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Critical Meeting on the Ankara–Damascus Line

On September 13–14, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan was welcomed at Damascus Airport by his Syrian counterpart, Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani. Fidan was later received by Ahmed al-Sharaa and held talks addressing critical issues between Türkiye and Damascus. One of the most notable parts of the visit was Fidan’s visits to shrines and mosques. He also met with Abdurrahman Mustafa, President of the Syrian Turkmen Assembly, and his delegation. According to the joint press statement, one of the main points emphasized was the ongoing cooperation between the two countries. Fidan stated that Türkiye strongly supports Syria’s rapid recovery after the war and takes a positive view of the integration of the SDG into the army. He also expressed support for Syria’s steps in the fight against terrorism. Before the visit, reports in the press that Turkish had been removed from its status as an elective course in Syria and that another language had been included in the curriculum instead had drawn public reaction. Hakan Fidan’s reception of Syrian Turkmen

Assembly President Mustafa clearly demonstrates that Türkiye has always supported efforts to resolve the problems faced by Turkmen living in Syria. At the same time, Fidan’s particular emphasis on the dissolution process of the SDG and its integration into the Syrian Army shows that Türkiye supports the continuation of the Terror-Free Türkiye Process in an effective manner within the country, while also openly backing neighboring countries in their fight against terrorism. Especially over the past two years, Ankara and Damascus have continued to maintain cooperation in both diplomatic and operational terms. The press conference concluded with good wishes and remarks from the counterparts of the two countries, while attention was drawn to the importance of regional stability.



Hakan Fidan’s Visit to Baku and Regional Security Diplomacy

On 15–16 September 2026, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan paid an official visit to Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan.



The visit coincided with the 108th anniversary of the liberation of Baku. During his visit, Fidan was received by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. The meetings focused on regional security, transport networks, and the future of international energy routes. The two countries also reaffirmed their strategic partnership. During the high-level meetings, Turkey and Azerbaijan discussed technical cooperation, joint defense priorities, and strategic logistics in response to regional crises and global uncertainties. The two sides also discussed steps to increase bilateral trade to the target of 15 billion dollars. In this context, progress on energy and transport projects was reviewed. Around 95% of the road and 75% of the railway construction on the Zangezur Corridor, up to the Armenian border, has reportedly been completed. The project is expected to connect with the Kars–İğdır–Aralık–Dilucu route and strengthen the Middle Corridor, which connects China to Europe through the Caspian Sea. Diplomatic talks are continuing over the section of the corridor that would pass through Armenian territory. Energy cooperation was another important topic. Projects connecting Nakhchivan with Turkey and cable projects that could carry renewable energy produced in Azerbaijan to European markets through Turkey were discussed as strategic priorities.

Regional security issues were also on the agenda. The geopolitical risks created by the US–Iran war, which has continued for more than six

months and reportedly created a financial burden of around 38 billion dollars for the United States, were discussed. The sides also addressed incidents in the Black Sea that resulted in the deaths of Turkish and Azerbaijani sailors. Turkey emphasized the importance of respecting the principles of the Montreux Convention and using the experience of the Black Sea Grain Initiative to support regional stability. The two countries also agreed to cooperate in global climate diplomacy by building on Azerbaijan’s experience in hosting COP29 and Turkey’s role as the host of COP31. Six years after the Karabakh victory, these contacts are important for transforming the South Caucasus from a conflict zone into an area of cooperation. At a time of growing tensions in the region and increasing risks to navigation in the Black Sea, closer cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan may contribute to regional stability. Completing joint infrastructure and energy projects could also strengthen regional connectivity, energy security, and economic cooperation.





Condemnation from Turkey to Houthis over UAV attack in Mecca

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Issues Message of Solidarity with Saudi Arabia Against New Houthi Attacks. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the drone (UAV) attack targeting the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia by the Houthis, who de facto control a significant part of Yemen. The Ministry of National Defense also released a message of solidarity with Saudi Arabia on Wednesday. The ministry's statement included the following: "We strongly condemn the Houthi UAV attack targeting the holy city of Mecca." The statement further noted, "We reaffirm our support for Saudi Arabia's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security, and once again emphasize our solidarity with Saudi Arabia." So, what happened? Part of the "Axis of Resistance" reflecting Iran's relations with its supported groups in the Middle East, the Houthis announced on Wednesday that they had shot down a Saudi warplane using their domestically produced ammunition. Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree stated on social media, "The Yemeni Armed Forces, with the help and grace of Allah, managed to shoot down a Saudi F-15 fighter jet while it was conducting hostile operations." Saudi Arabia, which supports the Yemeni government against the Houthis, claimed that the Houthis targeted Mecca, one of Islam's holiest sites. However, spokesman Saree denied this claim in his

