



Weekly Geopolitical Brief

Policy, Security, and Strategic Affairs in the
Horn of Africa and Beyond

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Horn Review: Weekly Brief

Dec 29– Jan 04, 2026

1. Ethiopia

Rising tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea have been highlighted by Foreign Policy magazine as one of “10 Conflicts to Watch in 2026,” warning that a clash between the two neighbors could tip the Horn of Africa into full-scale conflict. The magazine noted that months of hostile rhetoric and accusations between Ethiopia and Eritrea have increased fears of war, while the international community remains largely distracted by other crises, including the ongoing conflict in Sudan.

Business representatives in Shire Endaslasse have called on the Tigray Interim Administration for urgent measures, including debt relief and halting property auctions, as the regional economy struggles to stabilize, following a meeting with President Lt. Gen. Tadesse Woreda. During the meeting, traders raised alarms over mounting bank debts and the risk of losing their properties. Many said they are being pressured by banks to auction assets to recover accumulated loans, warning that a growing number of businesses are on the verge of collapse.

The Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) has called on the African Union (AU) and international partners to convene emergency sessions to address what it described as a rapidly worsening humanitarian crisis in Tigray, urging urgent action to ensure humanitarian access for internally displaced persons (IDPs). In a letter to African Union Commission Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, the TPLF said conditions at IDP centers across the region have sharply deteriorated, with displaced populations facing severe food shortages and rising mortality. The party argued that the situation constitutes a violation of the Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.

Salsay Weyane Tigray has opposed the confiscation of funds and relief items mobilized by TikTok users for internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the Hitsats IDPs center by the Federal government, warning that the action has further deepened hunger among displaced communities. In a press release on Monday, the party said the aid was intended to provide urgent food assistance to IDPs facing severe shortages, adding that interference with privately mobilized humanitarian support has deprived vulnerable families of immediate life-saving help. The statement criticized the federal government for obstruction of humanitarian efforts, arguing that such actions exacerbate an already dire humanitarian crisis rather than contribute to durable solutions, including the safe and voluntary return of IDPs.

Ethiopia’s Ambassador to Pakistan, Oumer H. Oba (PhD), held talks with Morocco’s Ambassador Mohammed Karmoune, the Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps in Islamabad, focusing on regional cooperation and closer diplomatic engagement among

African states, according to Islamabad Post. The meeting, which took place at the Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco, addressed issues of regional importance as well as prospects for strengthening bilateral and multilateral ties among African countries represented in Pakistan.

Foreign Affairs Minister Gedion Timotheos (PhD) said Ethiopia has transitioned its quest for access to a sea outlet into a diplomatically accepted position, with current efforts focused on how it will be implemented. The minister made the remarks during the 6th regular session of the 6th House of Peoples' Representatives on 30 December 2025, where he responded to questions from lawmakers regarding the country's maritime ambitions and related diplomatic activities. Describing Ethiopia's pursuit of a sea outlet as "a cross-generational national question that transcends any single government or political party," Gedion emphasized that the issue remains a shared national priority. He noted that Ethiopians at home and abroad, alongside Ethiopian embassies, are actively engaged in advancing the country's maritime access, with current diplomatic activities showing ...

Ethiopia has taken a decisive step toward transforming itself from a marginal gold producer into a significant player in Africa's mining sector after securing \$340 million to develop the Tulu_Kapi gold project, according to Business Insider Africa. The project is set to become the country's largest modern mining venture.

Ethiopia is among 17 countries set to benefit from a \$2 billion humanitarian funding agreement signed between the United_Nations and the United_States, under which U.S. support will be channeled through UN relief programmes in 2026, the UN said in a statement. The agreement, formalized on Monday in Geneva, commits the United States to fund global humanitarian operations amid what the UN describes as escalating needs worldwide. UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher hailed the deal as a landmark commitment that would help save millions of lives, including in Ethiopia, where humanitarian needs remain acute due to conflict-related displacement, food insecurity, and climate shocks.

2. Sudan

This week, Sudan's conflict saw continued military escalation alongside worsening humanitarian conditions and limited external economic relief.

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) announced the capture of several South Sudanese nationals fighting alongside the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in North Kordofan, including in Kazqil and surrounding areas. Sudanese authorities stated that the detainees were operating as mercenaries, reinforcing SAF claims that the RSF is relying on foreign fighters amid manpower constraints. Khartoum indicated that the issue would be formally raised with Juba, introducing a potential diplomatic sensitivity into an already strained regional environment.

SAF operations also continued to rely heavily on aerial capabilities. An SAF drone strike killed a senior adviser to an RSF commander along with several aides, underscoring sustained efforts to target RSF leadership networks. Separate drone operations disrupted critical infrastructure, with power outages reported in El-Obeid following strikes on energy facilities, highlighting the expanding civilian and economic spillover of long-range warfare. Additional strikes disrupted electricity supply across parts of oil-producing southern Sudan, reinforcing concerns over the conflict's growing impact on strategic infrastructure and economic lifelines.

Politically, SAF Chairman Abdel Fattah al-Burhan reiterated his commitment to achieving military victory over the RSF, while maintaining that national reconciliation could follow once the RSF is defeated and disarmed. Burhan framed the war as existential for the Sudanese state, rejecting negotiations under current battlefield conditions but leaving open the possibility of a post-conflict political process.

On the ground, fighting intensified across multiple fronts. The RSF claimed control of the El-Bardab area north of Kadugli in South Kordofan, increasing pressure on SAF positions around the Nuba Mountains and underscoring South Kordofan's strategic importance as a corridor linking Darfur to Blue Nile.

The humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate. The United Nations expressed extreme concern over escalating violence and its impact on civilians, warning that access constraints and sustained fighting are accelerating Sudan's humanitarian collapse. Following limited UN access, El-Fasher was described by UN officials as a "crime scene," citing destroyed infrastructure, widespread killings, and acute shortages of food, water, and medical supplies. UN teams reported severe civilian trauma, reinforcing assessments that Darfur remains the epicenter of mass atrocities.

Displacement continued to accelerate nationwide. Camps across multiple regions are swelling, with particularly dire conditions reported in Kosti, where displaced families lack even basic shelter and are forced to rely on sheets or open ground. New arrivals from Darfur and Kordofan are further straining already exhausted humanitarian systems. Faith-based monitoring groups also reported heightened persecution of Christian communities in conflict-affected areas, adding an additional layer of vulnerability amid widespread insecurity.

On the economic front, China announced plans to exempt Sudan from repayment of approximately 345 million yuan in interest-free debt, alongside discussions on additional development support. While the move offers limited fiscal relief, it does not materially alter Sudan's broader economic crisis, which remains shaped by conflict-driven production losses, infrastructure damage, and constrained state capacity. This week's developments reflect Sudan's deepening war entrenchment. The capture of foreign fighters, expanding RSF territorial claims in South Kordofan, intensified drone

warfare, and worsening humanitarian indicators point to a conflict increasingly regionalized in composition but localized in civilian suffering. Burhan's victory-first posture and continued infrastructure degradation suggest a prolonged conflict trajectory, while external economic gestures remain symbolic and insufficient absent a durable security and political breakthrough.

3. Egypt

Egypt's activities this week centered on strategic economic partnerships, diplomatic interventions, and infrastructure enhancements, all woven together to strengthen regional influence amid persistent challenges like Nile water security and Middle Eastern stability. By prioritizing ties with Sudan, pressuring Ethiopia through port deals, mediating in Yemen, and developing Sinai logistics, Cairo demonstrated a calculated approach to turning vulnerabilities into opportunities. These moves not only address immediate economic needs but also position Egypt as a key stabilizer in the Horn of Africa and Arabian Peninsula, potentially easing border tensions while safeguarding vital resources.

