



Weekly Geopolitical Report

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

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Horn Review: Weekly Report

Jan 26 – Feb 01, 2026

1. Ethiopia

Renewed clashes in northern Ethiopia's Tigray region, erupting on January 29, 2026, have escalated into what many fear is the onset of a new war, pitting federal Ethiopian forces and allied Amhara militias against Tigrayan fighters, with drone strikes on January 31 killing civilians and prompting flight suspensions amid widespread displacement concerns. While Eritrean forces (Shabia) have lingered in disputed areas, violating the 2022 Pretoria peace accord and providing tacit support to destabilize the region, and Sudan's army has indirectly fueled tensions through border incursions and proxy alignments amid its own civil war, the primary blame falls on the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) for provoking the violence by refusing full disarmament, seizing contested territories like Alamata and Korem, and exploiting internal power struggles to reignite conflict, dragging a war-weary population back into chaos despite international calls for dialogue.

Reports of drone strikes in Tigray that have heightened fears of renewed confrontation, but the primary responsibility lies with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), whose persistent refusal to fully disarm, continued occupation of contested territories such as parts of Western Tigray, and repeated provocations have deliberately undermined the Pretoria peace agreement and forced the federal government to respond in self-defense.

The incident reflects a broader pattern in which the TPLF exploits emerging military technologies and regional instability to pursue irredentist goals, turning what should be a phase of post-conflict recovery into a fragile, managed transition riddled with insecurity that the federal authorities are compelled to contain through necessary but regrettable measures. Parallel accounts of renewed clashes in northern Ethiopia further demonstrate how the TPLF's intransigence on political grievances, territorial claims, and power-sharing demands continues to erode confidence in the peace framework, making sustained dialogue difficult when one party repeatedly chooses escalation over compromise.

Diplomatic engagement surrounding the Tigray process has intensified, with the African Union, European Union, and other international actors urging full implementation of the accord, humanitarian access, and reconstruction, efforts that are repeatedly hampered by TPLF obstructionism rather than any shortfall on the part of the Ethiopian government. At the multilateral level, the UN Security Council's continued monitoring of humanitarian conditions, displacement, and ceasefire durability reflects appropriate international concern, yet it also underscores the need for greater pressure on the TPLF to honor its commitments so that Ethiopia's sovereignty and the stability of the Horn of Africa are no

longer held hostage by a faction unwilling to accept the reality of a unified, peaceful nation.

Meanwhile, Ethiopia's external security relationships appear to be entering a technologically oriented phase. U.S. Africa Command leadership has highlighted how emerging technologies—from data systems to advanced platforms, are reshaping African security cooperation, emphasizing interoperability and adaptive defense partnerships. For Addis Ababa, such trends indicate that future military effectiveness will increasingly depend on innovation rather than force size alone.

This technological dimension intersects with a broader diplomatic milestone: Ethiopia and the United States recently marked 120 years of relations while discussing a strategic partnership aimed at expanding cooperation across security and development domains. The symbolism is notable. Even as Ethiopia diversifies partnerships globally, longstanding ties with Washington retain institutional weight.

Regionally, Ethiopia's foreign ministry continues to frame the Horn as an interconnected security ecosystem where political stabilization, economic integration, and counterterrorism cooperation are mutually reinforcing priorities. Such framing reflects an emerging doctrine that views domestic resilience and regional diplomacy as inseparable.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's meeting with the presidents of Djibouti and Somalia reflects a coordinated effort to deepen regional cooperation on trade, infrastructure, and security while reinforcing Ethiopia's economic connectivity to maritime routes. The visit aligns with Ethiopia's broader diplomatic push—highlighted by high-level engagements and partnership initiatives—to strengthen strategic ties and promote stability in the Horn, implying a shift toward multilateral economic integration and political coordination as tools to safeguard national development and regional influence.

2. Sudan

This week saw continued mass-casualty violence, renewed diplomatic activity, and Sudan's conflict entered a further escalatory phase, marked by intensified military activity across new fronts, mounting evidence of mass atrocities, deepening humanitarian collapse, and accelerating environmental and institutional degradation. The war continues to expand geographically and structurally, reinforcing a trajectory of fragmentation rather than stabilization.

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) launched a renewed offensive in Blue Nile State, interpreted by analysts as a strategic diversion from sustained pressure on RSF positions in Kordofan. Fighting in the region underscored the RSF's ability to open secondary fronts, stretching Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) response capacity and widening civilian exposure. SAF later announced that they had repelled the RSF attack in Blue Nile, highlighting continued volatility and the absence of durable control on either side. The

expansion of hostilities into the Blue Nile added to an already complex multi-front war, reinforcing concerns that Sudan's conflict is no longer confined to core urban or Darfur theatres but is increasingly national in scope. Regional security assessments continued to emphasize Sudan's role within a broader transnational conflict ecosystem, with RSF-linked networks, arms flows, and militia coordination extending across borders and complicating containment.

Fresh reporting brought renewed attention to mass graves in Khartoum, described as exposing a "dark chapter" of the war. Investigations and survivor accounts reinforced allegations of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and systematic violence against civilians. International humanitarian leaders described the level of abuse in Sudan as "grotesque," underscoring the scale and severity of violations taking place largely beyond effective monitoring or accountability mechanisms. The United Nations reiterated grave concern over continued attacks on civilians and warned that ongoing violence, obstruction of aid, and impunity risks entrenching mass atrocity patterns. Rights advocates stressed that without credible accountability pathways, abuses are likely to persist or intensify.

Sudan marked nearly 1,000 days of war, with humanitarian agencies warning that the country's crisis has moved beyond emergency response into a prolonged catastrophe. Displacement, hunger, and disease continue to rise, while access constraints and insecurity limit effective humanitarian reach. International NGOs warned that civilians are enduring extreme deprivation under conditions of sustained violence, with little prospect of relief. Climate and environmental stress compounded the crisis, as reports highlighted how state neglect and illegal logging are accelerating the destruction of Sudan's forests, eroding livelihoods, increasing flood and drought vulnerability, and undermining long-term recovery prospects. Environmental degradation emerged as both a consequence of conflict and a multiplier of future instability.

Sudan's energy crisis deepened, with conflict-related damage, fuel shortages, and governance breakdown disrupting electricity supply and basic services. Infrastructure degradation continued to undermine economic activity, public service delivery, and humanitarian operations, reinforcing a cycle of institutional collapse. Beyond infrastructure, Sudan's cultural heritage remained under threat, with reports documenting looting and destruction of museums and historical collections, signaling the erosion of Sudan's collective memory alongside its physical and political disintegration. Domestic flights resumed at Khartoum International Airport for the first time since the conflict began, reflecting an early step toward restoring essential services, facilitating the movement of displaced populations, and supporting humanitarian operations.

Diplomatic maneuvering around Sudan continued across regional and international arenas. Analysts highlighted competing external engagements and shifting alignments

involving Egypt, Gulf states, Turkey, and Western actors, raising concerns about policy incoherence and selective engagement. Egypt assumed chairmanship of the African Union Peace and Security Council, placing Sudan and Somalia at the top of its agenda, signaling heightened regional focus and potential for accelerated diplomatic intervention. Commentary suggested that Sudan's war is increasingly shaped by broader geopolitical calculations, including Nile diplomacy and Red Sea security, rather than centered on civilian protection or political transition. General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan urged citizens to return home and help rebuild, emphasizing reconstruction in government-held areas, but developments on the ground continued to outpace diplomatic initiatives.

Assessment

This week reinforces Sudan's trajectory toward deepened national fragmentation. The opening of new fronts in Blue Nile, continued mass grave discoveries, extreme levels of civilian abuse, environmental destruction, systemic infrastructure collapse, and selective diplomatic attention reflect a war consuming the foundations of statehood itself. While diplomatic activity persists, it remains disconnected from battlefield realities and civilian protection, leaving Sudan trapped in a prolonged, multi-dimensional crisis with no credible pathway toward resolution.

3. Egypt

In the realm of Middle Eastern tensions, Egypt issued a condemnation of Israel's demolition of the UNRWA headquarters in East Jerusalem, labeling it a blatant violation of international law. The foreign ministry's statement highlighted concerns over actions undermining international legitimacy, amid ongoing regional conflicts that continue to strain diplomatic relations.

Shifting to North African affairs, Egypt joined Tunisia and Algeria in emphasizing Libya's stability as essential for regional security during a ministerial meeting in Tunis. Foreign ministers discussed political developments, advocated for a Libyan-led solution, and opposed foreign interference, issuing a joint statement to support unity and sovereignty.

On the economic front, Egyptian fintech firm NowPay expanded into Saudi Arabia via a \$20 million joint venture with Tas'heel, forming NowAccess. Tas'heel holds a 75% stake after investing, while NowPay retains 25%, building on its payroll-linked financial services.

Building on diplomatic ties, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is set to visit Cairo for talks with President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi on security, economic matters, and the Gaza situation. Sources indicate discussions will cover shared political issues, highlighting a warming in Egypt-Turkey relations after years of strain.