statement. Saree said, "Our operations are far from holy places; they target oil facilities and military bases. The fabrications and lies spread by the criminal Saudi regime cannot deceive anyone." Advancing around the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait as the tension between the US and Iran flared up again, the Houthis took advantage of the situation to expand their sphere of influence in Yemen and the Red Sea. By capturing new islands in the southern Red Sea, the group consolidated its control over the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait-the primary maritime trade route after the Strait of Hormuz. Looking at these dynamics, with the Strait of Hormuz at the center of US-Iran tension and blockade risks, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait becomes even more vital from a strategic standpoint. Increasing their pressure on critical points and maritime trade networks around the Red Sea, the Houthis are turning this regional crisis into an opportunity to expand. While this situation complicates the security balance in the Middle East, it also directly affects maritime security on Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean-Red Sea axis, as well as transportation costs and supply chain calculations. Indeed, with the reflections of the Mecca Common Defense Agreement, Turkey-with its military presence in the region, diplomatic mediation capacity, and strategic contacts-will continue to keep this crisis at the center of its main agenda.



Growing Security Concerns in Russia–Europe Relations

On 19 September 2026, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk stated that Poland would not give up “even a single inch of its territory” in any potential future conflict with Russia, while warning that Russia could carry out drone and missile attacks against European countries supporting Ukraine. At the same time, French President Emmanuel Macron highlighted the growing risks posed by Russian hybrid threats and potential attacks targeting Europe’s critical infrastructure, emphasizing the need for European countries to strengthen their security capabilities. These statements reflect the broader evolution of European security perceptions since the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war in 2022. While Europe’s initial security concerns largely focused on supporting Ukraine and preventing the conflict from spreading, the scope of these concerns has increasingly expanded toward the protection of European territory, airspace, and critical infrastructure. For Poland, the Russian

threat is therefore viewed not only through the lens of the war in Ukraine but also in direct relation to the security of NATO’s eastern flank. Macron’s emphasis on hybrid threats further demonstrates that European security concerns now extend beyond conventional military attacks to include cyberattacks, sabotage, disinformation, unmanned aerial vehicles, and threats to critical infrastructure. Another important development is Europe’s growing effort to strengthen its own defense capabilities while maintaining its reliance on the United States. The Trump administration’s emphasis on greater European responsibility for defense, combined with changes in U.S. policy toward Ukraine, may have reinforced the perception in European capitals that long-term security planning cannot depend solely on capabilities provided by Washington. This does not necessarily represent a move away from NATO; rather, it points toward greater defense spending, expanded military-industrial capacity, and stronger defense capabilities, particularly among countries on NATO’s eastern flank. Consequently, Europe’s perception of the Russian threat increasingly involves not only Russia’s military capabilities but also Europe’s own preparedness to respond to potential security challenges. Although Russia has stated that it has no plans for a direct war against Europe, such statements have not eliminated mutual threat perceptions.



European countries continue to consider potential future scenarios as part of their deterrence strategies. At the same time, the strengthening of European military capabilities may be interpreted by Russia as a security challenge, potentially reinforcing the cycle of mutual threat perceptions. In this context, Tusk's and Macron's statements can be understood as reflecting a broader transformation in Europe's security environment. As of 2026, Russia–Europe relations increasingly involve the security of European territory, hybrid threats, NATO's eastern flank, European defense capabilities, and the future role of the United States. How Europe develops its defense capacity, how security responsibilities between Europe and the United States evolve, and how Russia responds to these developments will remain important factors shaping the regional security architecture.