On December 30, 2025, Egypt secured a pivotal agreement with Sudan to lead infrastructure rebuilding in critical sectors such as electricity, water, healthcare, and education, granting Egyptian firms priority access. This includes technical aid for reviving factories and training customs staff, alongside efforts to boost trade through better logistics and product standards. With a January 2026 conference planned to tackle border congestion and future joint projects tapping Sudan's resources, plus a 2027 follow-up in Khartoum, the deal cleverly leverages Sudan's post-conflict recovery to embed Egyptian economic interests, fostering mutual benefits while subtly aligning against shared threats like Ethiopia's dam projects that could disrupt Nile flows.

That same day, Egypt appealed to Saudi Arabia and the UAE to handle Yemen disputes wisely, praising their leadership and stressing Arab unity for a political resolution that honors Yemeni aspirations. This came amid heightened tensions, with the Southern Transitional Council seizing eastern provinces, Saudi accusations against the UAE for backing them, and the scrapping of a defense pact. This highlights how Cairo's mediation seeks to prevent Red Sea spillover that could threaten Egyptian trade routes while reinforcing its role as a neutral arbiter in Gulf rivalries.

Shifting to the Horn of Africa on December 31, 2025, Deputy Prime Minister Kamel El Wazir finalized a deal to upgrade Djibouti's Doraleh port, extending to Eritrean facilities, as a direct counter to Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. By enhancing military logistics and trade hubs essential for landlocked Ethiopia, Egypt amplifies pressure on Addis Ababa, building on alliances with Somalia and Eritrea to promote stability.

Entering the new year on January 1, 2026, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi allocated 6.2 million square meters in North Sinai near Rafah for logistics zones, aiming to link Mediterranean and Red Sea trade via roads, railways, and ports. This decree transforms Sinai into a hub for regional and global markets, tying domestic development to broader ambitions like Red Sea connectivity, which could facilitate aid to Gaza and ease border strains, ultimately turning a historically volatile area into an economic asset that bolsters national resilience.

On January 2, 2026, Egypt joined Turkey and several other nations, including Jordan, the UAE, Indonesia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, in demanding that Israel lift aid restrictions on Gaza. This call for action comes amid a dire humanitarian crisis compounded by severe weather, impacting 1.9 million displaced Palestinians. The joint call for NGO access, infrastructure fixes, and an open Rafah crossing, while backing peace and self-determination, illustrates Egypt's humanitarian leverage, using multilateral pressure to address Gaza's plight in ways that align with its border management and regional peace goals, potentially reducing refugee pressures on Sinai.

4. Eritrea

The International Federation of Journalists, in its annual “killed list” report, stated that Eritrea remains the largest jailer of journalists in Africa, noting that many detained journalists have been imprisoned for more than a decade.

The Associated Press released a fact-check addressing footage circulating on social media that purportedly showed ongoing protests in Asmara. The footage originated from an Al Jazeera report, with accompanying claims that protests were currently unfolding in Eritrea. AFP confirmed the footage dates back to 2017. Other videos depicting protest-like activity by individuals identified as Eritreans have also circulated online.

The National News, an Abu Dhabi-based outlet that earlier reported on a deal between Egypt and Eritrea regarding Assab, published a follow-up report providing additional details. The outlet stated that the agreement was signed by President Isaias Afewerki and President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi during Afewerki’s visit to Cairo in October.

On January 2, a Sudanese delegation led by Finance Minister Gibril Ibrahim and Minister of Culture, Information, and Tourism Khalid Al-Aysar met President Isaias Afewerki. The delegation thanked Eritrea for what it described as facilities and care provided to Sudanese residents and transit travelers amid Sudan’s ongoing crisis. Eritrea appears to be positioning itself as an increasingly valuable partner to Port Sudan, with assistance extending beyond military cooperation.

On January 2, Eritrea’s Ministry of Information published an article titled “Sovereignty is not Conditional: Obsessed Potemkin Party Elites and the Abuse of History,” criticizing aspects of Ethiopia’s policy discourse, particularly the “two waters doctrine” and

narratives framing the loss of Red Sea access as a historical mistake driven by rival states such as Egypt.

A January 1 report indicated that Eritrea participated in the Russia–Africa Conference held in Cairo in late December, co-chaired by the Russian and Egyptian foreign ministers.

5. Djibouti

The final week of December 2025 was seen with diplomatic engagements and decisions by the Republic of Djibouti primarily centered on regional solidarity and adherence to established international positions regarding Somali sovereignty.

On December 29, 2025 President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti hosted President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of Somalia for a high level meeting. The discussions focused squarely on reinforcing bilateral cooperation aimed at defending Somalia's unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Both leaders emphasized a firm and shared opposition to any actions perceived as leading to the division of the Somali state reaffirming Djibouti's consistent diplomatic stance in support of a unified Somalia.

This position was translated into direct action on December 31, 2025, when the Government of Djibouti announced the closure of the liaison office maintained by the administration of Somaliland in Djibouti City. The decision was characterized as a direct response to Somaliland's recent receipt of recognition from the State of Israel. In its rationale, Djibouti stated it viewed this recognition as a violation of international law and inconsistent with Somaliland's declared foreign policy frameworks. This move was explicitly aligned with Djibouti's support for Somalia's unity and its previously expressed positions within United Nations forums. In reaction to Djibouti's decision the Somaliland administration recalled its envoy to Djibouti for immediate consultations, a step reported across multiple regional news outlets.

Beyond these high-profile diplomatic developments, Djibouti featured in broader regional contexts in the first days of January 2026. On or around January 2, 2026, commercial maritime news indicated the launch of a new shuttle service by Greta Shipping connecting Oman to Djibouti highlighting on going economic and logistical activities in the region. Separately, regional security reports from the same period included mentions of U.S. military exercises in the broader Horn of Africa area, though these reports did not center on Djibouti-specific developments.

6. South Sudan

This week, South Sudan experienced renewed security deterioration alongside mounting political and international pressure, deepening concerns over stability ahead of the proposed 2026 elections.

Armed confrontations intensified in multiple regions. The SPLA-IO overran SSPDF garrisons in Uror County (Jonglei State) and near the Sudan border in Unity State,

marking significant setbacks for government forces and highlighting the fragility of security arrangements under the peace framework. In parallel, the SPLA-IO issued warnings to civilians while targeting SSPDF and police installations, signaling a more assertive posture and raising risks of civilian exposure to violence.

Border insecurity also escalated. Heavy gunfire was reported in Nadapal, a key border town near Uganda, resulting in soldier fatalities and underscoring the volatility of South Sudan's peripheral regions, where armed actors, weak state presence, and cross-border dynamics intersect.

Politically, President Salva Kiir publicly called for peace and restraint ahead of the planned 2026 elections, presenting reconciliation as essential to national stability. However, this rhetoric contrasted sharply with continued battlefield losses and growing internal divisions. Domestic commentary intensified, with a former oil minister urging punitive measures against the SPLA-IO following recent military setbacks, reflecting rising elite frustration and hardening positions within the political establishment.

International scrutiny also increased. The United States signaled a major review of its assistance to South Sudan, citing governance failures, lack of reform progress, and persistent insecurity. Separately, U.S. officials reiterated that South Sudan's oil revenues should be prioritized for paying civil servants and soldiers, reinforcing external concern over fiscal management and the risk that unpaid salaries could further destabilize the security sector.

Legal and political uncertainty extended beyond South Sudan's borders. In the United States, a federal judge blocked efforts to remove deportation protections for South Sudanese nationals, temporarily maintaining safeguards amid ongoing instability at home.

Opinion commentary this week further questioned South Sudan's readiness for elections, arguing that unresolved security arrangements, institutional weaknesses, and shrinking civic space make credible polls in 2026 unlikely. Separate opinion reporting warned against threats to witnesses, emphasizing the erosion of accountability and rule-of-law protections.

This week's developments underscore South Sudan's persistent fragility and conflict recurrence. Battlefield gains by the SPLA-IO, border insecurity, and elite polarization contrast sharply with official calls for peace. At the same time, rising international pressure over governance and aid effectiveness signals diminishing external patience. Together, these trends cast serious doubt over the feasibility of a stable electoral pathway and reinforce the risk of further political and security fragmentation.

