

THE 3RD JAPAN–MIDDLE EAST STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

Securing transregional connectivity

Navigating war, fragmentation and strategic realignment

16–18 September 2026

Istanbul, Türkiye

Organized by

Levant Strategic Centre

ROLES: RCAST Open Laboratory for Emergence Strategies, The University of Tokyo

Istanbul Technical University, Faculty of Architecture

JCCME: Japan Cooperation Center for the Middle East

DRAFT AGENDA

Event overview

Event	The 3rd Japan–Middle East Strategic Dialogue in Istanbul
Theme	Securing transregional connectivity: Navigating war, fragmentation and strategic realignment
Date	16 September: Closed Meeting by Speakers/Observers 17–18 September 2026: Day 1 and Day 2
Venue	No. 109 Nazih Eldem Conference Hall, Faculty of Architecture of Istanbul Technical University (İTÜ) at Taşkışla Campus https://maps.app.goo.gl/cvS53sHoaF3EDMm19

Background and rationale

The Middle East and its surrounding regions are being reshaped by overlapping conflicts, political transitions and competing approaches to regional order. Developments in Gaza, the confrontation involving Iran, Israel and the United States, the changing security environment in the Gulf, Russia's war in Ukraine and political realignments in the South Caucasus are no longer separate strategic theatres. They are increasingly connected through energy markets, maritime routes, transport corridors, migration, investment and the foreign policy calculations of regional and global powers.

These developments have exposed the vulnerability of the networks connecting East Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the Caucasus. The security of maritime chokepoints, the future of regional energy infrastructure, the reopening or closure of land corridors and the political conditions governing reconstruction have consequently become central strategic questions.

Japan has a direct interest in the stability of these connections. Its dependence on Middle Eastern energy, its economic and development partnerships and its preference for dialogue, institution building and non-military engagement give it a distinctive position from which to contribute to regional stability. Türkiye occupies an equally distinctive position at the intersection of Europe, the Middle East, the Black Sea and the South Caucasus. Istanbul therefore provides an appropriate setting in which to examine how the political, economic and security dimensions of connectivity can be protected amid deepening regional fragmentation.

The dialogue will bring together academics, policy specialists, diplomats, development practitioners and private sector representatives from Japan, Türkiye, Arab countries and the South Caucasus. It will connect discussions of regional conflict with practical consideration of economic cooperation, reconstruction, energy security and future diplomatic engagement.

The event forms part of the wider Japan–Middle East Strategic Dialogue Week in Istanbul, which also includes discussions on Palestinian dialogue, reconstruction and social cohesion, as well as a confidential ROLES–LSC analysis meeting on the implications of the forthcoming United States midterm elections.

Objectives

- Examine how wars in Gaza, Iran and Ukraine are reshaping the regional order from the Gulf to the South Caucasus.
- Assess the security of the energy, maritime and transport routes connecting Japan, the Middle East, Türkiye, Europe and Central Asia.
- Explore opportunities for expanded Japan–Türkiye cooperation in trade, investment, infrastructure, reconstruction and development.

- Consider the political legitimacy, governance arrangements and reconstruction responsibilities associated with the Board of Peace framework in Gaza.
- Analyze prospects for stability and political recovery in Syria and Lebanon within the wider transformation of the Levant.
- Identify practical areas in which Japan, Türkiye and Middle Eastern partners can support dialogue, de-escalation and more resilient forms of regional connectivity.

Format

The dialogue will combine keynote interventions, moderated panel discussions and extended audience engagement. Most panels will consist of four or five speakers delivering concise opening remarks, followed by moderated discussion and questions from participants.

Closed Meeting by Speakers/Observers | Wednesday, 16 September 2026

Day one | Thursday, 17 September 2026

09:00–09:30	Registration and welcoming coffee
09:30–10:00	Opening session

The opening session will introduce the strategic purpose of the dialogue and situate it within the broader Japan–Middle East Strategic Dialogue Week.

Proposed opening remarks

- Prof. Hayriye EŞBAH TUNCAY, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture of Istanbul Technical University (İTÜ)
- Prof. Zaid Eyadat, Founding President of LSC (Levant Strategic Centre)
- Prof. Satoshi Ikeuchi of ROLES (RCast Open Laboratory for Emergence Strategies) of the University of Tokyo
- Speaker from JCCME (Japan Center for Cooperation with the Middle East)

10:00–11:15	Panel 1: Istanbul at the crossroads — Diplomacy, power and connectivity between regions
-------------	--

Description

Istanbul has historically connected Europe, Asia, the Middle East, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Its contemporary strategic significance extends beyond geography. The city is a center for diplomacy, finance, commerce, transport and political dialogue, while Türkiye has become increasingly active across the Gulf, the Levant, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Africa.