In response to developments in Syria, Egypt welcomed the ceasefire agreement between the Syrian government and the Syrian Democratic Forces, which includes a phased integration process. The foreign ministry reiterated rejection of external interference threatening Syria's unity and called for an inclusive political dialogue.

Turning to African continental matters, Egypt prepared to assume the presidency of the African Union's Peace and Security Council in February, focusing on crises in Sudan and Somalia. The one-month term prioritizes addressing security and developmental challenges, aligning with Agenda 2063 goals.

However, this focus appears strategically tied to Ethiopia's regional maneuvers, as President El-Sisi seeks to bolster Sudanese leader Al-Burhan as a key ally in the ongoing Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute and to counter Ethiopia's controversial Somaliland deal for Red Sea access.

Ethiopia's potential naval presence in the Red Sea poses a significant headache for Egypt, threatening its maritime dominance and Suez Canal interests, suggesting Cairo's priorities lean more toward containing Ethiopian ambitions than fostering unbiased peace and stability across the Horn of Africa.

Amid escalating US-Iran tensions, Egypt conducted separate calls with Iranian and US officials to urge de-escalation and prevent regional instability. Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty emphasized diplomatic solutions and sustainable agreements for security. This intervention follows concerns over potential conflict sparked by recent events, connecting to Egypt's role as a mediator in West Asia and its interest in avoiding broader confrontations that could impact neighboring areas.

4. Eritrea

Another veteran EPLF fighter and a senior figure in the PFDJ, passed away this January. Musa Naib was part of the PFDJ leadership and held different roles and was also part of the PFDJ Central Committee. His passing is part of a long trend of the PFDJ leadership ageing and passing away. Which has the consequence of depleting the regime's human resources and putting its future in an increasing limbo.

Notorious Eritrean Human Trafficker, Ammanuel Walid, has been sentenced to 20 years in prison by a Dutch court on January 27. He was charged with various offenses, including human smuggling, extortion, violence and money laundering, and sentenced to 20 years in prison, matching the maximum sentence requested by the prosecutors. He was active in Libya and the sentencing was described as “unprecedented, marking the first time a European country prosecuted an alleged leader of a criminal network running multiple detention camps in Libya,”

Japan has appointed its first Ambassador to Eritrea in late January. Ambassador Hideaki Matsuo will most likely be involved in developmental issues in Eritrea

Amani Africa's, an African Union focused think tank, Executive Director met Eritrea's Charge of Affairs in Addis Ababa. This meeting has been tied to the upcoming African Union summit that will be held this February.

With the TPLF initiating military activities in Ethiopia's Amhara and Afar regions in late february, reports indicate that Eritrea is part and parcel of this offensive, raising fears of the possibility of regional conflict that involves various actors in the region. Eritrea has been strengthening the Ximdo alliance which aligns it with proxy forces inside Ethiopia, namely Fano elements and the TPLF against the Ethiopian government. Clashes are ongoing and the details of the extent of Eritrean involvement have not come into a full picture.

5. Djibouti

President Guelleh received Sudanese Prime Minister Kamil Idris. Discussions centered on two critical tracks, facilitating Sudan's reintegration into African Union activities following its period of suspension and supporting regional and international efforts to advance the Sudanese peace process. This meeting positions Djibouti a current non-permanent member of the UN Security Council as a credible interlocutor invested in resolving neighbouring conflicts.

President Guelleh participated in a summit with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. This forum while details of the specific agenda are not fully public. Djibouti's role is likely that of a trusted convener, leveraging its relationships with both nations to promote regional stability, economic cooperation, and potentially address issues related to port access and trade corridors

President Guelleh held substantive talks with a high level U.S. delegation led by Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau. The discussions reaffirmed strategic partnership, with a particular focus on regional security, especially maritime security in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. This engagement highlights the continued importance of Camp Lemonnier and Djibouti's geographic position to U.S. strategy, amidst ongoing Houthi threats and great power competition in the region.

Djiboutian and French forces conducted a combined military exercise in the Koron and Grand Bara regions. This training held under the framework of the renewed 2024 Defence Cooperation Agreement demonstrates the operational depth and continuity of this historic partnership

Foreign Minister Abdoukader Houssein Omar received a delegation from the French Institute for Advanced Defence Studies (IHEDN). This interaction signifies a

commitment to long-term strategic dialogue and defense intellectual exchange, reinforcing the institutional pillars of the bilateral security relationship beyond immediate operational concerns.

The Russian Federation ratified an agreement on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, originally signed with Djibouti in August 2025. This formalizes a framework for judicial cooperation in prosecuting cross-border crime, including potentially terrorism, trafficking, and cybercrime. It represents a step in deepening the legal-institutional aspects of Djibouti's relationship with Moscow, complementing existing political and economic ties.

The government signed a letter of intent with a Chinese consortium to conduct a feasibility study for a proposed green industrial park. This project aligns with Djibouti's Vision 2035 development goals to transition from a port-and-logistics hub to a more diversified industrial and manufacturing base. The "green" designation aims to attract environmentally conscious investment and could link to renewable energy projects, such as geothermal, supported by other international partners.

Minister of Economy and Finance, H.E. Ilyas Moussa Dawaleh, publicly commended Somalia's recent security gains on 29 January, linking regional stability directly to enhanced economic prospects. His advocacy for greater regional cooperation reflects Djibouti's economic strategy of positioning itself as the primary gateway and beneficiary of a more integrated, peaceful, and trade-active Horn of Africa.

6. South Sudan

South Sudan's security environment deteriorated sharply over the past week, with renewed fighting, mass displacement, and heightened political uncertainty signaling a transition from chronic fragility toward a high-risk escalation phase. Government and opposition forces clashed repeatedly across Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Unity states, while peripheral border zones saw sporadic armed incidents that underscored the fragility of security arrangements under the revitalized peace framework. Reports indicate that opposition elements, particularly SPLA-IO units, registered battlefield gains against government positions, including the overrunning of several local garrisons, raising concerns about the potential for rapid territorial fragmentation.

The intensification of hostilities coincided with growing fears of widespread civilian suffering. Humanitarian agencies reported rising displacement across multiple states, with thousands forced to seek refuge in makeshift camps or cross into neighboring countries. UN officials warned that attacks on civilian areas, combined with restrictions on aid delivery and the destruction of infrastructure, risk entrenching patterns of mass atrocity. Church leaders and local advocacy groups issued public appeals, describing the unfolding

crisis as “potentially genocidal” if unchecked and calling for immediate cessation of hostilities.

Political tensions compounded the security crisis. Disputes over the recently passed electoral law, which governs the upcoming national elections, were formally challenged at the East African regional court, generating concern over the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process. Analysts observed that continued legal and political wrangling, coupled with ongoing military clashes, undermines prospects for a stable political transition and exacerbates the risk of renewed civil war.

The South Sudanese government launched a coordinated offensive against opposition forces in Upper Nile and Jonglei states, emphasizing the need to reassert state authority. While the offensive reportedly gained limited territorial ground, it also contributed to civilian casualties and triggered further displacement, highlighting the difficulty of achieving security objectives without aggravating humanitarian consequences. The East African region has reacted with growing apprehension, as escalating conflict in South Sudan poses spillover risks, including cross-border refugee flows, armed militia movement, and the potential for destabilization in fragile neighboring states. Regional actors, particularly Kenya and IGAD, continued to play a facilitative role, with Kenyan mediators recently submitting a proposed framework for renewed peace talks, though skepticism remains over the willingness of parties to adhere to negotiated terms.

International actors, including the United Nations, have reiterated calls for an immediate ceasefire, renewed dialogue, and unimpeded humanitarian access. UN officials highlighted that without urgent intervention, South Sudan risks descending into a protracted, large-scale crisis marked by civilian targeting, systemic displacement, and a breakdown of governance structures. Observers note that South Sudan’s current trajectory underscores the fragility of peace arrangements and the limits of regional mediation when confronted with entrenched political rivalries and militarized opposition networks.

This week reinforces the view that South Sudan is entering a highly volatile phase with regional implications. Escalating clashes, political deadlock, rising civilian suffering, and the looming threat of mass atrocities highlight the multi-dimensional challenges facing the state. While regional and international mediation efforts continue, the gap between diplomatic engagement and battlefield realities leaves South Sudan at high risk of a full-scale humanitarian and security collapse.

7. Somalia and Somaliland

Somalia

The public statement by Uganda's Chief of Defence Forces General Muhoozi Kainerugaba regarding Uganda's intent for a complete military withdrawal from Somalia. This follows nearly 19 years of continuous deployment under AMISOM and ATMIS where Uganda has been a main actor of the mission's operational capability. The announcement made while commending Ugandan troops suggests a national reassessment of military commitments. This will necessitate urgent planning within the African Union, ATMIS stakeholders and the FGS to manage the security vacuum, reassign sectors and accelerate SNA force generation to ensure a stable transition.

