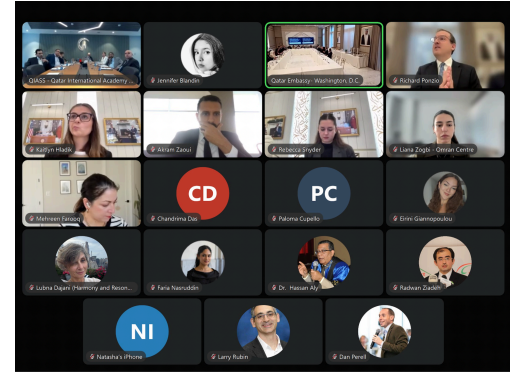


Expert Roundtable: Middle Eastern and Global Perspectives on Restoring Trust in an Age of Uncertainty



On Wednesday, 30 September, 2026, the Global Institute for Strategic Research at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) and Stimson Center, in partnership with the Embassy of the State of Qatar to the United States and Qatar International Academy for Security Studies, convened an expert roundtable on **Middle Eastern and Global Perspectives on Restoring Trust in an Age of Uncertainty** in a hybrid format at the Qatar International Academy for Security Studies in Doha and the Embassy of the State of Qatar to the United States in Washington, D.C. The conversation drew on the fourth annual edition of the [*Future of International Cooperation Report 2026* \(FIC'26\)](#). The roundtable's assembled policy researchers and practitioners from **MENARA: the Middle East & North Africa Research Network for Regional & Global Governance Innovation** proposed a menu of innovative regional and global governance/cooperation responses, designed to renew and rebuild trust in today's fractured world.

This roundtable continued in the spirit and tradition of MENARA to facilitate forward-looking dialogue dedicated to exploring issues and institutions at the intersection of regional and global governance through a Greater MENA regional lens. At a time of geopolitical upheaval, shifting alignments, and growing uncertainty around the future of regional and global institutions, trust remains the essential foundation that enables cooperation between states, societies, and other stakeholders. The following report summarizes the roundtable discussions, focusing on redefining and reframing regional and international perceptions of trust and recommending critical actions to respond to the complex challenges of the present era.

Guiding Questions:

- How are trust deficits impacting the effectiveness of diplomacy across the Middle East? What initiatives can international organizations, governments, or NGOs pursue to restore political trust in and among states in the region?
- What reforms can be made in regional and global governance to address trust deficits related to technological advancements and widening socioeconomic disparities?
- What regional and global governance responses would be effective in increasing the legitimacy of institutions in addressing security threats and ensuring just security?

Segment 1: Restoring Global Trust: Challenges, Threats & Opportunities

Facilitated by Dr. Richard Ponzio, Director, Global Governance, Justice & Security Program, Stimson Center

Lead-off Presentation by Dr. Zarqa Parvez, Postdoctoral Fellow, Georgetown University Qatar and Fellow, Global Institute for Strategic Research

Overview:

Participants explored the erosion of trust and how uncertainty continues to unfold at the global level. Through the lens of the *Future of International Cooperation Report 2026: Redefining Global Trust*, lead-off speakers considered the crisis international institutions are facing due, in large part, to trust deficits and rising conflict, as well as potential paths forward. They discussed the urgent need to rethink international cooperation in a changing world order and how to address the priorities and concerns of states and communities globally. Restoring trust requires stronger and more pluralistic, effective and visionary multilateral diplomacy and dialogue, while simultaneously bolstering the capacity of existing institutions and structures. Strengthening conflict prevention efforts through institutionalized channels for diplomacy is necessary to tackle evolving crises and the roots of conflict, including colonialism and critical mineral competition. Key priorities to strengthen dialogue, restore trust, and empower institutions include: improving information integrity and knowledge-sharing, developing shared Artificial Intelligence (AI) infrastructure, bolstering counter-terrorism efforts, advancing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, and advancing mediation and peacebuilding efforts. Panelists also highlighted unequal participation within international organizations and over-stretched capacity, illustrated by a lack of resources and overlapping functions that prevent efficient delivery. Moreover, the deterioration of trust has complex global roots, requiring conversations both vertically and horizontally. Additionally, acknowledging that diplomacy does not operate in a vacuum, intercultural engagement needs to be prioritized. Intercultural understanding can serve as a foundation for effective preventive diplomacy, and economic cooperation is also key to enhancing international cooperation, rebuilding trust, and preventing conflict. For instance, restoring trust requires dialogue between governments and cooperation among countries and international institutions. Intercultural engagement can help to address misunderstandings and reduce tensions, while economic cooperation can create shared interests and, over time, strengthen relationships. Ultimately, rebuilding trust requires time, inclusive participation, ethical leadership, and practical results.