7. Somalia and Somaliland

Somalia

The week in Somalia was dominated by large-scale public mobilization against Israel's recognition of Somaliland. On December 30, tens of thousands of citizens participated in nationwide protests with major demonstrations in Mogadishu at the national stadium and airport vicinity, as well as in Baidoa, Dhusamareb, Las Anod, Hobyo, and the northeastern regions. Protesters waved Somali flags and called for national unity and territorial integrity. Diplomatically, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul. President Erdogan condemned Israel's recognition as illegitimate and unacceptable warning it risked destabilizing the region while President Mohamud accused Israel of violating international law.

Diplomatic efforts intensified on December 31 as President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, in an exclusive interview from Istanbul made serious allegations regarding Israel's motivations. He claimed that according to Somali intelligence Somaliland's recognition was contingent upon three conditions, agreeing to resettle Palestinians from Gaza, permitting the establishment of an Israeli military base on the Gulf of Aden and formally joining the Abraham Accords. He described the move as unexpected and warned of severe implications for regional stability and the Palestinian cause.

On January 1, Somalia assumed the rotating presidency of the United Nations Security Council. At the same time, the Somali Defence Ministry announced the results of a military operation conducted with international support in the Jabad Godane area of southeastern Somalia. The ministry reported that the operation resulted in the deaths of 29 al-Shabaab militants and the destruction of vehicles and weaponry. Separately, the Somali government addressed statements from Somaliland, formally rejecting their denials of alleged agreements with Israel.

On January 2, Somalia's Ambassador to the UN, Abukar Dahir Osman, held a press conference to outline the Security Council's program for January, featuring high-level debates on the rule of law and the Middle East. When questioned, he characterized Israel's recognition of Somaliland as a distraction from the Gaza conflict and reaffirmed Somalia's sovereignty. In a separate development, Turkey's Energy Minister announced plans to commence deepwater oil and gas drilling off Somalia's coast beginning in February 2026.

January 3 saw President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud issue a sharp warning regarding tensions with Somaliland, signalling that military action could be considered to defend national sovereignty. He reiterated accusations that Israel's move was strategically motivated and warned that the ensuing tensions could be exploited by al-Shabaab. Domestically, the Somali National Army reported eliminating over 20 al-Shabaab militants in a planned operation, with the Defense Minister detailing the deaths of specific

ringleaders. The Federal Parliament also approved the Medicine Bill to regulate pharmaceuticals, and the Commander of Ground Forces inspected troops in Beledweyne.

Security forces reported continued military pressure on al-Shabaab on January 4. Elite Danab forces conducted a nighttime raid in Jilib, a major militant hold killing at least 15 militants and making several arrests. In a separate operation in Lower Shabelle, Somali security forces secured full control of Jilib Marka following an intelligence-led mission, dismantling militant hideouts and re-establishing state authority in the area.

Somaliland

On December 30, international attention remained focused on reactions in Somalia to Israel's recognition of Somaliland. Within Somaliland, public sentiment continued to reflect the positive reception reported following the initial announcement. Media reports noted small gatherings in Borama, located in western Somaliland, where some residents expressed opposition to the diplomatic development, indicating varying perspectives within the region.

The following day, December 31, Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi Irro commented on the diplomatic situation, expressing optimism that recognition was gaining momentum and anticipating that other nations might follow Israel's decision. In a related regional development, the government of Djibouti announced the closure of Somaliland's liaison office within its borders, citing Israel's recognition as the basis for its decision.

On January 1, the Somaliland government responded to allegations made by Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. Officials issued a statement characterizing the claims which suggested agreements involving the resettlement of Palestinians or the establishment of an Israeli military base as baseless. The statement clarified that the relationship with Israel was diplomatic in nature and indicated plans for future diplomatic engagements, including potential involvement in the Abraham Accords.

International analysis of the recognition continued on January 2. Somaliland's Representative to the United States, Bashir Goth, participated in a media interview framing the recognition as a significant event that could enhance Somaliland's geopolitical role in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea region. This perspective was contrasted in separate expert commentaries, which highlighted potential risks associated with the development, such as regional instability and increased militarization. An internal development was reported on January 3, concerning the detention of a prominent religious figure, Sheikh Mahamed Wali Abdirashid. Reports indicated the arrest followed a sermon in which the sheikh voiced criticism of Somaliland's new diplomatic ties with Israel, citing potential political and religious ramifications.

On January 4 Somaliland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement regarding an international matter unrelated to the region expressing support for a reported United States operation concerning Venezuelan political leadership. The statement framed the action as supportive of democratic principles and the rule of law. Media reports also continued to reference the previous day's detention of a cleric in connection with criticism of the Israel and Somaliland agreement.

8. Yemen

Fighting in Yemen continued to intensify. Between December 29 and 30, the Saudi-led coalition conducted airstrikes on Mukalla port, reportedly targeting an unauthorized UAE weapons shipment to southern separatists, a claim denied by Abu Dhabi. Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council declared a 90-day state of emergency, canceled a defense agreement with the UAE, imposed a 72-hour air, land, and sea blockade, and demanded the withdrawal of Emirati forces.

On December 31, the UAE announced the withdrawal of its remaining forces amid escalating tensions with Saudi Arabia. Protests calling for southern independence expanded, while the Southern Transitional Council (STC) warned of potential Saudi airstrikes as troops mobilized near the border.

On January 1, the UAE confirmed a full retreat from Yemen. The STC refused to withdraw from provinces near the Saudi border but agreed to deploy Riyadh-backed forces. Clashes were reported between Saudi-backed government forces and UAE-aligned separatists. Fighting spread to Hadramout province, where the STC accused Saudi Arabia of airstrikes that reportedly killed at least seven fighters. Yemeni government forces retook Say'un city as the STC retreated, with at least 80 separatists reported killed since that date.

On January 3, the STC announced a two-year transition plan leading to a referendum on southern independence and a new constitution for a proposed "State of South Arabia." Saudi-backed forces regained control of resource-rich Hadramout. The STC welcomed Saudi calls for dialogue in Riyadh, while the UAE urged restraint.

By January 4, pro-government forces secured full control of Al-Mahra province following STC's withdrawal. The UN Security Council announced plans for a high-level debate on the Middle East, including Yemen, amid continued advances by Saudi-backed troops and concerns over renewed civil war.

9. The Gulf Countries

The conflict in Yemen remains the most visible point of friction between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with Emirati-backed STC forces clashing directly with the Saudi-backed Presidential Leadership Council and coming under Saudi airstrikes.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia plans, alongside Yemen's government, to convene a conference in Riyadh aimed at reaching a comprehensive settlement. Invitations have reportedly been extended to the STC.

The STC announced plans to hold a referendum on southern independence while simultaneously welcoming Saudi-led talks, underscoring its dual-track approach.

Sudan's Armed Forces leader, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, reportedly informed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during a December visit to Riyadh that plans for a Russian naval base on Sudan's Red Sea coast had been frozen. This suggests Saudi concern over growing militarization along the Red Sea, particularly Russian involvement. Al-Burhan has sought direct Saudi backing against the RSF, though Riyadh has thus far emphasized ceasefire efforts over material support.

A separate report indicated that Ethiopia repatriated approximately 26,000 Ethiopian nationals from Saudi Arabia who had been stranded in the Kingdom.

UAE

The UAE was among the few states that refrained from issuing a public statement on Israel's recognition of Somaliland. Subsequent indications suggest the UAE foreign ministry has begun accepting Somaliland passports for visa applications. Abu Dhabi's position remains ambiguous, given its lease of Berbera port and reported encouragement of the Somaliland–Ethiopia MoU signed in 2024. Oman, which borders STC-controlled areas of Yemen, has coordinated with Saudi Arabia while limiting its response to diplomatic efforts.

