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BULLETIN - 10



Escalating Hot Contact and Defense Spiral in the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean



High-Level Türkiye-Syria Meeting in Ankara



Escalating Tension in Yemen: Houthi Attacks on Saudi Arabia and Their Impact on Regional Security Balances



A New Escalation in the Ukraine War: Russia's Infrastructure Attacks and the "Shadow Fleet" Struggle in the Black Sea



The New Era of BRICS: Expansion, the Global South, and the Changing World Order



Closing Syria's Nuclear File: End of Past Suspicions?



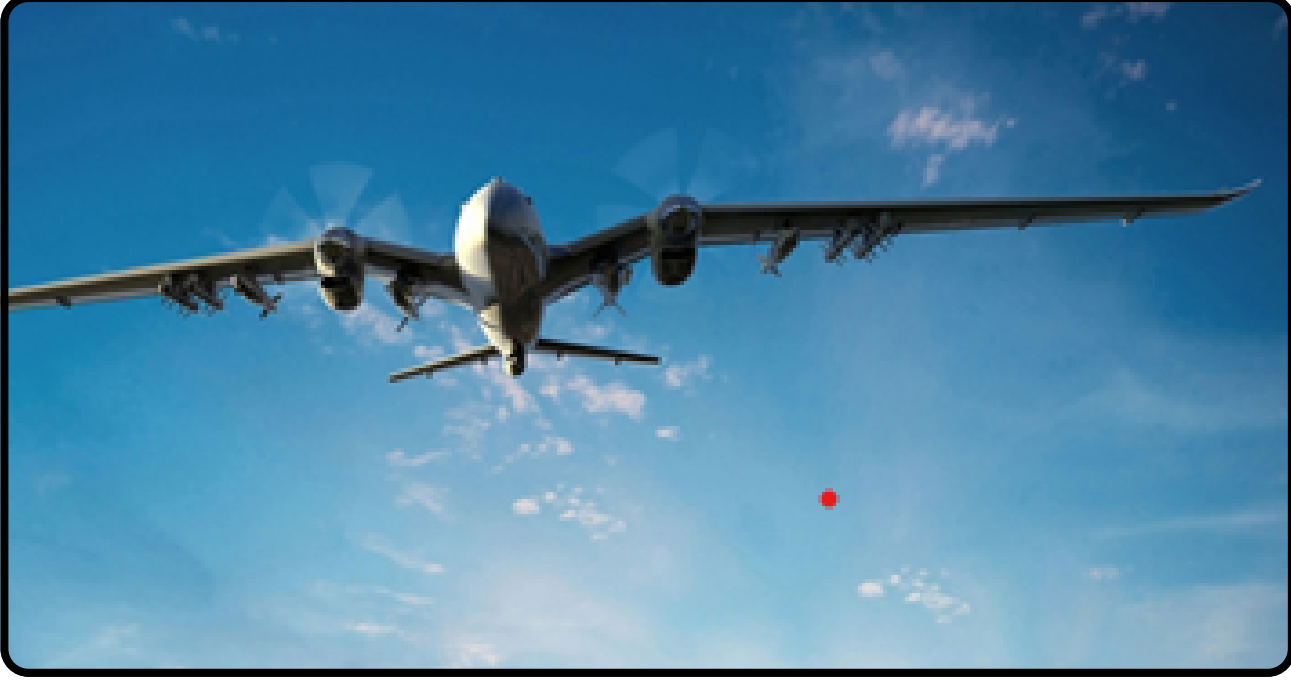
A New Stage in China-Philippines Tension in the South China Sea



A New Bargaining Arena in Iran-US Tensions via the Strait of Hormuz



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Escalating Hot Contact and Defense Spiral in the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean

The signing of the "Achilles Shield" project between Israel and Greece, covering a multi-layered air and missile defense infrastructure valued at approximately 3 billion euros, has mobilized regional military dynamics. On September 12, 2026, diplomatic tension escalated when Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis paid a high-level visit to Kastellorizo (Meis) Island—located merely 1.5 kilometers from the Turkish coast—to attend its liberation ceremonies. Immediately following this, media reports highlighted hot contacts and dogfights between the warplanes of the two countries in Aegean airspace. These consecutive recent developments indicate that the fragile *détente* achieved between Türkiye and Greece through the Athens Declaration has largely lost its effect and that both actors are once again heading toward a structural arena of competition. Although Greece's "Achilles Shield" move, implemented jointly with Israel, aims to protect its own airspace along the Aegean and

Mediterranean axis, this massive military step is evaluated on the Ankara front as a strategic encirclement and balancing effort that disrupts the regional power balance. The mutual steps taken drive the parties toward further armament; as Athens strengthens its defense line, Türkiye responds by increasing its own military deterrence and air defense capacity. Mitsotakis' statements persistently emphasizing the right to extend territorial waters, combined with symbolic visits to critical islands like Kastellorizo—which should have demilitarized status under international treaties—seem to make it difficult to resolve sovereignty disputes and exclusive economic zone debates in the Eastern Mediterranean through diplomacy. Efforts to consolidate domestic public opinion, influenced by the approaching election processes in Greece, can lay the ground for escalating nationalist and harsh rhetoric in foreign policy. On the other hand, flight routes over the Aegean and the issue of demilitarized islands further deepen fundamental legal disputes regarding the determination of maritime jurisdiction areas. Although keeping intelligence and diplomatic channels open aims to prevent a direct military confrontation, airspace violations in the Aegean, sovereignty rhetoric over Kastellorizo, and high-budget defense investments significantly weaken the possibility of the parties meeting at a common table. In the coming period, it is anticipated that energy diplomacy channels in the



Eastern Mediterranean could come to a standstill, while intense military activity on the ground could escalate regional risks originating from accidents or miscalculations.



High-Level Türkiye-Syria Meeting in Ankara

The high-level diplomatic contact between Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Syrian Foreign Minister Asad Hassan Shaybani in the capital Ankara on September 8, 2026, is one of the most concrete, comprehensive, and strategic indicators of the new reality that emerged in regional geopolitics following the extensive political transformation and restructuring process in Syria. The historical process that began with the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime in December 2024 and the establishment of the new administration in Damascus radically shook the power balances and alliance architecture in the Middle East. It decisively rendered it imperative to transition from the dynamics of conflict and proxy wars that had persisted for many years to the phase of institutional construction, sovereign foundations, and regional integration.

Against this deep historical and political background, the Ankara meeting was not merely a routine diplomatic protocol for both countries, but an extremely vital and strategic step taken toward restructuring regional stability and state architecture. Chief among the primary reasons for this high-level meeting were the preservation of post-revolution Syria's political and territorial integrity, ensuring full coordination in combating terrorist structures throughout the country including east of the Euphrates, and bringing a safe, dignified, and permanent solution to the refugee crisis, which stands as one of the major ongoing humanitarian and socio-economic burdens. By establishing direct dialogue mechanisms with the new Damascus administration, Türkiye aims both to completely minimize security risks and asymmetric threats along its border line and to assume a guiding and constructive role in Syria's integration process with the international system. The high significance of this contact for international politics and regional diplomacy lies in the fact that the dialogue channel between Ankara and Damascus has acquired a direct, unmediated, and institutional character without needing the mediation of third parties. Hosting Asad Hassan Shaybani—a diplomatic actor who completed his graduate studies in Türkiye and possesses a deep command of regional dynamics—in Ankara reinforces the diplomatic legitimacy of the new Syrian administration in the international arena. Concurrently, it solidifies Türkiye's position as a



decisive and key actor in the future of neighboring geographies in line with the principle of "regional ownership". Consequently, this critical meeting is a direct result of the pragmatic state mind, rational interest calculations, and searches for strategic cooperation that developed after decades of devastating crises, deep waves of mistrust, and destructive proxy wars. The convergence of two neighboring countries on a broad common denominator—ranging from border security to the revival of regional trade corridors and economic rehabilitation processes—holds the potential to directly shape peace, stability, and security architecture across the Middle East, not just internal dynamics. Ultimately, this Ankara contact dated September 8, 2026, clearly proves that military instruments and crisis parameters in the region have yielded to institutional diplomacy, and that former conflict zones are gradually being closed to build a new regional order focused on security and cooperation.