Major Challenges and Threats:

- **Erosion of trust in global institutions and mediation efforts:** The global consensus is weakening that current international bodies and peace mediation efforts are competent enough to manage global challenges.
- **Unequal representation in global governance:** Current structures lack a diversity of voices and do not currently reflect the interests and priorities of many nations, including from the Greater MENA region.
- **Rapid development of AI technologies and unequal access to information:** Without ensuring broader access to new technologies and information sources, the international community risks the exclusion of the majority of nations from such fast-paced global developments.
- **Disinformation in global governance is diminishing international trust:** As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the unrestricted dissemination of false and misleading information significantly hinders efforts to minimize instability and promote global cooperation.

- **Persistent and evolving causes of violence and conflict.** Structural inequalities, historical grievances, resource exploitation, and colonial legacies are all root causes of global instability, combined with shorter-term crises and externalities.
- **Growing cultural polarization and “Othering”:** Social division and violence deepen as exclusionary narratives and erode social capital; moreover, discriminatory migration governance marginalizes vulnerable communities worldwide.

Select Recommendations:

Establish a Multilateral Information Integrity Council

- A Multilateral Information Integrity Council could serve as a dedicated platform to advance information integrity, in which technical experts assess information environment degradation, develop shared standards and practices, and coordinate international responses.
- A Multilateral Information Integrity Council is crucial for fruitful, fair, and engaging dialogues between states, which would be unattainable without effective information and knowledge-sharing.
- Every state has the right to participate in global information environments on its own terms. Such participation should not be dictated by platforms and infrastructure that individual states themselves neither built nor control.
- The council should be integrated into existing multilateral institutions, and its functions should be streamlined across multiple international bodies to protect and promote information integrity.

Combat disinformation by encouraging honest and accountable journalism

- Bolster the capacity of existing institutions to combat disinformation.
- Support independent media and empower and protect honest, accountable journalists to restore trust in media and transparent information-sharing.

Expand the role of women and implement the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda

- Advance the WPS Agenda. Women should be seen as key players in building pathways for reconciliation, stability, and understanding among communities and states.
- Invest in existing frameworks to expand women’s role beyond the WPS Agenda into meaningful participation in civil society, dialogue, leadership, and institutions.
- Focus on implementing and sustaining participation by ensuring that women’s inputs, concerns, and advocacy have a tangible, long-term effect on policy-making and its outcomes. Removing obstacles for women’s participation should not be temporary or symbolic; rather, they should be treated as an inherent part of peace and security efforts.

Publicize Multilateral Successes

- Promote the effectiveness of specialized agencies within international institutions to demonstrate legitimacy.
- Encourage transparency and awareness of institutions’ missions; demonstrating their values and expanding their presence can build bridges and promote multilateral successes.

Invest in Existing Peace Agreements

- Achieving a peace agreement or establishing diplomatic channels should not be seen as the final step in conflict resolution; rather, peace agreements should plan for tangible long-term implementation efforts to achieve enduring peace and sustainable development. At the same time, diplomatic channels should be maintained and kept open to address future challenges to peace and security.

Segment 2: Restoring Regional Trust: Challenges, Threats & Opportunities

Facilitated by Amb. (Dr.) Mohamed Ali Chihi, Executive Director, Global Institute for Strategic Research

Lead-off presentation by Rebecca Snyder, Coordinator, Global Governance Innovation Network and Research Associate, Global Justice & Security Program, Stimson Center

Overview

The discussion examined the gap between regional security efforts and their ability to deliver lasting stability. In the Middle East, geopolitical rivalries and declining political trust have made collective responses to crises more difficult, even as governments continue to invest heavily in defense. The US/Israel–Iran conflict illustrates how competing interests can constrain regional coordination, raising broader questions about whether existing security approaches are addressing the drivers of instability or only managing its consequences.