Qatar

Following the ousting and arrest of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro by the United States, Qatar issued a foreign ministry statement expressing deep concern and calling for dialogue. While not an explicit condemnation, the statement signaled dissatisfaction with US actions, despite Qatar's status as a US ally and host of American military bases.

Israeli outlets, including The Times of Israel and Haaretz, reported that Israel had previously requested Qatar to increase financial assistance to Gaza before the October 7, 2023, attacks. The reports criticized Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, arguing that Qatari and Iranian funds contributed to Hamas's military buildup. The rationale behind the alleged request remains unclear.

Qatar joined several Arab states, including the UAE, in issuing a joint statement expressing concern over the deteriorating situation in Gaza and calling for increased humanitarian assistance.

The Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, held phone calls with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed, likely focused on Yemen. On January 3, Qatar's foreign ministry also issued a statement supporting the process undertaken by Yemen's internationally recognized government, referring to the Saudi-backed Presidential Leadership Council.

Kuwait

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan held a phone call with Kuwaiti Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Sabah, discussing Israel's increasingly destabilizing role in the region, including Israel's recognition of Somaliland. Kuwait was among 21 states that rejected the move, with criticism articulated through statements issued by Qatar's foreign ministry.

Most GCC states, including Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, continue to view Saudi Arabia as the primary external actor shaping the Yemen file and have publicly welcomed Riyadh's initiatives.

10. Africa and The Sahel Region

Sahel–U.S. Diplomatic Tensions

Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have imposed reciprocal entry bans on U.S. citizens, responding to Washington's expanded list of restricted countries, citing security concerns. Sahel governments have framed the measures explicitly as tit-for-tat diplomacy, rejecting what they describe as unilateral and discriminatory U.S. visa policies linked to regional insecurity.

The coordinated response reflects a shared political posture within the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)—asserting autonomy in foreign policy and resisting Western pressure through symbolic but pointed diplomatic countermeasures. Chad has adopted a parallel approach by suspending visa issuance for U.S. nationals, reinforcing the perception of a widening Sahelian bloc willing to absorb diplomatic friction.

Security Realignment: Joint Sahel Counter-Insurgency Force

AES members—Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger—are advancing plans to formalize a joint ground-and-air counter-insurgency force targeting jihadist groups operating across porous borders. The initiative is a cornerstone of the alliance's security doctrine, emphasizing regional self-reliance over external military partnerships. While operational capacity remains uncertain, the force signals a strategic pivot away from Western security frameworks.

Mali

Mali announced a reciprocal ban on U.S. citizens entering the country, joining Burkina Faso after the U.S. expanded travel restrictions to include Mali. The move reflects escalating diplomatic tension and a growing posture of reciprocity by the military government.

Moussa Mara's appeal hearing is set for January 19, 2026. The Court of Appeals in Bamako scheduled an appeal hearing for former Prime Minister Moussa Mara, in a politically significant case closely watched by the public and international observers.

In his New Year address, General Assimi Goïta outlined plans to reform Mali's political party system, including revising the Charter of Political Parties and addressing long-standing issues in party financing and transparency.

Although not fresh this week, the ongoing fuel shortages and blockades by al-Qaeda-linked group JNIM continue to strain Mali's economy and daily life. The blockade has disrupted fuel imports and transport routes, keeping markets and logistics under pressure. Insurgent activity by groups like JNIM continues to undermine stability nationwide, contributing to closures and irregular supply flows. This insecurity still shapes Mali's political and social environment.

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso imposes reciprocal travel ban on U.S. citizens

Burkina Faso has officially joined Mali in barring U.S. nationals from entering the country in response to an expanded U.S. travel ban that now includes Burkina Faso. The country's foreign ministry said the decision is a tit-for-tat measure based on reciprocity. A new U.S. government travel ban taking effect this month lists Burkina Faso among countries facing entry restrictions, citing security concerns. This has triggered reciprocal reactions from Ouagadougou. Several news organizations report that the Burkinabe and Malian governments announced these travel measures late last month or at the start of January as a response to U.S. visa policy changes. Analysts note that the revised travel ban ordered by the U.S. administration has immediate ripple effects in West Africa and that Burkina Faso's reciprocal action is seen as a diplomatic statement.

Niger

Niger was added to the list of countries banned from U.S. entry under the new U.S. visa restrictions, and in response has halted entry for U.S. citizens in line with other Sahel states this week.

ICRC offices closed after junta order

The International Committee of the Red Cross closed its offices in Niger and foreign staff left the country after the military government ordered them out following accusations the

ECOWAS's formal exit confirmed

West African states, including Niger, have formally exited ECOWAS after its demand for democratic transition compliance was part of shifting regional alliances.

Nuclear energy partnership plans

Niger says it wants to build two nuclear reactors with Russia's Rosatom, showing its pivot to new foreign partnerships and infrastructure projects, a policy discussion receiving attention in regional media.

Guinea

Coup leader Doumbouya wins presidential election

Gen. Mamady Doumbouya was declared the winner of the presidential election with around 86.7 % of the vote in results released this week, marking a formal transition after the 2021 coup. Critics question fairness and voter freedom in the process.

The election took place on Dec. 28, 2025, with the results expected and widely reported this week. Doumbouya's victory may reinforce his long-term rule and influence Guinea's political path.

Chad

Chad also stopped issuing visas to U.S. citizens in reaction to U.S. visa policy changes, part of the broader Sahel diplomatic climate.

UNHCR warns that Sudanese refugee numbers in Chad have more than tripled, stressing humanitarian systems and resources amid ongoing regional displacement.

A failed assault on the Chadian presidential palace in 2025 underscores the continuing threat of jihadist activity in the region, even if not a newly reported incident. Concurrently, Chad's ruling party won a commanding parliamentary majority in late-2025 polls, consolidating President Mahamat Idriss Deby's control. Opposition crackdown concerns. Recent reporting highlights accusations by opposition figures that the government represses dissent, an ongoing political fault line.

11. North Africa

Morocco

On December 29, 2025, Foreign Ministers Badr Abdelatty of Egypt and Nasser Bourita of Morocco held a phone conversation to discuss key issues concerning Palestine, Sudan, and Libya. They emphasized the need for sustained coordination to ensure stability and advanced a prime minister-led Joint Coordination and Follow-up Committee. This initiative highlights Morocco's role in fostering collaborative frameworks that could streamline responses to shared challenges like the fragmentation in Libya, ultimately

strengthening ties to counterbalance rivalries in the region and promote mutual interests in peacebuilding. Morocco's focused outreach aligns with broader Arab efforts, and the proposed committee offers a pathway for deeper integration. However, its success will depend on navigating divergent views on issues such as Western Sahara. Upcoming implementations could solidify alliances, but regional volatilities may challenge their effectiveness.

Algeria

Algeria's week was marked by anti-colonial legislation, migration coordination, and efforts to defend regional ties, all aimed at asserting sovereignty and fostering alliances amid historical grievances and contemporary challenges. From criminalizing the glorification of colonialism to engaging in migration talks and dismissing Israeli concerns over ties with Egypt, Algiers projected strength in unity, potentially straining relations with France while bolstering Arab solidarity. Although there were no events after December 30, the activities from December 24-30 illustrate a strategic blend of domestic assertion and international collaboration.

On December 24, 2025, Algeria hosted the inaugural Algerian-Italian-Libyan-Tunisian Quadrilateral Steering Committee meeting focused on voluntary migrant returns. This meeting established mechanisms for a joint project in 2026 and produced a working paper on migration management. This forum underscores Algeria's leadership in addressing the regional impacts of illegal migration, fostering practical cooperation that could alleviate border strains and enhance stability, though challenges such as funding and enforcement remain important for success.

That same day, Algeria's parliament unanimously enacted a law criminalizing French colonization, mandating an apology and reparations while prohibiting its glorification. This move escalates tensions with Paris to historic lows since Algeria's 1962 independence, amid claims of 1.5 million casualties during the colonial period. This legislation channels national memory into policy, rallying domestic support against perceived neocolonialism but risking diplomatic isolation or economic repercussions from France.