Escalating Tension in Yemen: Houthi Attacks on Saudi Arabia and Their Impact on Regional Security Balances

On September 8, 2026, missile and drone attacks carried out by the Houthis in Yemen against cities and energy infrastructure in southern Saudi Arabia revealed one of the most serious escalations in the Yemen crisis following the ceasefire period that began in 2022. While it was reported that 73 people were injured and energy facilities sustained damage in the attacks, the Houthis justified the strikes as retaliation for airstrikes they claimed were carried out by Saudi Arabia in Yemen. During the same period, forces affiliated with the internationally recognized government in Yemen launched counter-offensives on various fronts with the goal of recapturing Sana'a from the Houthis, showing that developments indicate a tendency for the Yemeni civil war to expand again rather than representing an isolated clash of nerves. The historical background of the crisis dates back to 2014. The Houthi capture of Sana'a in September 2014 transformed the struggle for political power in Yemen into an armed conflict; the Saudi-led military intervention in March 2015 subsequently carried the conflict into a regional competition dimension. Iran's political and military support over the Houthis caused Saudi Arabia to perceive the organization not merely as an internal rival within Yemen, but as an element of Iran's influence capacity in the Arabian Peninsula. Although the UN-backed ceasefire that began on April 1, 2022, allowed for a reduction in large-scale clashes and attacks on Saudi territory, a lasting political reconciliation could not be



forged between the parties. Therefore, the new clashes in 2026 demonstrate that unresolved core issues were temporarily suppressed and that the ceasefire failed to turn into a permanent peace. The most important dimension of the current escalation that differs from previous periods is the expansion of the conflict's geographical and strategic scope. The Houthi advance along the Red Sea coast toward the Bab el-Mandeb Strait strengthens the direct link between the civil war in Yemen and international maritime trade and energy security. Control over Bab el-Mandeb or threats to maritime traffic there could affect trade routes reaching the Suez Canal via the Red Sea, while also creating strategic consequences for Saudi Arabia's capacity to diversify its energy exports. This situation grants the Houthis a significant strategic advantage: although the group is conventionally much weaker than Saudi Arabia, it can threaten high-value economic targets through missile, drone, and naval capabilities. Thus, it partially balances Saudi Arabia's military superiority by utilizing asymmetric warfare methods. For Riyadh, the main problem is that giving a harsh military response to the Houthis carries two-way risks. On one hand, deterrence needs to be re-established, while on the other, a comprehensive operation could turn the Yemen war—which had calmed down relatively after 2022—back into a full-scale regional conflict. Furthermore, due to the Houthis' relationship with Iran, it is possible for the escalation on the Yemen field to reflect more directly on Iran-Saudi competition.

Therefore, the current crisis must be evaluated not only as a military struggle between two actors, but also in terms of reshaping the regional balance of power. In conclusion, the September 8 attacks show that the conflict in Yemen could stop being a frozen crisis and turn back into an active regional security problem. The ability of the Houthis to target Saudi Arabia's economic infrastructure and strategic transit points in the Red Sea demonstrates that the group's military capacity can create outcomes far beyond Yemen's borders. Hence, the decisive issue in the coming period will be whether Saudi Arabia can accomplish pushing back the Houthis using its military superiority without bringing about a broader regional war.



