sea Power, and Rimland theories, have interpreted the same global space from different perspectives. Mackinder saw land dominance, Mahan saw sea dominance, and Spykman saw control of

the coastal zone as the key to strategic superiority. These approaches have explained the relationship between production, exchange, and security through geographical lines.

22. The theory of maritime power has emphasized that global exchange operates through flows of people, capital, goods, ideas, and culture. The historical transformation of port cities into cosmopolitan and economic centers stems from the fact that sea routes make this multi-dimensional circulation possible. Therefore, naval dominance has been considered not only a military but also an economic and cultural power element. The concept of island- ness has demonstrated that isolation can be transformed into a strategic advantage and provide a favorable environment for the development of naval power. Mythology and island studies argue that each island possesses its own unique human, economic, and ecological characteristics. The example of Nassau has shown that spatial isolation can allow for alternative political and economic organizations.

23. The Anthropocene and Capitalocene debates have revealed that human activity has become the dominant force transforming geography . The opening of the Northern Sea Route due to ice melt has rendered the fixed geographical assumptions of geopolitics obsolete . This development has accelerated global integration and shifted the axis of geopolitical competition to new spatial lines .

24. Discussions regarding the balance of power between China and India in the Asia - Pacific region have revealed, over time, that China 's " String ofPearls " strategy also has a digital dimension . This digital dimension transcends classical maritime geopolitics , signifying a new sphere of influence established through communication infrastructures . Thus , naval power has come to be defined not only by physical lines but also by data flows .

25. popular belief, the global internet infrastructure is not an abstract network but rather a physical system based on intercontinental land and submarine cables . Just as in the early days of the internet , data transmission today primarily takes place over cables . This structure makes digital communication a direct geographical and geopolitical issue .

26. Submarine cables carry not only civilian communications , but also banking transactions , military command and control systems, and strategic data belonging to alliances . The fact that approximately ninety - five percent of global data traffic passes through these cables demonstrates that even satellite systems are dependent on terrestrial and submarine networks. This situation places the cables in the category of critical infrastructure .

27. Documents revealed by Edward Snowden in 2013 showed that US and UK intelligence services could directly interfere with submarine cables. Data copying and redirection

activities via optical splitters exposed the technical dimension of global surveillance capabilities. The fact that even encrypted data was stored for long - term decryption further increased the intelligence-related importance of this infrastructure.

28. Viewed within a historical context, the strategic role of submarine cables extends from telegraph lines to today 's fiber optic systems. The Atlantic and Euro - Asian lines have formed the backbone of global communication from the past to the present. The fact that these lines are largely operated by transnational corporate consortia rather than states has deepened sovereignty disputes.

29. The 2008 Red Sea cable outage demonstrated that damage to just a few lines could largely paralyze internet traffic across Southeast Asia. The same outage also affected NATO s' command and control communications, leading to widespread connectivity problems in allied countries. This example illustrates the global impact of infrastructure fragility.

30. Russia is known to have developed the capacity to monitor, listen to, and sabotage submarine cables through specially equipped vessels like the Yantar. Such platforms can disrupt communication through passive eavesdropping and physical interruption. This has made submarine cables potential targets in hybrid conflict environments.

31. China's PiS submarine cable line, built directly with its own funding and control , constitutes a concrete example of its pursuit of digital sovereignty. Its control over the internet infrastructure of a significant portion ofAfrica through its overseas military base inDjibouti demonstrates China 's strategic influencethrough data. This structure integrates communication security with military and economic interests.

32. In the context of a potential Asia - Pacific conflict, China 's design of itsown communication lines aims to guarantee continuity of connectivity under wartime conditions. This approach demonstrates that its naval power strategy is complemented by digital infrastructure. Control of communication lines has acquired a strategic value equivalent to classical base and port policies.

33. Submarine cable systems have become not only a technical infrastructure but also a central element of national security and global power competition. NATO s'institutional and military measures in this area indicate that underwater sabotage and digital interference will increase in the future. In this context, the security of data flows stands out as one of the fundamental determinants of contemporary geopolitics.