On December 30, 2025, a former Egyptian diplomat downplayed Israeli concerns regarding the Algeria-Egypt rapprochement, describing it as a historic bond that strengthens Arab security through cultural and strategic dimensions. Mohamed Hegazy criticized Israeli policies as disruptive, framing the partnership as a counter to regional instability and suggesting that Algeria's growing ties could enhance collective leverage on issues like Palestine.

Algeria's interconnected actions from migration diplomacy to anti-colonial laws and alliance defenses reveal a cohesive push for autonomy and collaboration. These moves might provoke a reaction from France, but could also pave the way for stronger

Mediterranean ties. As the 2026 migration project advances, monitoring the fallout with France and synergies with Egypt will be crucial, with prospects for reinforced Arab cohesion if navigated skillfully.

12. Middle East

Israel

Israel's activities this week centered on high-level diplomacy with the U.S., reactions to global events like the change in Venezuelan leadership, and strict measures on Gaza aid organizations. These actions reinforce Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's alignment with President Donald Trump while advancing security priorities. From the Mar-a-Lago meeting on Gaza and Iran to congratulations on Maduro's capture and license revocations, these steps emphasize Israel's focus on countering perceived threats, fostering alliances against authoritarianism, and controlling humanitarian flows. While they strengthen bilateral ties, they also risk international backlash amid ongoing tensions in Gaza.

On December 29, 2025, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convened with President Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago to outline Gaza ceasefire advancements and issue a stark warning to Iran over its nuclear pursuits, amid a backdrop of mutual commendations that dispelled rumors of discord. Netanyahu's proposal for Trump to receive the Israel Prize and their shared insistence on Hamas disarming, coupled with Trump's downplaying of civilian casualties from Israeli strikes, underscore a robust U.S.-Israel partnership that prioritizes military objectives over humanitarian concerns, though ambiguities around a Peace Board, international forces, and Hamas's reluctance to cede power without statehood talks suggest stalled progress that could prolong instability.

Shifting to international affairs on January 3, 2026, Netanyahu extended congratulations to Trump for the U.S. seizure of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, hailing it as a triumphant stand for freedom against tyranny and lauding the military's execution. This endorsement, set against Maduro's controversial rule marked by economic ruin and rights violations, not only cements the Netanyahu-Trump bond but also frames global anti-authoritarian efforts in a way that could embolden similar actions elsewhere, drawing criticism for overlooking potential Venezuelan chaos while amplifying Israel's narrative of moral leadership in confronting dictators.

That same day, Israeli leaders expressed optimism about rekindling diplomatic relations with Venezuela following Maduro's removal. Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar hailed the U.S. operation as a beacon for democracy, while Prime Minister Netanyahu supported Trump's "historic" guidance without detailing the operation. Opposition Leader Yair Lapid and Diaspora Affairs Minister Amichai Chikli compared the situation to Iran's, urging Tehran to take notice and labeling Maduro's regime as a destabilizing criminal network. These remarks tie Venezuelan developments into Middle East geopolitics,

potentially exerting pressure on Iran and highlighting Israel's strategic use of U.S. interventions to strengthen its security rhetoric and explore new alliances.

On January 4, 2026, Israel began revoking operating permits for 37 foreign humanitarian groups in Gaza, enforcing new registration rules with a deadline of March 2026 to stop their activities. Authorities downplayed the impact, stating these groups provided less than 1% of aid during the conflict and that supplies would continue as usual. This move follows similar actions against UNRWA and allegations of terrorist links to organizations like Doctors Without Borders. Critics see the decision as ideologically driven, which could strain relations with the UN, despite its claims of neutrality. It also fits into broader efforts by Israel to control Gaza by limiting external influences that could challenge Israeli oversight.

Israel's interconnected moves from Gaza strategy talks and aid crackdowns to capitalizing on Venezuela's shift demonstrate a cohesive foreign policy that harnesses U.S. support to address threats like Iran and Hamas. However, these actions may heighten humanitarian scrutiny and regional frictions. As license revocations unfold and potential Venezuelan ties develop, monitoring U.S.-Israel coordination will be essential, with opportunities for de-escalation hinging on clearer ceasefire paths amid persistent uncertainties.

Turkey

Turkey's week was defined by assertive diplomacy on humanitarian fronts, crisis mediation, and selective economic outreach, all linked to broader goals of regional solidarity and independent foreign policy. From Gaza advocacy and Yemen talks to visa waivers for China and concerns over Venezuela, Ankara positioned itself as a vocal defender of stability, weaving anti-imperialist themes with pragmatic ties. These actions not only amplify Turkey's influence in Muslim-majority issues but also navigate global tensions, potentially bridging divides while addressing domestic economic needs.

On December 31, 2025, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan intensified calls to halt Israeli attacks on Gaza, ramp up aid, and start rebuilding, crediting Palestinian endurance for maintaining a ceasefire despite violations. Demanding accountability for over 71,000 deaths in what he called a "war of annihilation," this stance underscores Turkey's consistent framing of the conflict as a moral imperative, linking it to regional justice efforts that bolster Ankara's soft power among Arab audiences and align with domestic sentiments.

Building on this, January 2, 2026, saw Turkey unite with Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, Indonesia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar to urge Israel to ease Gaza aid blocks amid harsh weather impacting 1.9 million displaced, pushing for NGO freedom, better infrastructure, and Rafah access while endorsing lasting peace and self-determination. This multilateral push highlights Turkey's skill in coalition-building, transcending

rivalries to focus on humanitarian urgency, which could indirectly support its broader anti-occupation narrative and foster unexpected alliances.

Also on January 2, 2026, Turkey waived visa requirements for Chinese citizens for 90-day tourism and transit stays, a non-reciprocal move to spur tourism hailed by China's ambassador for deepening ties. Yet, it drew flak over security risks to Uyghur communities and modest economic returns from lower-spending visitors, revealing Ankara's willingness to prioritize growth amid global isolation concerns. This approach complicates human rights stances and exposes internal vulnerabilities.

In Yemen diplomacy that day, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan discussed the crisis with Saudi and UAE counterparts, addressing the Southern Transitional Council's province seizures and resulting Saudi-UAE accusations. This outreach positions Turkey as an engaged mediator, using dialogue to mitigate instability that could affect Red Sea shipping, tying into its Gaza efforts by emphasizing unity against division.

The following day, January 3, 2026, Turkey expressed alarm over U.S. military actions in Venezuela, capturing President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, calling for restraint and offering legal mediation while rejecting U.S. oil-grab claims. Maintaining ties with Maduro contrasts Western isolation, illustrating Turkey's anti-hegemonic tilt that echoes its Middle East critiques, potentially safeguarding economic links like oil imports amid global energy shifts.

Also on January 3, Turkey welcomed Yemeni President Rashad al-Alimi's conference invitation for southern factions, backing Saudi initiatives for stability and a constitutional solution amid threats to sovereignty. This endorsement reinforces Turkey's Yemen involvement, connecting to earlier talks by prioritizing dialogue over conflict, which could enhance Ankara's regional credibility and counterbalance Gulf dynamics.

In sum, Turkey's linked pursuits from Gaza solidarity to Yemen mediation and global stances showcase a foreign policy that amplifies voice through partnerships, though China policy risks and Yemen volatility pose hurdles. Future engagements could yield de-escalation dividends, but navigating U.S. frictions and economic trade-offs will test resilience.

Iran

Iran's engagements this week showcased defiance against external pressures, solidarity with regional allies, and opportunistic commentary on global events, all linked to domestic protests and longstanding tensions with the U.S. From condemning Trump's threats to commemorating Soleimani and interpreting Maduro's capture through an exiled perspective, Tehran reinforced its narrative of resilience during economic struggles. By leveraging alliances like Hezbollah, Iran aimed to project strength, which could galvanize internal support but also risks further isolation as protests escalate.