A New Escalation in the Ukraine War: Russia's Infrastructure Attacks and the "Shadow Fleet"

Struggle in the Black Sea

On September 12, 2026, Russia launched large-scale missile and drone attacks on various regions of Ukraine, primarily Odesa; at least 11 people lost their lives, numerous people were injured, and residences as well as critical infrastructure were damaged in the attacks. In the same



process, as Russia declared that it targeted Ukraine's ports, commercial ships, and metallurgical facilities, Ukraine also carried out strikes against Russia's energy and industrial infrastructure. Thus, the latest development does not consist merely of mutual airstrikes, but reveals a new phase of escalation where the parties target each other's economic, logistical, and strategic war capacities. One particularly striking dimension of this development is Ukraine's operations against the "shadow fleet," which is alleged to support Russia's oil exports and its capacity to bypass sanctions. Ukraine targeting tankers and other vessels assessed to be connected to Russia shows that the war has expanded beyond land and airspace into energy transportation and maritime trade in the Black Sea. The concept of a "shadow fleet" refers to tanker networks operating through different flags, companies, and complex ownership structures largely to diminish the impact of sanctions. Therefore, targeting these ships acts as a direct instrument of pressure for Ukraine against Russia's war economy. Indeed, Ukraine carrying out strikes since the summer of 2026 against numerous vessels evaluated to belong to Russia's shadow fleet indicates that Kyiv is bringing the economic dimension of the war further to the fore. Russia targeting ports around Odesa and Ukrainian industrial facilities on September 12 can be evaluated as a response to this strategy. Metallurgical facilities are of critical importance for the Ukrainian economy not only in terms of industrial production, but also for

export revenues. Consequently, striking these facilities may aim to erode Ukraine's economic resilience as well as weaken its military production capacity. Similarly, targeting the Odesa ports threatens the sustainability of Ukraine's exports conducted via the Black Sea. Due to the Ukrainian economy's significant dependence on ports for agricultural and metal exports, every attack on port infrastructure yields economic consequences beyond the direct military effect of the war. Indeed, throughout 2026, it is reported that Russian attacks caused billions of dollars in damage to Ukraine's infrastructure and that the reduced functionality of ports created severe pressure on export revenues. For this reason, evaluating current developments as classic "retaliatory attacks" remains insufficient. The parties are increasingly targeting each other's capacities to finance war, execute production, provide logistical support, and access international trade. The core assumption behind this strategy is the erosion of the opponent's sustained war-fighting capacity under conditions where a rapid and decisive result cannot be obtained on the frontline. However, this approach also increases the risk of the conflict expanding. Commercial ships, ports, and energy infrastructure becoming direct targets of the war weakens maritime security in the Black Sea while creating new risks for international trade. In conclusion, the September 12 attacks show that the boundaries between the military struggle on the frontline and economic warfare are increasingly disappearing in the



Russia-Ukraine war. The parties no longer merely aim to gain territory or destroy military targets, but target the opponent's economic resilience, energy revenues, and logistical networks. Therefore, the future course of the war should be evaluated not only through territorial changes on the front, but also through the scale of damage the parties can inflict on each other's economic and strategic infrastructure.



The New Era of BRICS: Expansion, the Global South, and the Changing World Order

The 18th BRICS Summit held in New Delhi, India, on September 12-13, 2026, was an important meeting where the group sought to redefine its position in global politics following its expansion. At the summit, 10 member countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates—came together; under India's 2026 presidency, the theme of "Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability" was brought to the forefront. In the New Delhi Declaration adopted on the first

day of the summit, a shared will was expressed toward strengthening multilateralism, increasing the representation of developing countries in global decision-making mechanisms, reforming the United Nations system, and building a fairer international order. Within this framework, one of BRICS' main goals is to increase the weight of developing countries in existing global governance structures rather than building a direct alternative system to replace those thought to be Western-centric. Particularly, the emphasis on making the UN Security Council more representative and giving African, Asian, and Latin American countries a greater voice in international decision-making processes shows that BRICS is positioning itself ever more distinctly as the "political platform of the Global South". In the economic field, facilitating cross-border payments, developing trade in local currencies, and strengthening financial connections among BRICS countries were among the key agenda items. Nevertheless, no decision was taken in the declaration regarding the establishment of a common BRICS currency; instead, continuing efforts toward developing trade and payment mechanisms over existing national currencies was adopted. This distinction is important because it shows that BRICS is trying to develop alternative financial channels that can reduce dependency on the dollar, rather than forming a single currency to replace the dollar in the short term.