Growing Security Tensions in Russia–Japan Relations

On 18 September 2026, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called for the removal from Japan of the U.S.-owned Typhon missile systems deployed on Japan's Kyushu Island.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated that Moscow had delivered a protest note to Tokyo on 3 September, arguing that the deployment posed a threat to Russia's national security as well as regional peace and stability. Moscow also called on Japan to end the deployment of the Typhon systems and to recognize the outcomes of the Second World War, including arrangements concerning the Southern Kuril Islands. Russia's reaction should be assessed in the context of Japan's efforts in recent years to expand its defense capabilities and deepen military cooperation with the United States. A major turning point in the current security tensions between Russia and Japan came after Japan joined Western countries in imposing sanctions on Moscow and providing political and financial support to Ukraine following Russia's large-scale military operation against Ukraine in 2022. Relations between the two countries subsequently deteriorated, while the longstanding dispute over the Southern Kuril Islands, known in Japan as the Northern Territories, once again gained greater security significance. In 2026, tensions have become more visible not only in diplomatic and economic relations but also through military capabilities and deployments. The use of Typhon systems during the U.S.-Japan-Australia Orient Shield exercises in September, alongside their deployment in Japan, has been viewed by Moscow as a concrete indication of the transformation in Japan's defense policy. The Typhon system is a ground-based missile platform capable of employing



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weapons such as Tomahawk cruise missiles and SM-6 interceptors, making its deployment in Japan significant for the military balance in the Indo-Pacific from the perspectives of both Russia and China. This development is also part of Japan's broader transformation in its security policy. With the adoption of its new National Security Strategy in 2022, Tokyo introduced the possibility of developing counterstrike capabilities and increased its investment in long-range missile systems. Russia, meanwhile, has described these policies as a form of "remilitarization" and considers Japan's expanding military capabilities a security concern. Russia's large-scale military exercises around the Southern Kuril Islands in August 2026, as well as President Vladimir Putin's visit to one of the disputed islands, further demonstrated that tensions between the two countries extend beyond the issue of missile deployments. Therefore, Moscow's protest against the Typhon systems represents more than a reaction to a specific weapons system; it reflects the broader expansion of security competition between Russia and Japan. For Japan, strengthening defense cooperation with the United States is increasingly connected to its assessment of Russia alongside China and North Korea in its security planning. For Russia, meanwhile, Japan's growing military capabilities are viewed as a development capable of affecting the strategic

balance in the Russian Far East. These mutual security concerns also demonstrate how the Russia–West confrontation resulting from the war in Ukraine is increasingly intersecting with the Indo-Pacific security environment. The latest developments surrounding the Typhon systems therefore indicate not only the continuing tensions in Russia–Japan relations but also a broader regional security transformation shaped by the expansion of U.S. allies' defense capabilities, Russia's strengthening of its military presence in the Far East, and Japan's restructuring of its security policy.



BRSA's Decision on Bank Mellat: U.S. Sanctions, the Global Financial System, and Turkey's Financial Security

On September 18, 2026, the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BRSA) revoked the operating license of Iran-based Bank Mellat through Decision No. 11572. Consequently, all operations and commercial activities of the bank's Istanbul-headquartered Turkish branch were officially terminated. The BRSA officially cited the risk the bank posed to the security and



stability of the Turkish financial system. However, behind this legal justification lies the pressure of international sanction standards and the risks Turkey faces within the global financial architecture. Bank Mellat began operating in Turkey in 1981, eventually expanding its commercial footprint with branches in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Yet, its international transactions have long been under global scrutiny. The U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned the bank in 2007 over its links to Iran's nuclear program. In 2019, the U.S. and six Gulf nations jointly blacklisted Bank Mellat for transferring funds to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The primary driver behind this revocation is the tightening of U.S. sanctions against Iran and the threat of secondary sanctions—which risk cutting off third-party banks doing business with sanctioned entities from the global system. Amid what U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent termed an "Economic D-Day", Washington intensified its oversight of the Turkish banking sector. Concrete signs of this pressure include the restrictions imposed on Golden Global Bank on September 4, 2026, alongside financial tracking tied to Mahan Air. Maintaining ties with Bank Mellat threatened to exclude Turkish banks from U.S. financial markets and dollar-denominated transactions. The BRSA stepped in with the closure decision to insulate Turkey's banking sector from this severe risk.

The timing of the decision directly correlates with diplomatic engagements ahead of the United Nations General Assembly and Turkey's drive to align with global financial standards following its removal from the FATF grey list. This step represents a necessary measure to prevent Turkey from becoming a target of U.S. sanctions and to safeguard its ties to the international financial system. Although the decision closes a direct commercial and money transfer corridor with Iran, it reinforces the credibility of the Turkish banking system in global markets. Ultimately, Turkey prioritized preserving its reputation and standing in the global financial system over regional trade opportunities.