On January 3, 2026, President Masoud Pezeshkian sharply rebuked U.S. President Donald Trump's warnings of intervention over Iran's handling of protesters, labeling them and regional critics as "nonsense" while blaming U.S. policies for Middle Eastern chaos and Iran's hardships from sanctions. This response, amid escalating economically driven demonstrations, portrays Iran as unyielding in its pursuit of independence, potentially rallying nationalists but highlighting vulnerabilities that could invite more international scrutiny if protests escalate unchecked.

That same day, Hezbollah Secretary General Sheikh Naim Qassem, in a speech marking the sixth anniversary of General Qassem Soleimani's death, lauded Soleimani's role in bolstering Palestinian resistance and noted Iran's unconditional support for Hezbollah. Stressing continued opposition to Israel, the need for Lebanese elections, and arming the Lebanese military, Qassem's words emphasize Iran's pivotal backing of proxy groups, which strengthens its regional influence but ties Tehran to Lebanese instability, possibly complicating domestic priorities amid protests.

Also on January 3, 2026, exiled Iranian figure Reza Pahlavi commended the U.S. ousting of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, drawing parallels to Iran's unrest and expressing hopes for freedom in both nations through a potential democratic alliance. As an advocate for secular governance in Iran, Pahlavi's statement aligns with surging protests over economic issues, using the Venezuelan shift to amplify calls for change—a move that contrasts sharply with Tehran's official line, potentially deepening internal divisions while signaling to the West Iran's reformist undercurrents.

Iran's clustered responses on January 3 reveal a dual narrative of official defiance and exile optimism, interconnected through themes of anti-authoritarianism and U.S. influence, which might fuel protest momentum or prompt crackdowns. As economic strains persist, watching for U.S. escalations or regional spillovers from allies like Hezbollah will be critical, with opportunities for dialogue hinging on de-escalating rhetoric.

Syria

On January 4, 2026, the UK and France conducted a joint airstrike on an underground ISIS site in central Syria, using RAF Typhoon FGR4s and French jets to target tunnels storing arms and explosives in a reportedly uninhabited area. Defense Secretary John Healey described the operation as part of efforts to prevent ISIS from rebuilding. Initial reports indicated success and no civilian risks, showcasing effective intelligence-sharing and precision tactics. This operation is likely to deter ISIS regrouping while minimizing backlash, although it subtly reinforces Western involvement in Syrian affairs, which could strain relations with Damascus and regional powers. This isolated strike connects to broader anti-terrorism campaigns, offering a model for future interventions that prioritize minimal disruption, but ongoing monitoring for ISIS retaliation or Syrian government

responses will be essential. As alliances like this persist, they may contribute to incremental stability, provided they avoid escalating into wider conflicts.

13. Europe

Finnish authorities detained a ship suspected of involvement in damage to critical undersea infrastructure in the Baltic Sea, while also carrying Russian steel under EU sanctions. The case has heightened European concern over hybrid threats, sanctions evasion via maritime routes, and the vulnerability of strategic seabed infrastructure. It reinforces ongoing EU and NATO debates about attribution, deterrence, and escalation thresholds in grey-zone activities linked to Russia.

Following repeated incidents involving cables and pipelines in the Baltic and North Seas, European governments intensified coordination on maritime surveillance and infrastructure protection. The issue is increasingly framed not as a technical or commercial matter but as a collective security challenge. This reflects a broader shift in European threat perception toward non-kinetic, deniable forms of coercion.

The EU's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, and other European leaders emphasized the need to uphold international law and the UN Charter following the U.S. military operation in Venezuela that deposed Nicolás Maduro. They urged restraint and clarity on the U.S. transition plan, stressing that any pathway forward must respect sovereignty and democratic processes.

Spain, along with five Latin American countries, issued a communique rejecting the U.S. attack on Venezuela as a violation of international law and sovereignty, aligning with broader EU concerns. Berlin publicly urged de-escalation and a negotiated route forward, reiterating EU principles of international law and peaceful resolution while acknowledging complex views on Maduro's legitimacy.

Reactions to the U.S. strikes in Venezuela have reinforced existing European concerns about Washington's preference for unilateral or coalition-of-the-willing approaches. Several EU capitals emphasized international law not only as a principle but as a constraint necessary to prevent wider destabilization. The episode feeds into long-running debates over European strategic autonomy and the credibility of the rules-based order.

While European allies engaged in discussions around a U.S.-led 20-point peace framework in Kyiv, governments were careful to signal that diplomacy does not equate to de-escalation of support. Military aid, financial assistance, and training commitments remain intact.

On January 1, 2026, Cyprus officially took over the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the next six months, steering EU legislative and policy work. This follows the usual half-year rotation and includes priorities aligned with the joint 2026 legislative agenda signed by EU institutions.

British and French warplanes targeted suspected Islamic State weapons facilities in Syria, reaffirming Europe's continued engagement in counter-terrorism operations beyond its immediate neighborhood. The strikes highlight Europe's selective but sustained military footprint in the Middle East, even as strategic attention is largely consumed by Ukraine and Russia. They also reflect continued reliance on intelligence-driven, limited strikes rather than large-scale deployments.

Bulgaria officially became the **21st Eurozone member**, transitioning its currency from the lev to the euro. Reports indicate banks and shops handled the switch smoothly despite mixed public sentiment on inflation and sovereignty concerns. Bulgaria's smooth transition to the euro was presented by EU institutions as a success for integration and economic convergence. However, public skepticism persists, particularly around inflation, cost-of-living pressures, and perceived loss of monetary sovereignty. Euroskeptical and nationalist actors are likely to exploit these concerns in domestic politics across the region.

The activation of the EU's carbon border adjustment mechanism for heavy industry marks a major step in climate governance. While intended to prevent carbon leakage, the measure risks friction with external trade partners and could provoke retaliatory responses. Internally, it also tests the EU's ability to balance climate ambition with industrial competitiveness.

European allies convened in Kyiv to coordinate Ukraine support amid U.S.-Russia diplomacy concerns. Planned trilateral working groups (U.S., Ukraine, Russia) eyed for early 2026 meetings.

Southern EU states continued to warn that migration pressures remain high despite seasonal fluctuations. Implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum remains slow, with burden-sharing mechanisms still contested. The issue continues to fuel political polarization across member states.

Despite relatively stable gas storage levels, colder winter conditions have prompted closer monitoring of energy systems. Policymakers remain wary of price volatility, infrastructure disruption, and geopolitical shocks. Energy resilience remains a strategic concern rather than a resolved issue.

On political stability in the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Keir Starmer insisted he will remain in office through 2027, rejecting speculation about leadership challenges amid weak polling and internal party unease. His statement reflects concerns within Labour about credibility, electoral fatigue, and the risk of further fragmentation at a time of economic strain and rising populist pressure.

14. The United State

Immigration enforcement and citizenship review

The U.S. government has begun auditing cases involving Somali-born U.S. citizens to assess potential grounds for denaturalization, citing concerns over possible fraud during the naturalization process. The move, while framed as a legal and administrative review, has raised alarm among civil rights advocates who warn it risks selective enforcement and could deepen mistrust between the federal government and immigrant communities, particularly at a time of heightened domestic polarization.

Judicial limits to executive authority

A U.S. federal judge temporarily halted the administration's effort to end deportation protections for South Sudanese migrants under Temporary Protected Status (TPS). The ruling underscores the continued role of the judiciary as a counterweight to hardline immigration policies and reflects broader legal uncertainty surrounding U.S. commitments to populations fleeing protracted conflict and state fragility.

On the Ukraine-Russia conflict and diplomacy

Progress toward a potential peace settlement remained stalled amid mutual accusations and ongoing hostilities. U.S. President Trump hosted Zelenskiy at Mar-a-Lago, discussing a reworked 20-point peace framework with discussions on security guarantees but persistent disputes over Donbas territory, Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant control, and ceasefire terms.