The geopolitical dimension of the summit stood out particularly through the conflicts in the Middle East. The presence among its members of states like Iran and the United Arab Emirates, whose regional interests do not always overlap, reveals the limits of BRICS' capacity to produce a common foreign policy. Despite this, serious concern over the escalation of violence in the Middle East was expressed in the New Delhi Declaration, maximum restraint was urged upon the parties, and it was emphasized that disputes should be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue. This situation shows that BRICS is a multi-centric diplomatic mechanism bringing different interests together on the same platform rather than a political alliance. Similarly, despite the border dispute between India and China, the leaders of both countries holding contacts during the summit toward stabilizing relations demonstrated that BRICS can create a diplomatic arena not only on global issues, but also in managing bilateral tensions among members. In conclusion, the 2026 BRICS Summit reveals the organization's tendency to transform into a broad platform advocating greater representation in global governance, economic diversification, and the strengthening of multipolarity, rather than an anti-Western bloc. However, members possessing different

strategic priorities—such as Iran, Russia, China, India, and Gulf countries—makes it difficult for BRICS to become an integrated political structure similar to NATO or the European Union. Therefore, the true importance of the summit lies not in creating a joint bloc, but in increasing the coordination capacity of power centers outside the West in the global system, demonstrating that the international order is progressing toward an increasingly multi-centric structure.



Closing Syria's Nuclear File: End of Past Suspicions?

The decision by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors on September 9, 2026, to close the file regarding Syria's past undeclared nuclear activities marked an important turning point in a nuclear verification and non-proliferation issue that had persisted for nearly two decades.



