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News of the Day With Nasser Kandil

Turkish Foreign Minister as Mandate Proxy: We Will Not Accept the Continued Presence of the Syrian Democratic Forces

Incursion Into Syria Failed to Secure Netanyahu a Majority... Gantz: We Are on the Verge of Civil War

The Presidential File Heats Up With Discussions Around Aoun, Al-Khazen, Al-Baysari, and Khoury

The political editor wrote:

The sharp polarisation between Washington and Ankara over Syria has crystallised around the Kurdish file. This was evident in the contrasting statements from U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. Blinken reiterated his position, emphasising that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led by the Kurds, play a “vital” role in preventing the resurgence of ISIS in Syria after the overthrow of the previous regime under Bashar al-Assad. He added, “The priority is to prevent ISIS’s return, and the SDF is critical to ensuring this”.

In contrast, Fidan’s remarks were striking in their portrayal of Turkey as a de facto mandate power over Syria. Speaking on matters that should fall squarely within Syria’s sovereign

domain, such as the nature of the constitution and government, he declared that Turkey could not, under any circumstances, accept the continued presence of the SDF. He dismissed the group as merely a façade for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Turkey designates as a terrorist organisation, highlighting that eliminating this threat is central to Turkey's security interests in Syria.

While the Kurdish issue remains a sticking point between Turkey and the U.S., it has not overshadowed Israel's escalating incursions into Syrian territory. Tel Aviv has tied any reconsideration of its actions in Syria to the establishment of a new, legitimate, and constitutional authority in Damascus. According to the roadmap outlined by UN Security Council Resolution 2254, this would occur after parliamentary elections under a new constitution - a process that would take at least two years. Discussions on implementing this resolution have already begun, with UN envoy Geir Pedersen meeting in Damascus with Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham leader Ahmad al-Sharaa (Abu Mohammad al-Jolani).

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hopes of compensating for losses in Gaza and Lebanon with a symbolic victory in Syria have faltered. Polls conducted by *Maariv* show that his ruling coalition would secure only 50 seats in any upcoming elections, a sharp decline from its current 64 seats. While Netanyahu's Likud party gained three seats at the expense of his allies, many of those allies saw significant losses.

Former Defense Minister Benny Gantz, now in the opposition, offered a grim assessment of the situation, warning, “We are on the brink of transitioning from a war against Israel’s enemies to a civil war”.

In Lebanon, the presidential race is intensifying amid cautious optimism about the possibility of electing a new president in the parliamentary session scheduled for January 9, just three weeks away. Political discussions are reportedly ongoing between the National Duo - Amal Movement and Hezbollah - represented by Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, and key figures such as former Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt, Free Patriotic Movement leader Gebran Bassil, and several independent blocs.

Reports suggest that former minister Suleiman Frangieh supports the candidacy of MP Farid al-Khazen, who is scheduled to visit Maarab today. Meanwhile, three prominent names remain under discussion: Army Commander General Joseph Aoun, Acting General Security Director Elias al-Baysari, and former Vatican Ambassador George Khoury.