Trump held a phone call with Putin ahead of the meeting, where Putin raised unsubstantiated claims of a Ukrainian drone attack on his Valdai residence (denied by Kyiv and dismissed by Western sources), using it to justify intensified strikes. President Trump described a recent phone call as "very productive." The sequencing highlights Washington's attempt to recalibrate its diplomatic leverage in the Ukraine war, while also raising questions among allies about U.S. strategic priorities and the balance between Moscow and Kyiv.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the US from December 28, 2025, to January 1, 2026, meeting President Trump at Mar-a-Lago on December 29 to discuss advancing the Gaza ceasefire's Phase Two, disarming Hamas and Hezbollah, countering Iran, and Saudi-Israeli normalization. Netanyahu attended Trump's New Year's Eve party as the guest of honor and spoke to Florida's Jewish community, praising Trump's leadership. The visit strengthened US-Israel ties with public mutual praise.

Defense and strategic alliances

The Pentagon announced an \$8.6 billion contract with Boeing for F-15 fighter jets for Israel, reinforcing Washington's long-standing security partnership amid regional

instability in the Middle East. The deal signals continuity in U.S. military support for Israel despite growing international scrutiny over arms transfers and their implications for regional escalation.

In a pre-dawn raid, US Special Forces, supported by airstrikes and CIA intelligence, captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores in Caracas. The operation involved precise strikes on targets like La Carlota airport, resulting in ~80 deaths (mostly Venezuelan) and no US casualties. Maduro was extracted to the USS Iwo Jima and transferred to New York for federal drug-trafficking and weapons charges. President Trump announced the US would temporarily "run" Venezuela to restore stability, secure oil resources, rebuild infrastructure with US companies, and facilitate a transition—framed as counter-narcotics but evoking Monroe Doctrine revival.

Maduro arrived in New York for detention and arraignment. International reactions were sharply divided: condemnation from China (calling it emboldening territorial claims), Russia, Iran, Cuba, Spain (violation of international law), Mexico, Brazil, and Chile; mixed or supportive views from some allies (e.g., Argentina, El Salvador) and Venezuelan opposition/diaspora celebrations. Legal debates arose over the operation's legality and Congress's notification. Trump administration officials defended it as a law enforcement success aligned with hemispheric security priorities.

Moreover, President Trump has reignited controversy by suggesting that the United States "needs" Greenland for strategic defense purposes in the Arctic, linking the comments to Washington's recent operation in Venezuela. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and Greenland's own leadership forcefully rejected any notion of U.S. annexation, emphasizing that Greenland is not "for sale" and underscoring existing NATO defence agreements that already facilitate U.S. military access. Danish officials have called on Washington to cease provocative language that undermines allied relations, and Copenhagen has reiterated respect for Denmark's territorial integrity and self-governance. Provocative signals from Trump's political allies, including a social media post depicting Greenland under a U.S. flag with the caption "SOON," have further stoked unease among Danish and Greenlandic authorities.

President Trump publicly pledged that the United States is "locked and loaded" to intervene if Iranian authorities violently suppress ongoing cost-of-living protests, which have turned deadly amid a severe economic crisis. Trump's message—framed as support for Iranian demonstrators—has prompted warnings from Tehran that foreign intervention would cross a red line and significantly escalate regional tensions. Iran's foreign minister and other senior officials have labelled U.S. comments "reckless and dangerous" and reiterated their intent to reject external interference. The U.S. Department of State has expressed support for protesters' rights while urging restraint from Tehran, but Trump's interventionist rhetoric has intensified diplomatic friction.

15. Eurasia

On Turkey's positioning, hundreds of thousands joined pro-Palestine rallies in Istanbul on January 1, 2026. President Erdogan planned talks with Trump on Ukraine and Gaza, while Foreign Minister Fidan engaged in "Coalition of the Willing" efforts.

Russia accused Ukraine of launching a large-scale drone attack (91 drones claimed) targeting President Vladimir Putin's residence in Valdai, Novgorod Oblast. Ukraine denied the claim, calling it disinformation. Russia presented alleged drone fragments to a U.S. military attaché as evidence.

North Korea launched multiple ballistic missiles (at least two) off its east coast, flying about 900 km. This was the first launch of 2026, occurring hours before/during South Korean President Lee Jae-myung's state visit to China. Analysts viewed it as a message to deter closer China-South Korea ties and signal strength amid global tensions.

South Korean President Lee Jae-myung began a four-day state visit to China, arriving in Beijing on January 4. He met Chinese President Xi Jinping (their second meeting in two months) for in-depth talks on security, economy, Korean Peninsula peace, and denuclearization. Lee reaffirmed respect for the "One-China" policy on Taiwan. A large business delegation accompanied him, focusing on supply chains and cultural exchanges.

China released footage and reports confirming the completion of Justice Mission 2025, emphasizing improved PLA joint operations and blockade capabilities.

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued strong condemnations, describing the U.S. actions as "armed aggression," a "grave violation of international law," and an "unacceptable encroachment on the sovereignty of an independent state."

India and Pakistan exchanged lists of nuclear installations and prisoners under bilateral agreements.

India issued a travel advisory urging nationals to avoid non-essential travel to Venezuela following the U.S. capture of President Nicolás Maduro.

Preparations advanced for finalizing the India-EU free trade agreement, with EU leaders expected as Republic Day guests. India continued pragmatic engagement across global divides, prioritizing economic interests amid U.S. tariff challenges and China relations.

The diplomatic effort to achieve lasting peace and fully normalize relations between **Azerbaijan and Armenia** is expected to continue into **2026**, building on concrete steps taken in 2025. Last year saw expanded political dialogue, confidence-building measures, and agreements toward ending decades of hostility, including a **joint declaration signed under U.S. mediation** and initialing of a peace agreement. Both sides eased trade and transportation restrictions, fostering economic cooperation.

16. International and Regional Organizations

United Nation

UN Highlights Human Right to Seek Safety from Conflict

The United Nations emphasized the fundamental human right to seek asylum from war zones, prohibiting forced returns to perilous areas. This stance reinforces global protections for refugees amid rising displacements. By invoking the Geneva Conventions, the UN reminds warring parties that civilian safety and humanitarian aid must remain inviolable, even in active conflicts. This message gains urgency with Sudan's crisis displacing millions, where UNHCR is expanding support for refugees and host communities in East Africa, highlighting the need for sustained international aid to prevent further humanitarian collapse.

UN Updates on Gaza Crisis and Humanitarian Efforts

In Gaza, the UN reported massive ongoing displacements and severe hunger levels not seen before, with UNRWA struggling to deliver aid amid intense hostilities. This situation underscores how prolonged conflict exacerbates famine risks and civilian suffering, straining relief operations. The organization's focus on protecting vulnerable populations reveals gaps in international response, as blockades hinder essential supplies. By scaling up efforts, the UN aims to mitigate immediate crises while advocating for ceasefires, showing that without political resolutions, humanitarian needs will only intensify in besieged regions.

UN Reports on Russian Attacks in Ukraine

Major Russian assaults in Ukraine have caused civilian casualties, widespread destruction, and disruptions to essential utilities like power and water. The UN stressed the imperative to safeguard non-combatants and critical infrastructure under international law. These attacks illustrate how targeting civilian areas prolongs suffering and hampers recovery, eroding trust in peace processes. With winter amplifying vulnerabilities, the UN's call for adherence to humanitarian norms highlights the broader implications for regional stability, urging accountability to prevent escalation and foster diplomatic pathways.

UN Expresses Alarm Over Escalation in Venezuela

The UN voiced deep concern over Venezuela's crisis escalating to US military involvement, noting violations of international law. It urged all parties to pursue inclusive dialogue that upholds human rights and the rule of law. This intervention risks further destabilizing the region, as external actions could undermine sovereignty and exacerbate divisions. By advocating restraint, the UN seeks to protect civilians and promote peaceful resolutions, emphasizing that military solutions often lead to prolonged instability without addressing root economic and political grievances.