A New Dimension of U.S.-Saudi Defense Cooperation: The F-35 Sale

On 17 September 2026, the U.S. Department of State approved a potential \$24.3 billion deal for the sale of 48 F-35 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia. In addition to the aircraft, the package includes engines, spare parts, and technical support; however, the sale still requires the completion of



the review process in the U.S. Congress. The political groundwork for the decision was laid during Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to Washington on 18 November 2025. During the meeting, the two countries signed a Strategic Defense Agreement, while Washington expressed political support for Riyadh's request to acquire F-35s. The September 2026 decision therefore moved the previously expressed political support into the formal arms sales process. The timing of the decision becomes particularly significant when considered within the broader security environment in the Middle East. Following the war launched by the United States and Israel against Iran in February 2026, Saudi Arabia became the target of missile and drone attacks. The subsequent escalation in July between the Houthis and the government supported by Riyadh in Yemen further highlighted the fragility of security in the Gulf. In this context, Riyadh's efforts to strengthen its air capabilities can be viewed not only as a matter of military modernization but also as part of an attempt to enhance deterrence against regional threats. However, the significance of the F-35 decision extends beyond a potential increase in Saudi Arabia's military capabilities and points to a broader issue concerning the regional balance of power. Israel has long maintained particular security concerns regarding the transfer of advanced U.S. military technologies to other

countries in the region, and the F-35 is already operated by Israel in the Middle East. Therefore, Riyadh's potential access to the same platform could once again raise questions about how Israel's qualitative military edge in the region would be preserved. From Washington's perspective, the decision can also be viewed as an indication of an approach aimed at further integrating Saudi Arabia into the U.S.-led regional security architecture and strengthening the capabilities of Gulf partners vis-à-vis Iran. This could also support U.S. efforts to share a greater portion of the regional security burden with its allies. At the same time, given Saudi Arabia's developing relations with China, Riyadh's acquisition of advanced U.S. military technology may also serve Washington's broader interest in maintaining its strategic influence in the region. Nevertheless, this closer cooperation does not necessarily mean that regional stability will automatically increase. How Iran, Israel, and other Gulf states interpret the development, whether they respond by increasing defense investments, and whether they seek new security arrangements will be important factors. From Iran's perspective in particular, the development could be interpreted as a shift in the distribution of military capabilities in the Gulf, potentially contributing to regional arms competition. Conversely, Saudi Arabia's acquisition of advanced air capabilities could, under certain scenarios, strengthen deterrence against threats originating from Iran.



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Overall, the 17 September decision does not in itself demonstrate that the balance of power in the Middle East has fundamentally changed, but it does indicate a deepening of the U.S.-Saudi security relationship. In the coming period, the position of the U.S. Congress, the delivery timeline, and the responses of regional actors, particularly Israel and Iran, are likely to play an important role in determining the broader implications of the decision.



Is the Alternative for Germany (AfD) Really an Alternative for Germany?

According to unofficial results, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) received nearly 44% of the vote in the eastern German state of Saxony on September 6, 2026, reaching one of its highest vote shares since the Second World War. To understand the rise of the AfD, which is known for its far-right and populist rhetoric, it is necessary to examine the political line and discourse the party has adopted since its foundation. The AfD began its political trajectory with anti-American positions and by advocating Germany's return from the euro to its former national currency, the Deutsche Mark.

From the outset, the party also built its political identity around anti-immigration and Islamophobic rhetoric. In 2012, economics professor Bernd Lucke, together with Konrad Adam and Alexander Gauland, who were dissatisfied with their existing party platforms, formed a group called Electoral Alternative. The following year, in 2013, this group entered federal politics as the AfD by publishing an election manifesto and participating in the federal elections. In those elections, the AfD received 4.7% of the vote, remaining below the electoral threshold. In the 2014 European Parliament elections, however, its vote share enabled it to gain seven seats. The party made a major breakthrough in the 2017 federal elections, securing 12.6% of the vote and 91 seats, becoming the third-largest party in the Bundestag. For the first time since the Second World War, Germany witnessed the entry of a right-wing populist party into its national parliament. After entering parliament, the AfD drew attention with its anti-Islam and racist rhetoric, which intensified especially after political developments in North Africa and the Middle East. The Merkel government's decision to open Germany's borders to refugees angered AfD supporters and also contributed to an increase in the party's vote share. As the party's right wing pressured its more moderate wing to pursue harsher policies toward refugees, racist and anti-Islamic discourse became even more pronounced. Despite this, the AfD continued to increase its support.



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Today, the increase in the AfD's vote share is clearly visible. Therefore, in the coming period, it will be important to closely observe how Germany and Europe position themselves toward right-wing politics and how populist rhetoric continues to evolve.