Intensified U.S. Military Operations: U.S. Africa Command in close coordination with the FGS executed a sustained series of precision airstrikes demonstrating a clear operational tempo increase.

27 Jan: A strike targeted al-Shabaab militants near Godane approximately 60km northeast of Mogadishu an area used for training and logistics.

29 Jan: A second strike was conducted about 56km southwest of the capital continuing pressure on al-Shabaab's hinterland around the capital.

30 Jan: Two distinct strikes were directed against ISIS-Somalia elements in the Golis Mountains 43km southeast of Bossaso highlighting a concurrent focus on containing the group's limited but persistent presence in Puntland.

With approximately 23 strikes reported by late January this kinetic surge aligns with a stated U.S. objective to degrade terrorist capabilities proactively and may be linked to shaping the security environment ahead of potential ATMIS drawdowns.

The formal handover of command for the European Union Training Mission in Somalia from Brigadier General Sofia Westermarck to Brigadier General Elio Manes was conducted smoothly in Mogadishu. This transition scores the EU's long term institutional commitment to the professionalization of the SNA through advisory, mentoring and specialized training programs a critical complement to ATMIS's combat role.

The SNA reported a deliberate and planned offensive operation in the Middle Shabelle region successfully seizing control of the Jabd Gudni area from al-Shabaab. State media reported several al-Shabaab fighters killed. This operation is part of the FGS's Somalia Offensive strategy aimed at reclaiming territory and demonstrating growing SNA capability albeit still with partner support.

A pre dialogue incident severely strained the trust between the FGS and the FMS. On the eve of scheduled crucial talks understood to commence 1 February regarding electoral

processes and national unity, the FGS denied landing clearance at Mogadishu's Aden Adde International Airport to two aircraft transporting the advance security details for the Presidents of Puntland and Jubaland. The aircraft were forced to turn back mid-flight. The FGS justified the action by citing strict violations of previously agreed security protocols for VIP movements into the capital, specifically non submission of passenger manifests and exceeding stipulated numbers of armed guards. While framed as a procedural and security necessity the move is perceived by opposition figures and regional leaders as a politically motivated tactic to undermine the standing of the FMS leaders ahead of negotiations, potentially endangering the dialogue's prospects.

A joint session of the bicameral federal parliament convened in Mogadishu, descended into chaos with scuffles, shouting matches and physical altercations leading to its suspension. The trigger was a contentious set of proposed constitutional amendments. Opposition lawmakers vociferously accused the Speaker of the House of the People of attempting to rail-road through changes that could effectively extend the current parliament's mandate which is constitutionally set to expire in April 2026. The scene of lawmakers tearing up agenda papers scores the deep divisions and surrounding Somalia's constitutional review process and electoral timeline.

Bilateral Relations: The Somali Embassy in Ankara hosted a ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations, attended by senior Turkish officials and parliamentarians. The event emphasized the depth of historical cooperation, spanning humanitarian aid, security training, and infrastructure development, positioning Türkiye as one of Somalia's most engaged and consistent bilateral partners.

China: Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre received Chinese Ambassador Wang Yu for discussions focused on expanding bilateral cooperation. The talks specifically highlighted security sector collaboration, trade, and infrastructure projects, indicating Somalia's desire to deepen its strategic partnership with Beijing and attract investment under frameworks like the Belt and Road Initiative.

India: Foreign Minister Abdisalam Ali's participation in the second India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi provided a high-level platform for engagement. His bilateral meeting with External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar covered substantive areas of trade, education, and health cooperation. Somalia's attendance aligns with its pursuit of South-South partnerships and diversification of economic ties with both sides reaffirming principles of sovereignty and mutual benefit.

Multilateral Engagement: The signing of a substantial €102 million Financing Agreement between the FGS and the EU in Mogadishu is a landmark development. The package provides direct budget support to the Somali treasury, a sign of growing fiduciary trust, alongside development financing for institutional capacity and governance reforms.

This direct support is pivotal for the FGS's state-building agenda and financial sustainability.

United Nations/Assistance: The United States announced the resumption of food aid deliveries through the World Food Programme following a brief suspension imposed due to alleged administrative and logistical disruptions at Mogadishu Port. The swift resolution following FGS engagement scores the critical nature of this assistance in mitigating acute food insecurity affecting millions of Somalis, despite underlying disagreements over port management.

Somaliland

Eric Trump, son of the U.S. President was reported to have engaged with Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. Subsequent clarification by Mr. Trump characterized the interaction as a brief photo opportunity and exchange of pleasantries, explicitly denying any substantive discussions or negotiations regarding port investments in Berbera.

This incident reflects Somaliland's proactive, high level strategy to leverage its recognition by Israel to attract investment and political attention from influential Western figures. The swift denial from the U.S. side highlights the enduring sensitivity of engaging with Somaliland in a manner that could be construed as contravening the longstanding international consensus on Somalia's territorial integrity. It demonstrates the gap between Somaliland's diplomatic outreach and the cautious, often reactive, positioning of third party states.

A written question in the UK Parliament elicited a formal government response on the issue of recognizing Somaliland. The UK government reiterated its position of support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia and confirmed it does not recognize Somaliland as an independent state.

This response is a significant diplomatically. It scores that despite commercial engagements such as UK-based entities holding stakes in the Berbera port project and on going dialogue a major traditional partner and permanent member of the UN Security Council is not at present shifting its fundamental diplomatic position. This maintains a key pillar of the international status quo regarding Somali unity.

Following its 52nd session, the Somaliland Council of Ministers issued a strong public statement vowing to defend national sovereignty from internal and external threats and to safeguard peaceful stability. This rhetoric, while standard for national governments carries particular weight in the current post-recognition environment. It signals a fortified domestic posture intended for both internal consumption to rally public support and external audiences indicating readiness to resist perceived pressures from Mogadishu or other regional actors.

The Somaliland National Electoral Commission (NEC) announced a ten-month delay to the parliamentary and local council elections originally scheduled for 31 May 2026. Cited reasons include: i) Security concerns, ii) Impacts of severe drought on logistics and voter mobilization, and iii) Ongoing political disputes among stakeholders. This postponement is a substantial domestic development with dual implications.

8. The Gulf Countries

Saudi Arabia

In a press conference following a meeting with Russian Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, stated that “The relationship with the UAE from our perspective is critically important. It is an important element of regional stability and therefore the Kingdom is always keen on having a strong, positive relationship with the UAE as [an] important partner within the GCC,” and on the Yemen issue that it was positive that the UAE has left the issue to Saudi Arabia. His remarks addressed the long brewing Saudi UAE spat which has escalated in recent weeks, and the words hints at a Saudi desire to ease tensions and come to some sort of understanding on regional dynamics

According to a report by Axios, Saudi Defence Minister, following the banning of use of Air space to attack Iran, has made a reversal and has told the U.S that inaction could “embolden” Iran’s leadership. Has the Saudi position on Iran secretly reversed, this could strengthen the possibility of US attacks, since the kingdom’s reluctance and its perceived desire to avoid regime collapse in Iran had been considered to be the major factors that is hold the US back from military engagement.

UAE

UAE President Mohammad Bin Zayed made a visit to Moscow at the end of January and held talks with President Putin and the Kremlin leadership. This will likely strengthen Abu Dhabi’s relationship with Moscow. In addition, the visit is also part of the UAE’s increasing role in trying to mediate between Russia and Ukraine.

The UAE, despite of reports that it will assist the US in a possible attack on Iran, released a statement stating that it will not allow its airspace to be used in such an attack. This is similar to a statement issued by Saudi Arabia, who stated that it won’t allow the use of U.S bases or Saudi Air space to be used in such an attack.

With regards to internal political dynamics, the president of the UAE’s son, Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, has been made the new head of ADQ, a \$263 billion wealth fund in the U.A.E. this role was previously held by Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed al Nahyan. Sheikh Khaled was made Crown prince in 2023 and this appointment will see his role in Abu Dhabi grow.

9. Africa and The Sahel Region

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is executing a sophisticated "triad" of sovereign maneuvers, leveraging its newly inaugurated seat on the UN Security Council to fundamentally reshape its international standing. Central to this strategy is the high-stakes "Washington Accord," a strategic minerals partnership with the United States designed to swap preferential access to cobalt and copper exemplified by the impending sale of the mining giant Chemaf for robust security guarantees. By pivoting toward Western capital and public-finance models, President Félix Tshisekedi is attempting to decouple the nation's subsoil wealth from traditional monopolies, turning the DRC's resources into a powerful geopolitical lever aimed at both economic modernization and the restoration of national security in its volatile eastern provinces.

However, this "minerals-for-security" framework faces intense friction from the M23-linked Alliance Fleuve Congo (AFC), whose leadership has denounced the agreement as an "illegitimate loot loop" that bypasses rebel-held territories like the Rubaya mining hubs. Despite this internal defiance, the diplomatic corps in Kinshasa remains unified, publicly backing the DRC's territorial integrity against external aggression and reinforcing the state's legitimacy. As the administration prepares to submit these strategic partnerships for parliamentary approval in March 2026, the DRC is effectively betting that its global political leverage and resource-backed economic alignment can insulate the state from fragmentation, ultimately transforming its historical vulnerabilities into an impregnable architecture of sovereign power.