The panel will examine how Istanbul’s geographic and political position can support dialogue across increasingly divided regional systems. It will also consider the tension between Türkiye’s role as a bridge between regions and its position as an influential actor pursuing its own security and economic interests.

Guiding questions

- How has Istanbul’s role as a meeting point between Europe, the Middle East and the Caucasus changed amid recent regional conflicts?
- Can Türkiye facilitate dialogue between actors that maintain limited or adversarial relations with one another?
- How do Türkiye’s relations with NATO, Russia, the Gulf states, Iran and the states of the South Caucasus shape its diplomatic position?
- What can Istanbul offer as a venue for sustained Japanese, Middle Eastern and Eurasian strategic dialogue?
- How can academic institutions and policy centres contribute to diplomatic engagement when official channels are constrained?

Indicative format

Keynote address by a representative of Istanbul Technical University, followed by comments from Professor Satoshi Ikeuchi and Dr. Miyuki Aoki Girardelli.

Indicative format

Speaker and Commentators

- Dr. Eda YÜCESOY, Vice Dean and Associate Professor of the Faculty of Architecture of Istanbul Technical University (İTÜ)
- Dr. Miyuki Aoki Girardelli, Assistant Professor of the Faculty of Architecture of Istanbul Technical University (İTÜ)
- Prof. Satoshi Ikeuchi, Professor of Religion and Global Security of RCAST of the University of Tokyo and Founding Chairperson of ROLES (RCAST Open Laboratory for Emergence Strategies)

11:15–11:30	Coffee Break
11:30–12:30	Special panel: The Board of Peace and Gaza’s political future (Governance, reconstruction and Palestinian agency)

Description

The Board of Peace proposal has introduced a new international framework for considering Gaza’s transitional governance, stabilisation and reconstruction. Its possible relationship with a Palestinian technocratic administration, international security arrangements, donor financing and the wider Palestinian political system raises important questions of legitimacy, representation, accountability and implementation.

This focused session will assess whether such a framework could provide a workable pathway from ceasefire to governance and reconstruction, or whether it risks separating Gaza’s administration from Palestinian political ownership and the wider pursuit of Palestinian self determination. It will also consider how Japan, Türkiye, Arab states and international institutions can support reconstruction while safeguarding Palestinian participation and political agency.

This special panel is co-organized in cooperation with Accept International, a Japanese NGO.

Guiding questions

- What political and legal mandate should govern the Board of Peace’s involvement in Gaza?
- How should authority be divided between the Board, a Palestinian technocratic administration, Palestinian national institutions and international organisations?
- Would the framework provide Palestinians with meaningful representation in decisions concerning governance, security and reconstruction?
- How should Israeli withdrawal, Palestinian security arrangements, disarmament, reconstruction and the restoration of public services be sequenced?
- What accountability and financial oversight mechanisms would be required for reconstruction funding?

- How could Gaza’s interim administration be connected to a credible longer term Palestinian political framework rather than becoming an indefinite arrangement?
- What constructive roles could Japan and Türkiye play in reconstruction, institution building, mediation and international coordination?

Moderator

—Dr. Yosuke NAGAI, Accept International, Japan

Speakers

- Dr. Muhammad Shtayyeh, Former Prime Minister of Palestine Authority (Kennote)
- Dr. Hani al-Masri, Director General of Masarat, the Palestinian Center for Policy Research and Strategic Studies
- Mr. Toshiya ABE, JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency)
- Dr. Akihiro SEITA, UNRWA (online)

12:30–13:30	Coffee break
13:30–15:15	Panel 2: From trade to strategic partnership — Japan–Türkiye economic cooperation in a changing region

Description

Economic relations between Japan and Türkiye should be considered within a wider regional landscape. Türkiye offers access to markets and transport networks extending into Europe, the Middle East, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Japan contributes investment, development expertise, advanced technology and long term experience in infrastructure and institutional cooperation.

The panel will explore how this relationship can move beyond conventional bilateral trade towards cooperation on infrastructure, energy, reconstruction, resilient supply chains and regional development. Particular attention will be given to the contribution of JICA, JETRO, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and the Japanese and Turkish private sectors.

Guiding questions

- Which sectors offer the strongest prospects for expanded Japanese investment and partnership in Türkiye?
- Can Japanese and Turkish companies cooperate in reconstruction and infrastructure projects across the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia?
- How can transport corridors through Türkiye be connected more effectively to maritime routes and Asian markets?
- What role can Japan play in energy diversification, renewable energy, digital infrastructure and supply chain resilience?
- What political, regulatory and financial barriers continue to constrain Japanese business engagement in Türkiye and the surrounding region?
- How can development cooperation and private investment reinforce one another without subordinating development priorities to commercial interests?