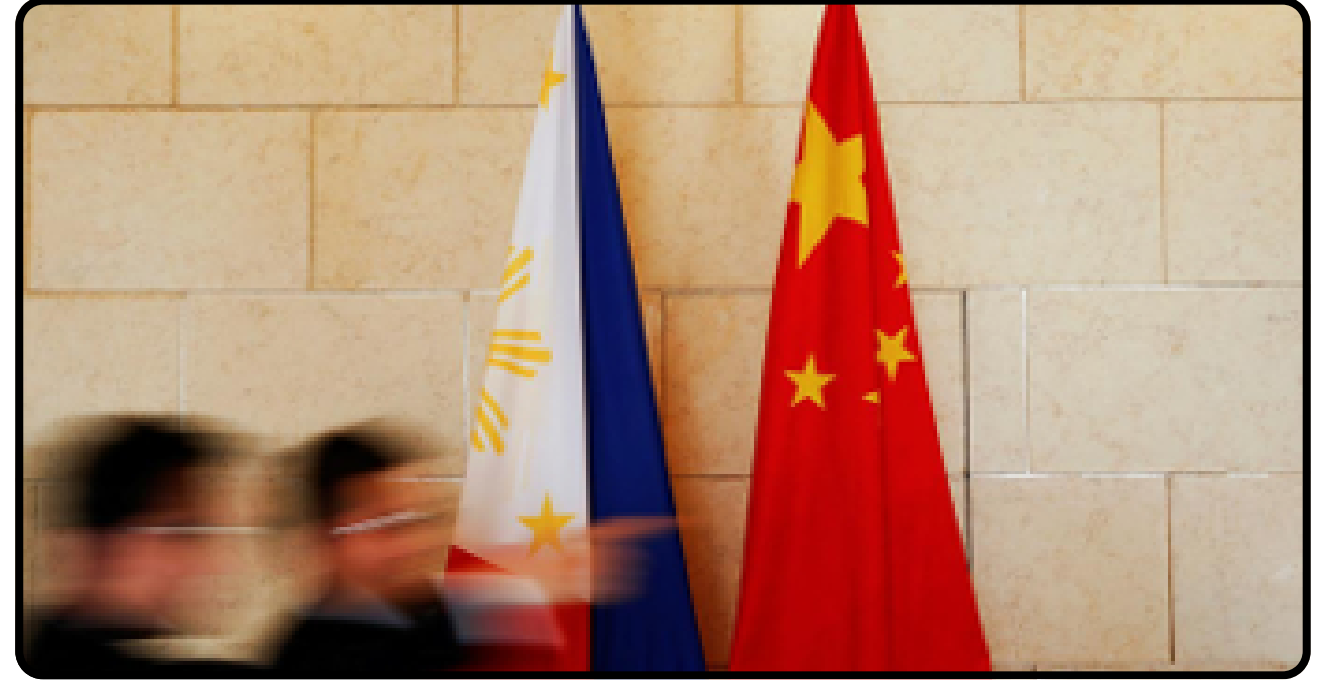
In the background of the decision lies the destruction of a facility in Syria's Deir ez-Zor region by an Israeli airstrike in 2007, and the subsequent findings revealing that the facility possessed a nuclear purpose. As a result of its investigations, the IAEA concluded that the facility had the nature of a nuclear reactor and that Syria should have reported these activities to the agency in a timely manner; in 2011, it reported Syria to the United Nations Security Council for non-compliance with its nuclear obligations. However, the fundamental development enabling the file to be closed was the new Syrian administration—established after the Bashar al-Assad regime was overthrown at the end of 2024—entering into more comprehensive cooperation with the IAEA. The new administration providing information and access allowed previously unanswered questions to be re-examined and uncertainties in the agency's hands regarding Syria's undeclared nuclear activities to be resolved. In recent IAEA inspections, it was determined that approximately 73 metric tons of natural uranium metal were present in Syria, evaluated largely as reactor fuel, and it was reported that this material was kept under IAEA safeguards. Nonetheless, closing the file does not mean past activities were unimportant or that suspicions regarding the nuclear nature of the 2007 facility were completely removed.

On the contrary, the decision means that thanks to existing findings and the cooperation provided by the new Syrian administration, the IAEA has concluded its open questions about the past and no longer needs to keep the subject on the Board of Governors' agenda. This distinction is particularly important, because closing the nuclear file and exonerating Syria's nuclear past are not the same thing. According to statements by IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi, the facility in Deir ez-Zor was designed to possess the potential to produce fissile material that could be used in nuclear weapon construction; however, it was also emphasized that no definitive conclusion was reached stating that the ultimate goal of the facility was producing nuclear weapons. Therefore, the main strategic importance of the decision is that it opens a new page in Syria's relations with the international nuclear inspection regime. Cooperation problems experienced with the IAEA during the Assad era and suspicions regarding undisclosed activities were key elements restricting Syria's international standing in the nuclear field. Closing the file can be evaluated as a concrete result of the cooperation the new administration established with international organizations. At the same time, this development holds importance in terms of reducing political obstacles ahead of Syria conducting more international cooperation in peaceful nuclear technology and nuclear science in the future.



The Syrian administration also evaluated the decision as a diplomatic gain in terms of closing a process that had continued for years and returning the country to international cooperation in peaceful nuclear technology. Furthermore, the decision carries a broader meaning for regional security. At a time when debates regarding Iran's nuclear program in the Middle East are extremely sensitive, closing the Syrian file demonstrates once again the importance of political conditions and the level of state cooperation in the IAEA's evaluations regarding different states' nuclear obligations.

For Syria, the new administration's ability to leave behind international pressure caused by the past regime's nuclear activities is a significant development supporting the normalization process in foreign relations. In conclusion, the IAEA closing Syria's file does not mean Syria's past nuclear activities are forgotten, but that the international verification process regarding these activities has been completed. Thus, the true importance of the development is that while closing a security and inspection problem remaining from the Assad era, it gives the new Syrian administration an opportunity to build a more transparent and collaborative position within the international nuclear system.