Niger

The coordinated assault on Niamey's Diori Hamani International Airport and Air Base 101 on January 29, 2026, marks a moment in the Sahelian security crisis. Executed by the Islamic State's Sahel affiliate using a sophisticated mix of heavy weaponry and aerial drones, the "surprise" operation pierced the heart of Niger's capital, resulting in a two-hour firefight that damaged civilian aviation infrastructure and threatened a sensitive uranium stockpile. While Nigerien defense forces bolstered by Russian tactical support repelled the incursion by neutralizing twenty militants and capturing eleven others, the breach exposed critical vulnerabilities in the state's urban intelligence apparatus. The aftermath has been characterized by a profound domestic rallying effect, with massive prayer gatherings in Niamey and the Tahoua region manifesting a collective spiritual and civic defense, while the African Union and the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) have issued stinging condemnations of the "barbaric" strike against the nation's strategic sovereignty.

This tactical escalation has simultaneously served as a catalyst for a deeper geopolitical realignment, as General Abdourahamane Tiani utilized the crisis to directly accuse

France, Benin, and Côte d'Ivoire of sponsoring the "mercenary" incursion a narrative that further accelerates Niger's decoupling from traditional Western security architectures. By the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is executing a sophisticated "triad" of sovereign maneuvers, leveraging its newly inaugurated seat on the **UN Security Council** to fundamentally reshape its international standing. Central to this strategy is the high-stakes "**Washington Accord**," a strategic minerals partnership with the United States designed to swap preferential access to cobalt and copper—exemplified by the impending sale of the mining giant **Chemaf**—for robust security guarantees. By pivoting toward Western capital and public-finance models, President Félix Tshisekedi is attempting to decouple the nation's subsoil wealth from traditional monopolies, turning the DRC's resources into a powerful geopolitical lever aimed at both economic modernization and the restoration of national security in its volatile eastern provinces.

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publicly thanking Russian forces for their defensive intervention, the junta is signaling a "sovereignty-first" pivot that prioritizes new-age alliances over colonial-era pacts, even as regional neighbors like Chad reaffirm their solidarity against the extremist threat. However, beneath the rhetorical defiance and the reports of 74% territorial recovery, the Niamey assault underscores a persistent asymmetric risk: the ability of small, high-mobility cells to bypass conventional military might and strike at the center of national gravity. For the Horn of Africa, this event serves as a stark warning that securing critical infrastructure requires a holistic, "triad" integration of electronic warfare, localized intelligence, and a unified command structure to insulate the state from both the "Hanish-style" maritime raids and the urban drone-led incursions seen in the Sahel.

Burkina Faso

The administration of Captain Ibrahim Traoré has executed a high-stakes pivot toward total centralized authority and reclaimed territorial integrity. On January 29, the government formally dissolved every political party in the nation and liquidated their assets into the state treasury, framing the decree as a surgical necessity to "rebuild the state" and eliminate the social fragmentation inherent in a multiparty system. This radical

political consolidation is being validated by significant kinetic successes on the ground, as the Prime Minister reported only a day later that military operations have successfully recovered control over approximately 74% of the country. This security dividend has paved the way for the restoration of essential services, including the reopening of schools and health facilities in regions that were once inaccessible due to insurgent activity, thereby tethering the government's legitimacy to its direct performance in the theater of war.

To institutionalize this newfound sovereignty, Burkina Faso diversifies its strategic and technological dependencies, moving away from traditional Western partnerships in favor of an Alliance of Sahel States (AES) integration model. This forward-thinking posture is underscored by a major foreign direct investment from a UAE-based firm to construct a thermal power plant, alongside high-level negotiations with Russian officials to launch a Sahel-oriented communications satellite. By integrating space-age surveillance and energy independence into its defensive triad, the junta is attempting to create an autonomous security umbrella that bypasses colonial-era bottlenecks. While maintaining a fiercely independent foreign policy, the recent resumption of diplomatic dialogue with Côte d'Ivoire suggests a pragmatic effort to stabilize regional trade corridors, ensuring that the "Reconquest" of Burkina Faso is supported by a robust infrastructure and a digitized, sovereign command-and-control architecture

Equatorial Guinea

Equatorial Guinea is currently navigating a high-stakes transition period, characterized by a radical decentralization of its administrative core and a sophisticated "sovereignty-first" recalibration of its foreign policy. The formalization of Ciudad de la Paz as the nation's official capital, serves as the centerpiece of this transformation. By relocating the seat of government from the island-based Malabo to the mainland's interior, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo is attempting to insulate the state from maritime-based vulnerabilities and foreign-backed incursions a move framed less as an urban development project and more as a hardened security strategy for the 21st century. This domestic "hard reset" is mirrored by a sweeping diplomatic reshuffle, with a presidential decree recalling high-level ambassadors from key missions in Spain, Nigeria, and Turkey, signaling Asmara-like intent to refresh global ties and prioritize emerging partnerships within the Gulf of Guinea and beyond.

On the international stage, Equatorial Guinea is aggressively positioning itself as a regional maritime stabilizer while simultaneously navigating a growing judicial crisis with Spain. The administration reaffirmed its technical cooperation with the Maritime Organisation of West and Central Africa (MOWCA), aiming to leverage the "Yaoundé Architecture" to secure its offshore hydrocarbon assets and attract blue-economy financing. However, this push for regional legitimacy is complicated by a high-profile

summons from Spain's *Audiencia Nacional*. Furthermore, a contentious \$7.5 million migration arrangement with the United States has seen the quiet deportation and "chain refoulement" of third-country nationals through Equatorial Guinea, highlighting a pragmatic, albeit opaque, bilateral cooperation framework.

Chad

Chad has moved from a period of strategic friction to a sophisticated "sovereignty-first" reset of its international relations. This transition reached a high-water mark in late January 2026, as President Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno conducted a high-stakes official visit to Paris. Following the 2024–2025 termination of traditional military pacts that saw the final withdrawal of French troops, this visit signaled a shift toward a "partnership of equals" centered on economic investment and political dialogue rather than the outdated security-centric model. By meeting with President Emmanuel Macron on January 29, Déby successfully transitioned the bilateral narrative from a colonial-era military dependency to a modern collaboration based on shared interests, effectively de-escalating a year of diplomatic chill while maintaining his pledge to diversify Chad's global partners.

Simultaneously, N'Djamena has fortified its regional standing, securing critical endorsements within the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC). During the January 24 summit, Chad not only placed a national representative as the vice-president of the CEEAC Commission but also gained the bloc's collective backing for its bid for a future seat on the UN Security Council. This dual-track strategy calming the waters in the West while cementing dominance in Central Africa demonstrates a forward-thinking maneuver to balance traditional ties with France against emerging alliances with the UAE, Turkey, and Russia. For Ethiopia's best interests, Chad's successful pivot toward "sovereignty-driven diplomacy" offers a compelling template for navigating the complexities of external influence while anchoring national security in regional multilateralism.

10. North Africa

Morocco

In the sphere of international diplomacy, Morocco participated in the fourth round of political consultations with Azerbaijan in Baku, co-chaired by Deputy Foreign Minister Yalchin Rafiyev and Omar Kadiri from Morocco's foreign ministry. The discussions reviewed bilateral ties in politics, economy, energy, transport, tourism, education, and sports, while exploring new collaboration avenues. Both sides praised their multilateral cooperation and exchanged views on regional developments, including Azerbaijan's reconstruction efforts, underscoring a commitment to mutual growth amid shared global priorities.

Extending its regional outreach, Morocco's Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita held a phone discussion with Egypt's Badr Abdelatty to address mutual concerns on security and stability. They agreed to ramp up communications for enhanced Arab and African coordination, while preparing for a joint committee meeting led by their premiers. This engagement highlighted the robust historical bonds between Rabat and Cairo, with a focus on advancing political, economic, commercial, and investment partnerships to tackle ongoing challenges effectively.

Algeria

In the realm of bilateral engagements, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Interior, Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Naif, met with Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune in Algiers to bolster relations and enhance security cooperation. The discussions underscored mutual interests in stability, with the prince conveying greetings from King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, wishing prosperity for Algeria. This meeting reflects ongoing efforts to deepen ties between the two nations amid broader regional security challenges.

Extending to North African diplomacy, Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf joined counterparts from Egypt and Tunisia in a ministerial meeting in Tunis focused on Libya's political landscape. The trio emphasized a Libyan-led resolution, rejected external meddling, and advocated for preserving Libya's unity and sovereignty through a joint statement. This collaboration highlights Algeria's role in fostering regional stability, connecting directly to shared concerns over neighboring conflicts and their potential spillover effects.