Indicative format

Moderator: Ambassador Akio MIYAJIMA

Speakers

- Mr. Ahmet Çalık, Çalık Holding (tentative)
- Mr. Yasunori SAKAMOTO, Mitsubishi Corp.
- Mr. Kotaro TANAKA, JICA: Japan International Cooperation Agency
- Mr. Kazumasa UEDA, JETRO Japan External Trade Organization/Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry (METI) of Japan
- Mr. Itsu ADACHI, Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF)

- Dr. Kohei IMAI, Research Fellow and Director of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies Group of the Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO)
- Dr. Mürsel Doğrul, Associate Professor at the Joint War College of the National Defence University of Türkiye

15:15–15:30	Coffee break
15:30–16:15	Day one strategic reflection
A moderated discussion drawing together the principal conclusions from the first day, particularly the relationship between diplomacy, economic cooperation, Palestinian reconstruction and the wider theme of transregional connectivity.	
16:15	Close of day one

Day two | Friday, 18 September 2026

09:00–11:00

Panel 3: Geopolitical dynamics in the South Caucasus and beyond — Security, energy and connectivity

Description

The South Caucasus is being transformed by developments both within and beyond the region. The Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process, prospects for Türkiye–Armenia normalization, Russia’s war in Ukraine and the conflict involving Iran have altered the strategic calculations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye.

The region is also central to competing transport and energy projects connecting Europe, Türkiye, Central Asia and the Caspian Sea. The reopening of borders and routes could generate significant economic opportunities, but disagreements over sovereignty, security guarantees and external influence continue to shape the future of regional connectivity.

The discussion will be organized around three interconnected themes: the Iran war as viewed from the South Caucasus, the implications of the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process for energy and connectivity, and the transformation of the region following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Guiding questions

- How is the conflict involving Iran perceived in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye?
- What are its implications for border security, domestic politics, economic relations and foreign policy alignment across the South Caucasus?
- Could the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process establish the foundations for durable regional cooperation?
- What would Türkiye–Armenia normalization mean for trade, diplomatic relations and the reopening of regional transport routes?
- How should competing connectivity projects address sovereignty, customs arrangements and the security of transit routes?
- What is the future strategic importance of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum gas pipeline?
- How has Russia’s invasion of Ukraine changed relations between the South Caucasus states and Moscow?
- How are the roles of Türkiye, the European Union and other external actors expanding as Russia’s regional position changes?

Format

120 minutes, with approximately five panelists delivering 15-minute opening interventions, followed by moderated discussion and questions.

Moderator

Dr Shu Uchida, Project Researcher at RCAST of the University of Tokyo and Non-Resident Senior Fellow of Oxford Centre for Geopolitics

Opening Remarks

H.E. Dr. Irakli Menagarishvili, Former Foreign Minister of Georgia (Georgia) -Video

Panelists

- Prof. Mustafa Aydin, Professor of International Relations and Former Rector of Kadir Has University (Istanbul) and Member of the Security and Foreign Policy Board of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye (Turkey)
- Prof. Seyithan Ahmet Ateş, Professor at the Department of Economics at Ankara University and Senior Research Fellow of Oxford Centre for Geopolitics (Turkey)

- Mr. Richard Giragosian, Director, Regional Studies Center (RSC), Yerevan (Armenia/US)
- Mr. Mahammad Mammadov, Researcher/Lecturer in International Security at Qarabag University (Azerbaijan)
- Dr. Nikoloz Tokhvadze, Accredited assistant (Advisor) at the European Parliament (Georgia/EU)
- Dr. Kornely Kakachia, Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow, Robert Bosch Academy (Georgia)

11:00–11:15	Coffee break
11:15–12:45	Panel 4: After the Iran war — Gulf security, maritime chokepoints and the new regional balance

Description

The confrontation involving Iran, Israel and the United States has challenged previous assumptions concerning deterrence, escalation control and the security architecture of the Gulf. It has also demonstrated the global consequences of insecurity around the Strait of Hormuz and other maritime routes upon which energy importing states, including Japan, depend.

The panel will examine how Gulf states are responding to the changing balance between the United States, Iran, Israel and other regional actors. It will consider whether recent events will reinforce dependence on external security guarantees, accelerate strategic diversification or create space for a more regionally anchored security framework.

Guiding questions

- How has the war altered the strategic calculations of the Gulf Cooperation Council states?
- Has the conflict strengthened or weakened confidence in United States security guarantees?
- How are Gulf states balancing their relations with the United States, China, Russia, Iran and Israel?
- What arrangements are required to protect shipping and energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz?
- Could maritime de-escalation or crisis communication mechanisms reduce the risk of future disruption?
- How might changes in Gulf security affect global energy markets and Japan's energy security?
- Can Gulf economic diversification strategies continue amid prolonged geopolitical instability?
- What role can Japan play in supporting maritime security, energy resilience, diplomacy and post conflict economic recovery?