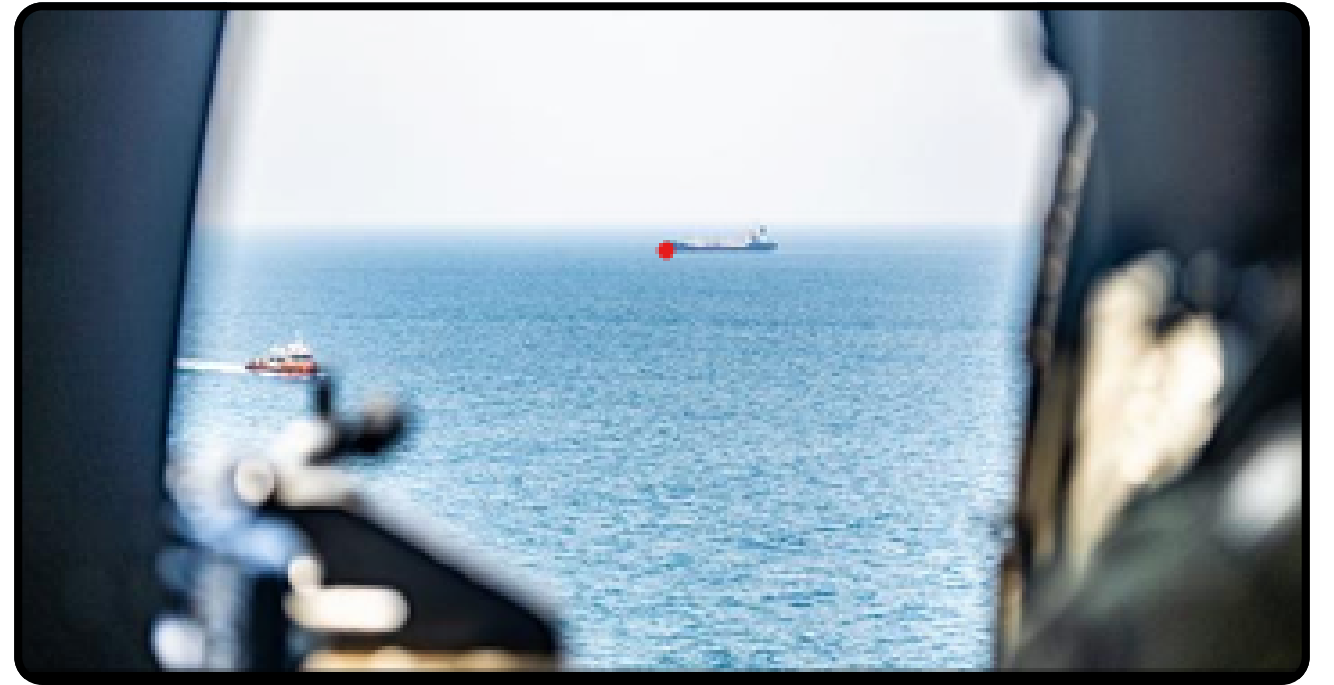
A New Stage in China-Philippines Tension in the South China Sea

On September 8, 2026, during the speech of Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro at the Seoul Defense Dialogue, a note defending China's attitude in the South China Sea was handed to him—a striking development showing that the recently intensifying China-Philippines competition has been carried into the diplomatic arena. Teodoro read the note stating that China does not recognize the 2016 arbitration decision aloud to the audience, criticizing Beijing's stance and describing it as "bullying" and "aggression". The Chinese side accused the Philippines of escalating tension, emphasizing that its own position remained unchanged. In the background of this incident lies the South China Sea dispute that has continued for many years. Especially following the China-Philippines tension around Scarborough Shoal in 2012, the issue of de facto control in the region became even more critical,