Shifting to domestic legislative matters, Algeria's Senate has called for amendments to a lower house bill that criminalizes France's 1830-1962 colonization as a crime against humanity, seeking an apology and reparations for atrocities like nuclear tests and killings. The Senate argues the provisions contradict President Tebboune's position against financial compensation, favoring only recognition of crimes. A joint committee will review the disputed elements, amid strained Franco-Algerian relations following France's stance on Western Sahara.

Libya

In the realm of Libya's energy sector revival, US oil companies are ramping up investments despite historical tensions and ongoing political divisions. Firms like ConocoPhillips, Halliburton, SLB, and Chevron have announced expansions, including a \$20 billion plan for the Waha oilfield to add 850,000 barrels per day, funded externally with projected revenues of \$376 billion. Challenges persist, such as funding shortages and the split between rival governments in Tripoli and the east, which could hinder long-term stability and investor confidence in this export-dependent economy.

This influx of foreign capital ties into broader international partnerships, as Libya and Turkey revived their Joint Economic Committee after a 17-year hiatus, signing agreements in Tripoli to enhance cooperation in oil trade, renewables, and mining. Led by ministers from both nations, the move aims to diversify energy ties and foster mutual economic benefits, reflecting efforts to convert historical relations into practical alliances amid Libya's push for development and prosperity.

Building on these economic engagements, Turkey remains a key trading partner for Libya, with active involvement in infrastructure projects like airports and roads, alongside oil and gas exploration. Turkish firms led applications in Libya's recent tender for new licences after a 17-year pause, targeting production increases to 2 million barrels per day. The partnership, highlighted in recent committee meetings, focuses on resolving pending issues and expanding sectors, positioning Libya as an attractive market for sustained investments.

Shifting to diplomatic fronts, regional neighbors discussed Libya's stability, with Tunisian President Kais Saied and Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty emphasizing coordination among Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria to support a Libyan-led political settlement. The talks, part of a broader ministerial meeting including UN representatives, addressed unity and sovereignty, though Libya's Government of National Unity voiced concerns over exclusions, underscoring the complexities of external involvement in resolving internal divisions.

11. Middle East

Israel

In the evolving landscape of Gaza's post-conflict recovery, Israel successfully retrieved the remains of Ran Gvili, the final hostage held in the enclave since the 2023 attacks, through coordinated military operations. US President Donald Trump acknowledged Hamas's cooperation in locating the body, describing their efforts as diligent, while insisting the group must now fulfill its commitment to disarm under the ceasefire agreement. This achievement, involving mediation from Qatar, Turkey, and Egypt, signals the closure of the hostage crisis and opens pathways for further regional stabilization.

Building on this momentum in US-Israel relations, Israeli officials are gearing up to negotiate a renewed 10-year security pact with the Trump administration, transitioning from annual cash grants of \$3.3 billion to collaborative defense initiatives. The move, extending beyond the 2016 deal's 2028 expiration, reflects Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's goal of achieving greater military independence, amid strengthened bilateral ties following recent political shifts.

Reflecting on challenges from the prior administration, Netanyahu claimed during a news conference that ammunition shortages, attributed to Biden-era delays in arms deliveries, contributed to Israeli soldier fatalities in Gaza operations. He highlighted a marked improvement since Trump's return to office, though former US officials categorically denied any formal embargo, labeling the accusations as inaccurate and ungrateful.

Amid these reflections on alliances, attention has turned to escalating tensions with Iran, as Israeli and Saudi representatives engaged in Pentagon discussions on potential US military actions against Tehran. Israel provided intelligence on strike targets, while Saudi Arabia pushed for restraint and declined to permit use of its airspace, all against a backdrop of Iran's domestic turmoil with over 6,000 protest-related deaths and mass detentions.

In anticipation of such strategic decisions, Netanyahu convened a high-level security consultation in Jerusalem on a classified matter, widely reported as centering on an impending US strike on Iran, with a presidential decision expected imminently. Israeli assessments suggest even a constrained US operation could provoke Iranian countermeasures, underscoring the delicate balance of regional power dynamics and preparedness for escalation.

Emphasizing Israel's defensive posture amid these uncertainties, Netanyahu issued a stern warning to Iran, stating that any assault would elicit a response of unprecedented magnitude, one that Tehran has never encountered. This came in response to Iranian threats of retaliation, including strikes on Tel Aviv, if the US proceeds with attacks, highlighting the mutual deterrence shaping current confrontations.

Concurrently, addressing humanitarian and mobility needs in Gaza, Israel has initiated the partial reopening of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, allowing limited pedestrian traffic starting Sunday after nearly two years of closure. This trial phase, coordinated between the two nations, permits around 150 crossings daily initially, supporting medical evacuations and aligning with broader ceasefire objectives to ease restrictions in the area.

Turkey

In the context of regional stability, Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party reaffirmed its commitment to Syria's unity and sovereignty, emphasizing the need for a political solution amid ongoing conflicts. This stance aligns with Ankara's broader foreign policy goals, highlighting opposition to any fragmentation that could exacerbate tensions along shared borders, while calling for international cooperation to address humanitarian concerns in the area.

Building on border security measures, Turkish authorities imposed a ban on protests in Hatay province, adjacent to Syria, citing risks of unrest amid heightened regional dynamics. The decision, enforced by local officials, aims to maintain public order while

navigating the complexities of cross-border influences, reflecting Turkey's proactive approach to internal stability in sensitive geopolitical zones.

Extending its anti-terrorism efforts beyond the Middle East, Turkey pledged enhanced cooperation with Nigeria to combat extremist groups, sharing intelligence and training initiatives. This bilateral agreement, discussed during high-level talks, underscores Ankara's global outreach in security matters, linking African stability to broader counter-terrorism networks and fostering mutual defense capabilities.

Shifting to high-profile diplomacy, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan engaged in discussions with US President Donald Trump on strengthening bilateral ties and addressing regional developments. The conversation covered trade, defense, and shared interests, signaling a potential thaw in relations post-elections, with both leaders expressing optimism for collaborative solutions to ongoing challenges.

Continuing the focus on US-Turkey dialogue, Erdogan and Trump specifically addressed the situation in Syria, exploring avenues for de-escalation and humanitarian aid. This exchange highlights Turkey's role as a key stakeholder in Syrian affairs, connecting to wider efforts to prevent spillover effects and promote stability through coordinated international actions.

Amid rising US-Iran tensions, Turkey positioned itself as a potential mediator, offering to facilitate talks to avert conflict. Officials emphasized Ankara's neutral stance and historical ties with both parties, aiming to de-escalate through dialogue, which ties into Turkey's strategic interest in preventing a broader regional war that could impact its security.

Reaffirming its solidarity with Damascus, Turkey expressed continued support for Syria's anti-terrorism operations, pledging assistance in maintaining territorial integrity. This commitment reflects Ankara's nuanced policy toward its neighbor, balancing historical rivalries with pragmatic alliances against common threats, and contributing to post-conflict reconstruction discussions.

In pursuit of lasting peace, Turkey's foreign minister advocated for a Middle East security pact grounded in mutual trust and regional solidarity, proposing frameworks for conflict resolution. This initiative seeks to address longstanding divisions through collective mechanisms, linking to Turkey's vision for a stable neighborhood free from external interferences.

Furthering mediation efforts, Erdogan proposed brokering talks between Iran and the US during a call with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, stressing the importance of diplomacy to avoid escalation. This outreach underscores Turkey's diplomatic agility, connecting internal regional dynamics to global powers and aiming to foster sustainable agreements.

Opting for strategic independence, Turkey declined to join a proposed Saudi-Pakistan mutual defense pact, according to sources, prioritizing its own alliances amid shifting geopolitical landscapes. This decision highlights Ankara's selective engagement in military coalitions, focusing on national interests while navigating relations with Gulf and Asian partners.

Strengthening Mediterranean ties, Libya and Turkey held discussions in Ankara on defense cooperation, exploring joint training and equipment sharing. The talks, involving senior officials, aim to bolster security collaboration, reflecting ongoing economic and military partnerships that support Libya's stability and Turkey's regional influence.

Iran

Amid escalating domestic unrest, Iran's protests entered their second month, with activists reporting over 6,200 deaths amid a brutal government crackdown. Demonstrations, sparked by economic grievances and calls for regime change, have prompted international condemnation, including from the US, which has warned of intervention if mass executions occur. This internal turmoil has heightened fears of external military involvement, linking Iran's stability to broader regional security dynamics.

As protests persist, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has reportedly relocated to a fortified underground bunker in Tehran, following assessments of an imminent US strike risk. His son, Masoud Khamenei, is managing daily affairs, signaling heightened regime caution. This move underscores the vulnerability felt by Iranian leadership amid US naval deployments and threats, connecting internal suppression efforts to defensive preparations against foreign aggression.

In a symbolic escalation, Iranian authorities unveiled murals in Tehran's central squares depicting damaged US aircraft carriers and coffins draped in American and Israeli flags, accompanied by warnings like "If you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind." These displays aim to rally public support and deter potential attacks, reflecting Iran's strategy of visual propaganda amid rising US-Iran confrontations and linking to broader threats of retaliation.