34. Maritime trade remains a fundamental element of global trade due to its low cost and high transport capacity. However, the emergence of new transit routes due to climate change indicates that existing routes are no longer absolute and fixed. This transformation is redefining maritime transport both economically and strategically.

35. The increasing global pressure to reduce carbon emissions has made maritime transport a more environmentally friendly option compared to other modes of transport. This pressure, shaped within the framework of international climate summits, has led to maritime trade gaining an advantageous position in the systemic transformation process. Lower emission and pollution levels make sea routes stand out in terms of sustainability.

36. The weakening of the long - standing , US - based maritime policing role in ensuring maritime security has created new risk areas in maritime trade . This gap has allowed for an increase in global security vulnerabilities and the penetration of different actors into these areas. The fragmentation of security has led to a diversification of risks.

37. Piracy and terrorism are among the major threats directly affecting maritime trade, particularly around Somalia and along the Red Sea route. Attacks on the Suez Canal and insurance companies excluding these routes from coverage have accelerated the search for alternative routes. This clearly demonstrates the impact of geopolitical risks on commercial decisions.

38. Activities such as armed robbery, cargo theft, and illegal trafficking threaten the security of maritime trade in multifaceted ways. Drug, arms, and human trafficking have opened sea routes to the use of organized crime networks. Furthermore, illegal fishing and environmental destruction undermine not only economic security but also ecological sustainability.

39. Irregular migration movements, increasing in parallel with geopolitical crises, have made sea routes fragile in terms of both humanitarian and security aspects. This process is compounded by cybersecurity risks, one of the new threat areas of the 21st century. The vulnerability of ship control systems to cyber intrusion has also brought the digital dimension of maritime trade to the security agenda.

40. The global supply chain fragility that became apparent with the COVID - 19 pandemic has transformed the continuity of maritime transport into a strategic issue. Real-time tracking ships have become a critical tool not only for security but also for economic stability. In this context, the importance of AI-powered data collection and analysis systems has increased.

41. Advance identification and tracking systems enable the automatic transmission of ship location, identity, and navigation data. Detection and reporting of unusual activities play a crucial role in crime prevention and improving rapid response capabilities. These technologies strengthen the preventive dimension of maritime security.

42. The concentration of global trade through straits and narrow passages transforms these points into strategic vulnerabilities. Disruptions at transit routes such as the Suez, Malacca, Bab el - Mandeb, and Bering River could have devastating effects on the global economy, potentially leading to a " suffocation". "Therefore , keeping alternative routes ready and developing emergency response capabilities is of vital importance .

43. Despite maritime trade accounting for over eighty percent of global trade, the absence of a comprehensive and global security mechanism in this area poses a serious structural risk. Fragmented and national - level measures are insufficient to protect the integrity of the global supply chain. This makes the security of maritime trade a matter of global governance.

44. The transit regime through the Turkish Straits, which has once again become a key focus of regional and global security due to the Russia - Ukraine war, is divided into two main categories within the framework of the Turkish Straits Maritime Traffic Regulation and the 1936 Montreux Straits Convention. These categories are defined as non - stop transit and transit with port, and each has different legal consequences. Unstoppable passage constitutes the primary area of application of the freedom of passage regulated in the agreement. Unstoppable passage refers to ships entering the Turkish Straits solely for transit purposes without calling at any port or pier. Ships benefiting from this type of passage are subject to the freedom regime foreseen in the Montreux Straits Convention. However, this status terminates in the event of violation of certain conditions.A transit without a port of call encompasses passages through the Turkish Straits made for the purpose of arriving at or calling at a port or pier. Within the scope of the regulation, any disruption of a transit without a port of call , or its transformation into a transitwith a port of call , is also included in this category . In such cases, the vessels are no longer subject to the Montreux Convention and become subject to Turkey 's national law.

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