Leading the Philippines to initiate an arbitration process in 2013 within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The decision rendered in 2016 ruled that China's broad historical rights claims asserted through the "nine-dash line" lacked a legal basis under UNCLOS, significantly strengthening the Philippines' arguments regarding maritime jurisdiction areas. However, China did not recognize the decision from the beginning and continued to argue that it was invalid. In recent years, this legal dispute has merged with military and security competition on the ground. While vessel blocking, collisions, and patrol activities occurred between Chinese coast guard elements and the Philippines around Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal, Chinese warplanes intercepting a Philippine aircraft conducting patrols near Scarborough Shoal in the first week of September 2026 revealed that tension is not limited merely to naval elements. In this context, the note crisis experienced in Seoul can be evaluated as part of the struggle by the parties to re-assert their positions over the South China Sea before the international public, rather than a diplomatic argument in isolation. For the Philippines, keeping the 2016 arbitration decision constantly on the agenda is the continuation of a legitimacy strategy based on international law. For China, not recognizing the decision is an indicator of its

policy not to step back from historical and strategic rights claims in the region. Additionally, the incident taking place in South Korea is important; as Manila has recently expanded defense cooperation with countries like the US, Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and European nations, China evaluates the increasing role of these external actors in the South China Sea as a threat to its own regional influence. Therefore, the current tension stops being merely a maritime jurisdiction dispute between two countries and becomes an important indicator of the competition among international law, balance of power, and alliance-building in the Asia-Pacific. In the coming period, alongside similar diplomatic standoffs, an increase in encounters at sea could elevate the risk of miscalculation. For this reason, the event in Seoul should be seen as a current reflection of a broader power struggle conducted through diplomatic discourse, law, and deterrence that precedes the use of military force in the South China Sea.





A New Bargaining Arena in Iran-US Tensions via the Strait of Hormuz

On September 12, 2026, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian announced that the Strait of Hormuz could be reopened if the US stops its naval blockade and attacks against Iran. This statement shows that the ongoing conflict between Iran and the US is being conducted not only through military targets, but also over critical transit points of global energy and maritime trade. Because the Strait of Hormuz is a strategic transit point for oil and natural gas transportation reaching world markets from the Persian Gulf, a long-term disruption that might occur here holds the quality to significantly increase the global economic consequences of the regional conflict. Iran conditioning the reopening of the strait on the US stopping blockades and attacks shows that Tehran is transforming this strategic position directly into a bargaining instrument. In the background of the crisis lies the Iran-US conflict that escalated progressively throughout 2026. The US applying a naval blockade against Iranian ports caused Tehran to exert pressure on maritime traffic around Hormuz, while military encounters between the two sides began to directly affect energy transportation. In this process, by tying the opening of Hormuz to its own security conditions, Iran uses the strait not merely as a geographical transit point, but as a strategic tool that can create pressure on Washington. Indeed, although an understanding regarding maritime transport came to the agenda between

Iran and Oman on September 12, it was reported that this did not mean an immediate opening of Hormuz, and that the final decision depended on meeting Iran's conditions toward the US. This situation reveals that while Tehran keeps regional diplomacy channels open on one hand, it tries to preserve its military and economic pressure capacity on the other. The broader regional dimension of the crisis is also important. During the same period, the increasing effectiveness of the Houthis around the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb in Yemen causes two critical maritime passages—like the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb—to come under security pressure at the same time. Thus, while the influence of Iran and its allies over regional sea routes expands, ensuring both energy flows and the security of commercial ships becomes increasingly costly for the US. Therefore, Pezeshkian's September 12 statement should not be evaluated merely as a message regarding when the Strait of Hormuz will open. The statement shows that Iran is trying to convert the military pressure of the US into diplomatic concessions by using its geostrategic location. However, the sustainability of this strategy will depend on how long Iran can maintain its control over the strait and on the economic pressure created by global energy markets. Consequently, the Strait of Hormuz has turned into one of the main strategic arenas where energy security, economic pressure, and diplomatic bargaining intersect, rather than acting as a military front line in the current conflict.