Building on these warnings, Iranian officials, including Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and adviser Ali Shamkhani, vowed forceful resistance to any US or Israeli strikes, threatening all-out war and strikes on Tel Aviv. They emphasized military readiness and rejected coercion, while expressing openness to a fair nuclear deal. This rhetoric ties domestic unrest to international posturing, aiming to deter aggression through displays of resolve.

From a reported bunker, Khamenei released a video message urging Iranians not to panic and mocking US threats as repetitive bluster, splicing past speeches with military imagery. This first public appearance in weeks coincides with new threats against the US

and Israel, reinforcing regime narratives of defiance while addressing internal fears sparked by protests and external pressures.

In response to US maneuvers, President Trump confirmed communications with Iran, expressing hope for talks to avoid military action while deploying a "massive armada" to the Middle East. He weighed strikes to potentially reignite protests, amid reports of thousands killed, highlighting a strategy blending diplomacy and pressure to address Iran's nuclear ambitions and human rights issues.

Shifting to regional diplomacy, Egyptian and Iranian leaders discussed de-escalation and Tehran's nuclear file, emphasizing dialogue amid tensions. Similarly, Saudi Arabia ruled out using its territory or airspace for attacks on Iran, reflecting Gulf states' reluctance to escalate, which connects to broader efforts to prevent a wider conflict through neutral stances.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned Iraq against deepening ties with Iran during talks with Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, as Nouri al-Maliki prepares a political return. This caution comes amid US-Iran strains and Iraq's new government formation, underscoring Washington's push to isolate Tehran regionally while managing post-ISIL detainee transfers.

Iran condemned a European resolution as "meddlesome," likely criticizing its handling of protests or nuclear program, while an Iranian MP warned neighboring countries against supporting terrorist groups. These statements highlight Tehran's defensive foreign policy, rejecting external interference and linking regional security to its internal challenges and international relations.

Syria

In the midst of fragile peace efforts in northern Syria, the Syrian army accused the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) of violating a recently extended ceasefire by launching over 25 explosive drones at positions in the Aleppo countryside, destroying vehicles and injuring civilians. The SDF countered by claiming Syrian forces-initiated attacks with artillery and reinforcements, escalating clashes around Ain al-Arab. This mutual blame highlights ongoing tensions despite the truce aimed at facilitating ISIL detainee transfers, threatening broader stability in the region.

These ceasefire breaches connect to Damascus's broader offensive against Kurdish areas, where interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa's forces launched assaults on Aleppo, displacing thousands and sparking atrocities amid anti-Kurdish disinformation. Despite prior agreements for SDF integration into the national army and local police cooperation, the attacks suggest alignment with external pressures like Turkey's opposition to Kurdish autonomy, eroding trust and hindering Syria's path to reunification through decentralization.

Following the offensive, US President Donald Trump expressed satisfaction with developments in Syria after speaking with al-Sharaa, praising his commitment to territorial integrity and anti-terrorism efforts. With the SDF withdrawing from key cities like Raqqa, Trump's stance signals a US policy shift away from Kurdish support, as Syria joins the global anti-ISIL coalition, potentially aiding Damascus in consolidating control amid diplomatic realignments.

This international backing ties into Russia's role, as Vladimir Putin hosted al-Sharaa in Moscow to discuss economic reconstruction and the status of Russian military bases like Hmeimim and Tartus. Putin pledged aid for Syria's recovery, while al-Sharaa highlighted territorial gains, underscoring Moscow's continued influence despite a reduced presence, which could bolster Syria's stability through sustained bilateral cooperation.

Extending regional partnerships, Syria engaged Azerbaijan in talks to enhance energy ties, with plans for Azerbaijani gas exports via Turkey and infrastructure rebuilding. Leaders Ilham Aliyev and al-Sharaa aimed to revive relations strained under Assad, reflecting Syria's efforts to address its energy crisis and foster economic recovery through diversified international alliances

Amid these conflicts, Turkey imposed a six-day ban on gatherings in Mardin province bordering Syria, following pro-Kurdish protests against Damascus's offensive. The measure, extending to Diyarbakir, seeks to prevent cross-border unrest, illustrating how Syrian Kurdish tensions spill over into Turkey's domestic security concerns and complicate its relations with the PKK.

In response to related allegations, Turkey rejected claims of supporting ISIS releases by the Syrian army, asserting its strong anti-ISIS record. The disinformation center dismissed such accusations as baseless, urging allies to disregard them, which underscores efforts to maintain regional credibility amid Syria's transitional challenges and counter-terrorism dynamics.

12. Europe

U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to China marked a significant reset in relations, the first high-level engagement in eight years. He met President Xi Jinping in Beijing, securing visa-free travel for British citizens for up to 30 days (business or tourism), reduced tariffs on Scotch whisky, and commitments to explore a services sector partnership plus cooperation on exports, sports, organized crime, vocational training, and food safety. Starmer raised concerns about detained activist Jimmy Lai and China's stance on Ukraine, while emphasizing a more sophisticated, balanced approach focused on economic opportunities.

The visit highlighted a positive atmosphere and business-centric focus, with announcements from companies like AstraZeneca and Octopus Energy. Starmer described

the trip as irreversible re-engagement, with easy wins prioritized and future dialogues planned, though sensitive sectors like wind farms were excluded for security reasons.

China lifted sanctions on nine British parliamentarians (including five MPs and two Lords members) who had been targeted for criticizing Beijing's human rights record, particularly regarding Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The move came during Starmer's talks with Xi, allowing them free travel to China, though the U.K. clarified no quid pro quo occurred and did not lift its own sanctions on Chinese officials. The affected parliamentarians rejected being used as a bargaining chip.

U.S. President Donald Trump criticized the U.K.-China reset as "very dangerous", warning allies against similar moves (citing Canada as an example) after Starmer's meeting with Xi. Trump, who called Xi a friend and planned his own China visit, stressed that China is not an economic solution and emphasized maintaining strong U.K.-U.S. ties in defense, security, and trade.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian accused Donald Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu, and European leaders of exploiting Iran's economic crisis and fueling violent protests by supplying resources and provoking division amid nationwide unrest over inflation and living costs. The protests triggered a brutal crackdown with mass arrests, killings, and a near-total internet blackout, described as the deadliest violence since 1979. In response to Iran's repression, the EU unanimously designated the Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization—equating it with groups like al Qaeda—following shifts by France, Italy, and Spain. Top diplomat Kaja Kallas announced the move, which includes additional sanctions on linked entities for domestic repression and support for Russia's war in Ukraine.

Iran's retaliatory response to the EU's designation of the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization escalated dramatically. On February 1, Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf announced that Tehran now considers the armies of all EU countries as "terrorist groups" under Iranian law, citing countermeasures legislation. This symbolic but provocative step followed the EU's unanimous decision last week, triggered by Iran's violent crackdown on nationwide protests. Iranian officials warned of potential expulsion of EU military attachés and broader regional conflict risks if the US attacks, while framing the EU move as blind obedience to American interests.

Russia-Ukraine peace talks, brokered by the U.S., appear close but remain stalled on major issues: territory (Russia demands full Donbas control via the "Anchorage formula," rejected by Ukraine), security guarantees (no NATO for Ukraine, veto rights per Russia; strong guarantees including U.K./France troops and EU path per Ukraine), and ceasefire timing (immediate halt vs. post-agreement). Zelenskyy shows compromise willingness, while Putin pursues his own aims, with Trump claiming progress but Donbas impasse acknowledged.

The U.S. National Defense Strategy downgrades Europe's priority, citing its declining global economic share and expecting allies to lead on regional threats with limited U.S. support, while prioritizing homeland defense and deterring China. It elevates Greenland (alongside the Panama Canal) as core security terrain for Arctic interests and emphasizes Western Hemisphere defense under the Monroe Doctrine.

The Pentagon's version of the strategy further deprioritizes China as the top threat, shifting focus to homeland and Western Hemisphere security, criticizing past overreach, and reducing emphasis on Russia, Iran, and North Korea while advocating diplomacy with China alongside Pacific posture.

Greenland Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen held talks in Washington, setting clear red lines on democratic values and territorial integrity amid U.S. pressures and acquisition rhetoric. He noted fears among residents but viewed the U.S. as a loyal partner, with Danish PM Mette Frederiksen reinforcing sovereignty and cautioning against threatening allies.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte emphasized that Europe cannot defend itself without the U.S., rejecting a separate European NATO pillar as duplicative and beneficial to Russia. He credited Trump for pushing allies to meet 2% GDP defense spending, stressed U.S. commitment to collective defense, and urged flexible EU aid to Ukraine (including U.S. weapons purchases) to meet immediate needs.

Keir Starmer aims to revive U.K.-EU defense talks, seeking progress on spending, capabilities, and collaboration after last year's collapse over payment disputes. Potential paths include the EU's Ukraine loan program or similar mechanisms, with broader goals for deeper post-Brexit ties in defense, security, energy, emissions, and trade ahead of the next summit.