Moderator

Prof. Zaid Eyadat, Founding President of LSC (Levant Strategic Centre), Professor of Political Science and International Relations of the University of Jordan and Senior Associate Member of RUSI (Royal United Services Institute) of UK

Speakers (Tentative)

- Mohammed Alsulami, Founding President of the International Institute for Iranian Studies (Saudi Arabia)
- Dr. Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, Founding President of MERI: Middle East Research Institute (Iraq)
- Hala Elhefnawy, Future Center in Abu Dhabi on the Gulf (Egypt/UAE)
- Speaker from Gulf Countries
- Mitat Çelikpala, Professor of International Relations and the Dean of Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences at Kadir Has University (Turkey)
- Prof. Shin KAWASHIMA, Professor of Chinese Diplomatic History and International Relations of East Asia at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of the University of Tokyo (Japan)

12:45–14:00

Lunch

14:00–15:30

Panel 5: The Levant after regional escalation — Syria, Lebanon and the search for a sustainable order**Description**

Syria and Lebanon remain at the intersection of regional competition, domestic institutional weakness, economic crisis and unresolved questions of sovereignty and security. Changes in Iran’s regional position, Türkiye’s security role, Israel’s military posture and renewed Arab engagement will have direct consequences for both countries.

The panel will examine whether current regional changes could create openings for political stabilisation and reconstruction or whether they will generate new forms of fragmentation and external competition. It will also consider the conditions under which Japan and other international partners could contribute to recovery, institution building and regional economic reintegration.

Guiding questions

- How have recent regional conflicts changed the balance of influence in Syria and Lebanon?
- What roles will Türkiye, the Gulf states, Iran, Israel, the United States and European actors play in shaping the future of the Levant?
- Can Syria move from conflict management towards political, institutional and economic recovery?
- How can reconstruction support national recovery without reinforcing political exclusion, dependency or territorial fragmentation?
- What are the implications of continuing Israeli military activity for sovereignty and regional stability?
- Can Lebanon undertake meaningful institutional and economic reform amid continued regional competition?
- How could Syria and Lebanon reconnect with regional trade, transport and energy networks?
- Where can Japan make a credible contribution through development cooperation, infrastructure, education, institutional support and dialogue?

Moderator

Prof. Zaid Eyadat, Founding President of LSC (Levant Strategic Centre), Professor of Political Science and International Relations of the University of Jordan and Senior Associate Member of RUSI (Royal United Services Institute) of UK

Speakers

- Dr. Najib Ghadban, Advisor to the Syrian Foreign Minister (Syria)
- Dr. Paul Salem, Non-Resident Senior Associate, CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies), Middle East Program (Lebanon)
- Dr Burcu Ozelik is a Senior Research Fellow for Middle East Security within the International Security department at RUSI
- Dr. Sayed Ghoneim, Chairman and Chief Strategist of IGSDA: Institute of Global Security and Defense Affairs (Egypt/UAE)
- Prof. Ayame SUZUKI, Professor at the Graduate School of Law and Political Science, Rikkyo University (Japan)

15:30–15:45	Coffee break
15:45–16:45	Concluding roundtable: A shared agenda for Japan, Türkiye and the Middle East

Description

The concluding session will identify the main implications of the dialogue for future cooperation. Rather than summarising each panel separately, participants will be invited to identify areas in which Japan, Türkiye and regional partners can translate strategic dialogue into sustained engagement.

Guiding questions

- Which forms of connectivity are most vulnerable to continuing regional conflict?
- Where do Japan and Türkiye possess complementary diplomatic, economic and developmental capabilities?
- Which recommendations emerging from the dialogue are sufficiently practical to be advanced before the next annual meeting?
- How can ROLES, LSC and their partners maintain engagement between annual dialogues?
- Which issues should form the core of the fourth Japan–Middle East Strategic Dialogue?

16:45–17:00	Closing remarks
— Prof. Satoshi Ikeuchi, Professor of Religion and Global Security of RCAST of the University of Tokyo and Founding Chairperson of ROLES (RCAST Open Laboratory for Emergence Strategies) — Prof. Zaid Eyadat, Founding President of LSC (Levant Strategic Centre), Professor of Political Science and International Relations of the University of Jordan and Senior Associate Member of RUSI (Royal United Services Institute) of UK	

18:00–19:00	Japan-Middle East Third-Country Partnership Business Forum — The Future of Japan-Middle East Partnership and Third-Country Partnership amid Regional Order Transformations —
19:00–21:00	JCCME Networking Reception in the Occasion of the 3rd Japan-Middle East Strategic Dialogue in Istanbul

Venue: Divan Hotel

Reception:

Welcome Remarks: ITU representative