UN Humanitarian Efforts in Ukraine

In Ukraine, the UN highlighted World Food Programme operations delivering aid near frontlines, combating rising hunger threats from conflict. This work demonstrates the challenges of operating in war zones, where access restrictions heighten malnutrition risks. By prioritizing vulnerable groups, the UN's initiatives reveal the interconnectedness of security and food stability, pushing for ceasefires to enable broader relief. Sustained support is crucial, as disruptions could trigger wider humanitarian emergencies, underscoring the need for international funding to match escalating needs.

End of UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)

The UN marked the conclusion of its Assistance Mission for Iraq after 20 years, reflecting on its contributions to stability and governance. This closure signals Iraq's progress toward self-reliance, but lingering challenges like sectarian tensions persist. UNAMI's legacy in elections and human rights monitoring highlights the value of multilateral support in post-conflict recovery. Moving forward, sustained partnerships are essential to prevent backsliding, showing that mission endings must align with robust local institutions.

UN Warns on Child Malnutrition in Sudan's North Darfur

The UN issued warnings about severe child malnutrition in North Darfur, Sudan, urging immediate interventions to avert famine. Conflict-driven displacements have worsened access to food and healthcare, exposing systemic failures in aid delivery. This crisis illustrates how wars amplify vulnerabilities, with long-term health impacts on survivors. Coordinated global responses, including funding surges, are critical to stabilize the region, preventing spillover effects into neighboring countries already strained by refugees.

Somalia Assumes UN Security Council Presidency

Somalia announced its UN Security Council presidency for January, a milestone for the nation amid recovery from instability. This role enables Somalia to amplify African voices on peace and development issues. Leading discussions could influence resolutions on regional conflicts, showcasing progress in governance. Challenges include balancing national interests with global duties, but it reinforces the Council's diversity, promoting equitable approaches to threats like piracy and terrorism.

UN Calls on Iran to Uphold Rights Amid Protests

The UN urged Iran to respect freedoms of expression, association, and assembly during protests, amid reports of violence. Suppressing dissent risks escalating unrest and eroding public trust in governance. By allowing peaceful grievances, authorities could foster stability, addressing underlying issues like economic hardships. International monitoring is key to ensuring accountability, as violations often lead to broader human rights regressions, impacting regional dynamics.

UN Urges Israel to Drop Mandatory Death Sentence Plans

The UN called on Israel to abandon legislation mandating death sentences solely for Palestinians, deeming it discriminatory. Such laws could heighten tensions in occupied territories, undermining justice principles. This move highlights imbalances in legal systems, potentially fueling cycles of violence. Advocating equal rights under international law, the UN seeks to prevent escalations, promoting reforms that build trust and pave ways for negotiations.

Africa Union

AU Issues Communiques on Venezuela's Crisis

The AU released communiques on Venezuela's crisis in multiple languages, reaffirming sovereignty and advocating dialogue. External interventions complicate resolutions, risking Latin-American stability with African parallels. By calling for peaceful talks, the AU draws from its mediation experiences, emphasizing non-interference. This stance fosters global solidarity, urging respect for self-determination to prevent broader diplomatic rifts.

Launch of AUSSOM

On January 1, 2026, the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) officially commenced, succeeding the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). This multidimensional peace support mission, endorsed by the United Nations, is designed to enhance stability in Somalia and facilitate the transfer of security responsibilities to Somali forces by December 2029. AUSSOM is authorized to deploy 11,826 uniformed personnel, comprising military, police, and civilian components, to combat Al-Shabaab and ISIL-affiliated groups. The mission follows the Somalia Security Development Plan (SSDP) and emphasizes a phased approach to building accountable and capable Somali security forces, while establishing a clear command structure for effective operations.

AUC Chairperson Welcomes Sudan's Peace Initiative

ON December 30, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, expressed strong support for the peace initiative proposed by Sudan's Transitional Government to the UN Security Council. He described the initiative as a comprehensive framework aimed at ending hostilities and alleviating humanitarian suffering while promoting Sudan's unity and sovereignty. Emphasizing the importance of peace talks, he highlighted the need for an immediate ceasefire, humanitarian access, and inclusive national dialogue. The AUC Chairperson reaffirmed the African Union's commitment to collaborating with international partners to support peace efforts in Sudan.

Egypt's Peace and Development Vision for Eastern Congo and the Horn of Africa

On December 29, 2025 Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty has presented Egypt's strategic vision for regional stability during a virtual AU Peace and Security Council session. He strongly condemned Israel's recognition of Somaliland, calling for an emergency AU session to counter these actions, which he argued violate international law and threaten peace in the Horn of Africa. Abdelatty welcomed the recent peace agreement between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda, urging commitment to its implementation. He offered Egypt's support in peacekeeping efforts, citing Cairo's extensive experience in the DRC, while emphasizing a comprehensive approach that incorporates political, military, and developmental strategies to ensure lasting stability and promote humanitarian efforts.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

IGAD Condemns Assassination Attempt on HirShabelle Leader

On January 3, Mohamed Abdi Were, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), condemned the failed assassination attempt on HirShabelle State leader Gudlawe Hussein in Jowhar, Somalia. He reported that no casualties resulted from the incident, which was successfully thwarted by Somali forces and the AUSSOM's Burundian contingent. The ongoing threat posed by Al-Shabaab urges collective efforts to eliminate the group's influence while commanding the quick response of security forces. Meanwhile, the Somali Ministry of Defense reported successful operations against Al-Shabaab, resulting in significant militant casualties and the death of a ringleader in the Middle Shabelle region.

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)

NATO Urged to Deploy Drones for Arctic Monitoring

On January 2, 2026, a new report emphasizes the need for NATO to develop a fleet of polar-hardened drones to enhance surveillance of Russian military activities in the Arctic. The report, published by the Center for European Policy Analysis, advocates for a strategy of "deterrence by detection," urging NATO to improve its capability to track submarine patrols, monitor aircraft, and identify threats to critical infrastructure. As Russia strengthens its military presence in the region amid increased competition for resources due to melting ice, the report highlights the urgency for NATO to create a formal Arctic strategy. It calls for accelerated procurement of Arctic-capable drones and the establishment of specialized drone units to effectively address challenges in this strategically important area.

US Ambassador Questions Claims of Ukrainian Attack on Putin's Residence

On December 31, 2025, US Ambassador to NATO Matthew Whitaker expressed skepticism regarding Russia's claims that Ukraine attacked President Vladimir Putin's

residence. In an interview, he emphasized the need to review US intelligence data to ascertain the truth of the incident. Whitaker noted that confirmation of such an attack would seem illogical given the current discussions around potential peace agreements. Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy dismissed the allegations as propaganda intended to justify an escalation in conflict. The situation remains uncertain, with international reactions highlighting the need for clarity and evidence.

BRICS

Trump's Tariffs on BRICS Nations

US President Trump announced 10% tariffs on the BRICS nations soon, responding to economic threats. This escalates trade tensions. Analytically, it protects US interests, potentially reshaping global supply chains, but invites retaliation. The policy challenges multipolarity, risking fragmentation, though negotiations are possible. This stance reveals shifts in power dynamics, emphasizing the need for dialogue to mitigate impacts.

BRICS on Multilateral Peace

BRICS discussed multilateral peace and security architecture, advocating reformed global governance. This addresses conflicts collaboratively. Analytically, it challenges unipolarity, potentially influencing UN reforms, but internal divergences hinder. The focus promotes inclusivity, strengthening voice, yet requires consensus. This effort reveals BRICS' diplomatic ambitions, fostering stability through collective mechanisms.

Global Dollar Dictatorship Critique

BRICS critiqued the global dollar dominance, pushing for de-dollarization alternatives. This seeks financial autonomy. Analytically, it diversifies reserves, potentially stabilizing economies, but transition volatilities exist. The narrative empowers emerging markets, challenging hegemony, though adoption barriers persist. This discourse underscores BRICS' economic agenda, aiming for balanced international systems.

HORN REVIEW

IDEAS CONNECTIONS SYNERGY

Ideas

Connections

Synergy