U.K. Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper visited Ethiopia on February 1-2, 2026, her first major trip to East Africa since taking office in late 2025. She met Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos in Addis Ababa, focusing on migration from the Horn of Africa to the U.K. Cooper emphasized job creation to reduce migration pressures, stronger law enforcement cooperation to combat smuggler networks, and faster returns of irregular migrants.

The visit occurred amid heightened diplomatic activity in Addis Ababa, with Cooper as the fifth senior foreign official in under a month—following foreign ministers from China, Germany, Japan, and the U.S. deputy secretary of state—reflecting growing international interest in the Horn of Africa region.

The European Union advanced its Horn-focused diplomacy through Special Representative for the Horn of Africa Annette Weber, who met Ethiopian State Minister Hadera Abera on January 28 to reaffirm long-standing partnerships and Ethiopia's

commitment to EU ties. Weber also engaged with African Union Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf on January 29, discussing regional peace/security (Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia), enhanced AU-EU cooperation in mediation, peace support operations (e.g., in Somalia), and multilateralism. This reflects the EU's ongoing support for AU-led efforts via the European Peace Facility and technical assistance.

Italy prepared for high-level regional involvement, announcing the second Italia-Africa Summit (under the Mattei Plan) to be held in Addis Ababa on February 13, 2026, at the Heads of State/Government level. Coinciding with the 39th AU Summit (February 14-15), it aims to advance Italy's development initiatives for Africa, including energy, infrastructure, and migration-related partnerships, while illustrating efforts to stem flows through economic cooperation.

Broader EU migration strategy ties into Horn engagements, with the European Commission's January 29 release of a five-year European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy emphasizing "assertive migration diplomacy." This includes leveraging visas, trade, and financial support to secure cooperation from origin/transit countries (relevant to Horn nations like Ethiopia and Somalia) on returns, border management, and preventing irregular departures. The strategy builds on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, with increased focus on partnerships in Sub-Saharan Africa, including North Africa/Horn routes, to dismantle smuggling networks and promote talent attraction/reintegration.

13. The United State

The Trump administration's immigration crackdown intensified domestic backlash, centered on Minneapolis where federal agents (ICE/Border Patrol) fatally shot two US citizens—37-year-old nurse Alex Pretti and another individual—during operations or protests. This sparked nationwide demonstrations, with tens of thousands rallying in solidarity across cities like Los Angeles, and outrage over the detention of 5-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos (released by court order after widespread criticism). Trump ordered DHS to avoid intervening in protests in Democrat-run cities unless requested, while celebrities at events like the Grammys wore anti-ICE pins. A partial government shutdown began (extending into its second day by February 1), partly tied to Democratic demands for DHS reforms amid the crackdown.

Foreign policy actions focused heavily on the Western Hemisphere and adversaries, with Trump signing executive orders addressing threats from Cuba (declaring a national emergency, imposing tariffs on countries supplying oil to Cuba to pressure the regime toward a "real blockade"), and Venezuela (reopening commercial airspace, while Secretary of State Marco Rubio testified on policy toward Maduro's government without ruling out further force). The administration continued military strikes on suspected drug boats in the Caribbean/Pacific (claiming dozens sunk since September), and Trump

threatened regional war if no nuclear deal with Iran, responding to Tehran's warnings and ongoing protests there. He also hinted at potential direct talks with Iran's leadership while praising US military strength.

The 2026 National Defense Strategy (released January 23) reinforced a "Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine", prioritizing homeland defense, securing borders, countering narco-terrorists, and guaranteeing US access to "key terrain" like Greenland, the Panama Canal, and the Gulf of America. It criticizes past overreach abroad, deprioritizes Europe (expecting allies to burden-share more), deters China through strength without confrontation, and emphasizes Western Hemisphere security over distant conflicts.

Trump directly criticized allies' engagement with China, calling the UK's reset under Keir Starmer "very dangerous" for doing business with Beijing (warning similarly about Canada), after Starmer's visit secured visa-free travel and other deals. This aligns with broader "America First" tensions, where tariffs and unpredictability have pushed allies toward independent ties, potentially isolating the US geopolitically.

Trump addressed UN financial issues, claiming he could "solve the problem very easily" by getting members to pay dues (while declining to confirm if the US would clear its billions in arrears). Separately, he warned Iran of severe regional consequences if no nuclear deal emerges, shrugging off Supreme Leader Khamenei's threats of "regional war" amid US military buildup and Iranian domestic unrest.

US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau concluded a major diplomatic tour of the Horn (Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti) from January 24 to February 1, accompanied by US Africa Command (AFRICOM) Commander General Dagvin Anderson. The trip promoted President Trump's priorities of rebalancing trade, fostering positive business environments, and advancing security/peace. In Addis Ababa (around January 27-28), Landau met Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos, and African Union Commission Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf to discuss expanding US commercial engagement, regional peace (including Sudan's conflict), humanitarian issues, and shared security cooperation. He attended events marking the Ethiopian Air Force's 90th anniversary, emphasizing longstanding US-Ethiopia ties and mutual military/political collaboration as essential for prosperity.

14. Eurasia

Recent developments across Eurasia suggest a security environment increasingly shaped by strategic recalibration, technological competition, and evolving alliance structures rather than outright systemic rupture. The 14th Annual Eurasian Peace Science Conference, held on January 24–25, brought together scholars and practitioners to examine conflict resolution and preventive diplomacy amid persistent tensions in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe. The emphasis on strengthening multilateral

frameworks to address hybrid threats reflects a growing recognition that contemporary conflict often unfolds below the threshold of conventional warfare, demanding institutional agility as much as military preparedness.

This emerging landscape coincides with signals of doctrinal adjustment in Washington. The Pentagon's 2026 National Defense Strategy appears to moderate the centrality of China as the singular organizing threat, instead encouraging allies such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan to assume greater responsibility for regional defense. While this redistribution of security burdens could reduce direct great-power confrontation, it also risks accelerating defense autonomy among U.S. partners, potentially reshaping alliance cohesion across the Asia-Pacific.

Uncertainty has been compounded by reports that the Trump administration is pursuing a more centralized and transactional diplomatic posture, including tariff threats linked to geopolitical disputes. Such moves have unsettled allies in both Europe and Asia, prompting several Eurasian states to quietly reassess the durability of transatlantic guarantees and to explore more self-reliant foreign policy trajectories. The resulting shift does not necessarily signal alliance breakdown, but rather a gradual evolution toward strategic hedging.

Tensions in Northeast Asia further illustrate how symbolic measures can carry geopolitical weight. China's renewed travel advisory against Japan, issued during the Lunar New Year period and tied to disputes over Taiwan's security environment, represents a form of calibrated soft-power signaling. Though short of economic coercion, such warnings can subtly disrupt commercial flows and reinforce diplomatic friction, demonstrating how competition increasingly extends into civilian domains.

Meanwhile, efforts to end the war in Ukraine suffered another setback as negotiations in Abu Dhabi collapsed without agreement. Both Kyiv and Moscow appear intent on leveraging battlefield dynamics to strengthen their negotiating positions, prolonging a conflict whose consequences continue to reverberate across European security architecture. Reports that the United States may condition long-term security guarantees on potential territorial concessions suggest a pragmatic—if controversial—turn in diplomatic thinking, one that could redefine the relationship between sovereignty, deterrence, and negotiated peace.

European vulnerability has been underscored by NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte's warning that the continent remains structurally dependent on U.S. defense capabilities. His remarks arrive amid trade frictions and political uncertainty, reinforcing calls for greater European investment in defense industrial capacity and strategic coordination. Parallel discussions within the EU Foreign Affairs Council, which approved new sanctions on Russia alongside major financial assistance and expanded military training

for Ukraine, indicate that Europe is attempting to translate such rhetoric into policy—while also extending support to Armenia and addressing instability linked to Syria.

In East Asia, Japan appears to be pursuing a measured de-escalatory posture. Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi clarified that the Self-Defense Forces would likely limit their role in a potential Taiwan contingency to evacuations and defensive operations, an adjustment aimed at reducing perceptions of automatic escalation while preserving alliance credibility. Taiwan, for its part, has launched its annual spring military drills with an emphasis on air defense capabilities, signaling preparedness without overt provocation and contributing to a deterrence equilibrium that remains inherently fragile.

A modest but symbolically important diplomatic breakthrough emerged in the Yellow Sea, where China agreed to relocate an unauthorized maritime structure following consultations with South Korea. The step suggests that even amid strategic rivalry, targeted bilateral engagement can still generate stabilizing outcomes, particularly in contested maritime zones.

Türkiye's National Security Council meeting on January 28 further highlighted Ankara's enduring role as a geopolitical hinge between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. By reviewing political, military, economic, and societal risks for the coming year, Türkiye signaled its intent to maintain strategic flexibility in a region where overlapping crises increasingly demand cross-theater awareness.