A central theme was that trust must be built through cooperation that produces practical results. Formal diplomatic agreements cannot sustain regional security without effective implementation, accountability, and communication. This challenge extends beyond governments: because crisis response increasingly depends on information and capabilities held by both public and private actors, coordination must be established before emergencies arise. The discussion highlighted the importance of establishing emergency contacts before a crisis, sharing information, and coordinating with non-state actors as ways to strengthen regional preparedness.

Maritime security offered a concrete example of how shared interests could support regional cooperation despite wider political divisions. Disruptions to navigation and the potential for environmental harm affect the Greater MENA region beyond individual national interests, creating the need for common approaches to information-sharing, emergency response, and maritime coordination. The broader implication was that regional trust cannot depend on diplomatic engagement alone. Early warning and preventive diplomacy, stronger regional trade ties, and credible accountability mechanisms could help to translate shared interests into sustained cooperation, while complementing, not replacing, the role of global multilateral institutions.

Major Challenges and Threats:

- **Opening communication channels with non-state actors:** Governments increasingly rely on private sector actors for information, services, and capabilities that are essential to crisis response. These systems cannot be managed by governments or private actors alone. Limited coordination, secure information-sharing, and clear accountability between state and non-state actors can undermine preparedness. Establishing emergency contacts and coordination procedures before a crisis occurs can help to close these gaps.
- **Performative diplomacy delegitimizes practices:** Engaging in diplomatic conversations with no intention of implementation or limited capacity to do so reduces trust in the process. Peace and diplomacy must not be the end of the conflict resolution process; peace agreements must be invested in,

and diplomatic channels should remain open following a conflict, if they are to contribute to lasting peace.

- **Dangerous narrative perceptions threaten cooperation:** Politically motivated narratives and cultural stereotypes threaten inter-regional and cross-cultural collaboration. Building trust and expanding forums for dialogue can help to shift interactions from a security lens to more diplomatic and cooperative forms of communication.
- **The widening gap between available financial resources and mounting global challenges:** Persistent conflict and instability, alongside rising defense spending, point to broader challenges in how security and conflict prevention are approached.
- **Maritime navigation has become a strategic tactic:** Regional and global cooperation in maritime practices, such as freedom of commercial navigation, has eroded as waterways are used as strategic levers. For example, sea lanes have been used as political levers, causing global supply shocks. Current policies to address these threats are reactive, expensive, and unsustainable.

Select Recommendations:

Inter-Regional Early Warning and Preventive Diplomacy Network

- Institutionalized continuous monitoring, early dialogue, and timely engagement can help to ensure that regional conflict-prevention mechanisms effectively address conflict before escalation and instability.
- Individual hubs embedded within existing regional organizations can facilitate collaboration among member states, strengthen coordination across regions, and ensure that early warning and preventive diplomacy efforts reflect regional priorities.

Embedded Enforcement Mechanisms in Regional Security Arrangements

- Independent monitoring and clear procedures for addressing violations can strengthen accountability and ensure that countries follow regional security agreements.
- Regulating compliance will enhance the credibility and effectiveness of regional security arrangements.

Expand and Deepen Regional and Inter-Regional Trade Agreements

- Stronger trade cooperation can sustain economic collaboration and rebuild trust by improving trade conditions through technical assistance, facilitation, and capacity-building.
- Stronger trade ties create shared economic interests, giving countries greater incentives to cooperate and maintain stable relationships.

Strengthen Regional Information-Sharing and Crisis Coordination

- Establish secure information-sharing channels among governments and private sector actors to build trust, counter misinformation, and develop a shared understanding of regional challenges.

Align Regional Incentives Toward Cooperation

- Strengthen economic and political incentives so that regional cooperation is more beneficial than conflict or disruption.
- Leverage commercial relationships and economic interdependence to support peaceful cooperation and reduce the risks of geopolitical rivalry disrupting regional connections.

Participants List (“*” denotes lead-off speaker)

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