Beyond conventional military concerns, hybrid threats continue to test institutional resilience. A calibrated cyber intrusion targeting roughly thirty facilities within Poland's power grid—apparently designed for probing rather than disruption—demonstrates how adversaries are refining capabilities to map vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure. The episode reinforces the urgency of deeper cybersecurity cooperation within NATO and EU frameworks, as deterrence increasingly depends on digital as well as physical defense.

Strategic Reading

Taken together, these developments point toward a Eurasian order defined less by immediate confrontation than by gradual strategic repositioning. Great powers are recalibrating commitments, middle powers are expanding autonomy, and alliances are adapting to a security environment where hybrid threats, technological competition, and economic leverage intersect.

Rather than fragmenting outright, the international system appears to be entering a phase of negotiated multipolarity—one in which stability will depend not on fixed blocs but on the capacity of states to manage competition without allowing it to escalate into systemic conflict. The central question is no longer whether the existing order is changing, but how quickly institutions can adjust to a landscape where deterrence, diplomacy, and resilience must operate simultaneously.

15. International and Regional Organizations

This week's developments across multilateral institutions reflected a convergence of institutional consolidation, strategic economic governance, and growing securitisation of geopolitical competition, particularly in Africa, the Arctic, and global trade governance. African institutions advanced constitutional normalization and mineral sovereignty frameworks, while Euro-Atlantic actors navigated trade tensions, Arctic security recalibration, and alliance cohesion. Parallel UN processes underscored rising humanitarian and climate governance pressures.

United Nation

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) held a high-level briefing on the implementation of Resolution 2720 regarding Gaza and the broader Middle East. UN Senior Humanitarian Coordinator Sigrid Kaag reported that aid delivery remained “wholly insufficient” and called for a pause in hostilities to facilitate vaccine rollout and food distribution. On January 30, the Council convened an emergency session to address threats to maritime security in the Red Sea following multiple strikes on commercial shipping, debating a draft resolution to extend monitoring of Houthi activities. On January 29, the Council reviewed the progress of the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission in Haiti and signaled willingness to expand the sanctions list against gang leaders after a surge in violence in Port-au-Prince.

Regarding mandate renewals and resolutions, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2723 on January 30, extending the mandate of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) until 31 January 2027 and urging renewed formal negotiations. On January 25, the Council also met to review the MINUSCA mandate in the Central African Republic, considering spillover security implications from the ongoing Sudan conflict.

Slovenia officially assumed the Rotating Presidency of the UNSC on February 1, with Ambassador Samuel Žbogar announcing that the month would prioritize Climate Security and Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). On January 31, the Council finalized its Annual Report to the General Assembly, noting a record number of vetoes in 2025, particularly in relation to the Middle East and Ukraine.

Africa Union

From January 22 to 24, the African Union (AU) held its 1325th Peace and Security Council meeting, during which it officially lifted the suspension of the Republic of Guinea following the country's successful political transition and presidential elections, approving its return to full AU participation. On January 26, the AU Chairperson reaffirmed Africa's commitment to multilateralism and the rule of law during high-level meetings in Addis Ababa. On the same day, the AU also received letters of accreditation

from the new Permanent Representatives of Kenya and Zambia, signaling reinforced member-state engagement ahead of the upcoming summit.

On January 30, the 51st Ordinary Session of the Permanent Representatives' Committee (PRC) concluded in Addis Ababa, finalizing reports on Agenda 2063, financial reform priorities, and the AU's 2026 theme, "*Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation.*" The PRC's work from January 30–31 formally set the roadmap for the 48th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council (11–12 February) and the 39th Ordinary Session of the Assembly (14–15 February). On January 31, Egypt was confirmed to assume the chairship of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) for February 2026, succeeding the Democratic Republic of Congo.

On January 27, the AU Commission publicly called for urgent de-escalation and renewed respect for the Revitalized Peace Agreement in South Sudan, emphasizing the need for dialogue and political accommodation. On January 30, the Chairperson strongly condemned a fresh spate of terrorist attacks in Niger, reiterating the AU's commitment to regional stabilization and counter-terrorism cooperation. Between January 19 and 23, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights conducted a fact-finding mission in Chad on behalf of Sudanese refugees, releasing its report on January 27. The report documented significant humanitarian and protection needs among refugees fleeing conflict.

On the diplomatic front, the AU Chairperson's engagements on January 26 reinforced Africa's commitment to international rule of law, while the reception of credentials from new Permanent Representatives of Kenya and Zambia indicated strengthened diplomatic engagement ahead of summit preparations.

Finally, on February 1, H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf was appointed as the new AU Special Envoy for Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC), a move aimed at strengthening protection frameworks for vulnerable populations in conflict zones.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

On January 28, the IGAD Executive Secretary expressed deep concern over the deteriorating security situation in Jonglei State, South Sudan, condemning surges in violence and inflammatory rhetoric that threaten the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict (R-ARCSS) and reporting multiple ceasefire violations. Later in January, IGAD advanced a three-phase roadmap for Sudan, including short-term de-escalation through a 14-day face-to-face meeting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the establishment of a "Civilian Caretaker Government," and reconstruction via national dialogue. The East Africa Standby Force (EASF) remained on high alert for potential deployment. In response to renewed clashes

in Ethiopia's Tigray region, IGAD, jointly with the African Union, urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint and return to dialogue.

January 24 marked the ratification of the new IGAD Treaty by the Federal Republic of Somalia, surpassing the two-thirds threshold required for official entry into force. On the same day, Executive Secretary Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu received letters of credence from the Ambassador of the Netherlands to Djibouti and IGAD, reinforcing bilateral cooperation on security and resilience. From January 23 to 25, IGAD finalized internal technical reviews for its 2026–2030 Strategy, incorporating national-level data to strengthen frameworks for food security, climate resilience, and cross-border integration. On January 29, IGAD commenced a Capacity-Building Workshop for legislators and policymakers in Addis Ababa focused on enhancing refugee protection and harmonizing migration data across member states. Additionally, on January 25, institutional teams addressed administrative preparations for Eritrea's formal withdrawal from the bloc, scheduled for January 29, 2026.

UN and IGAD reports highlighted that over 200,000 people were displaced in South Sudan due to fighting in Jonglei, coinciding with a sharp surge in cholera cases.

European Union (EU)

January 27 saw the European Union (EU) and India sign a historic Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in New Delhi, described as the “Mother of All Deals.” The agreement incorporates a new security and defence partnership, covering maritime security, cyber resilience, and reduced dependency on Russian arms industries. On January 29, the European Commission launched the European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy, prioritizing a reduction in illegal arrivals, which fell by 26% in 2025. Earlier, on January 22, EU leaders emphasized territorial support for Denmark and Greenland amid renewed U.S. interest in Arctic strategic terrain, with President António Costa welcoming the pause on U.S. tariff threats.

The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on January 29 focused on Ukraine, with ongoing support through a €90 billion loan and the 20th sanctions package against Russia, on Iran with new sanctions on individuals and entities tied to drone/missile production and human rights abuses, and on Gaza, where initial discussions considered a potential EU role in a “Board of Peace” for transitional administration. On the same day, the Council adopted a €20 million assistance measure for Armenia under the European Peace Facility to strengthen its security sector. In late January, the EU imposed new sanctions on seven individuals in Sudan for human rights violations and extended restrictive measures in Guatemala until 2027. On January 26, the Commission approved the second wave of Security Action for Europe (SAFE) funding for eight Member States to enhance military readiness.

The Council finalized conclusions on EU priorities for the 2026 UN Human Rights fora, emphasizing ending impunity and protecting civil society. In late January, Commissioner Andrius Kubilius continued advocating for the establishment of a European Security Council to oversee rearmament, though member-state enthusiasm remained cautious.

NATO

From January 23 to 24, NATO's Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) finalized \$1.2 billion in contracts for 155 mm artillery ammunition under the Defense Production Action Plan to replenish allied stockpiles and provide ongoing support for Ukraine. In late January, NATO began the tactical phase of Steadfast Defender 26, its largest exercise since the Cold War, involving over 90,000 troops across Europe to test new defence plans. On January 29, the NATO Military Committee met with Finnish and Swedish commanders to discuss Arctic and High North security, as well as the protection of undersea infrastructure following threats to Baltic pipelines.

The NATO-Ukraine Council met at the ambassadorial level on January 26 to discuss the long-term interoperability of the Ukrainian Armed Forces with NATO standards. In late January, Sweden participated in its first full cycle of the NATO Defense Planning Process (NDPP) following its accession, aligning its capabilities with alliance requirements. On January 31, Secretary General Mark Rutte emphasized the "indivisibility of security" between Europe and the Indo-Pacific, calling for deeper industrial cooperation with Japan and South Korea to counter the Russia–China–North Korea defence axis.

On January 30, General Christopher G. Cavoli, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), held briefings on the readiness of the Allied Reaction Force (ARF) to provide agile responses to emergent threats on NATO's Eastern Flank.



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