



# Weekly Geopolitical Report

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

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**For analytical and informational purposes only**

# Horn Review: Weekly Report

Feb 16 – Feb 22, 2026

## 1. Ethiopia

The domestic anchor of the week was the 65th anniversary of Ethiopia's Special Operations Command, marked by a grand ceremony in Hawassa attended by Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief Abiy Ahmed. His keynote address was not ceremonial rhetoric but strategic messaging. He characterized the elite airborne commandos, symbolized by the red bonnet, as "exceptional gifts of Ethiopia," embodying national continuity, discipline, and purpose. More critically, he declared that "our preparations are aimed at guaranteeing peace across the entirety of Africa," reframing force modernization as continental responsibility rather than domestic militarization. By describing Ethiopia as a "protective shield" from Somalia to Massawa, Abiy elevated the doctrine from territorial defense to regional stabilization architecture.

The implication is clear: military preparedness is positioned as deterrence and peace enforcement, not escalation. In an environment where external commentary has speculated about confrontation linked to maritime access debates, this calibrated framing directly counters claims of aggressive intent. Instead, Ethiopia projects disciplined modernization, advanced training, airborne integration, counter-terror capabilities, and technological upgrades, anchored in defensive sovereignty and collective African security.

Complementing this reinforced security posture was the high-impact state visit of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Addis Ababa, his first in over a decade. The visit marked more than diplomatic renewal; it represented strategic convergence between two pivotal regional actors navigating multipolar competition. At their joint press conference, Prime Minister Abiy reiterated Ethiopia's maritime question as a structural economic imperative. Describing the country's landlocked condition as a "historical injustice" that constrains over 130 million citizens, he emphasized that peaceful and mutually beneficial sea access is essential for sustaining projected double-digit growth and long-term resilience. By articulating this position alongside PM Erdoğan, PM Abiy internationalized the maritime discourse within a cooperative framework, transforming what external observers portray as a geopolitical flashpoint into a negotiated development priority. The stress on dialogue, sovereignty, and territorial integrity by both leaders was deliberate. Erdoğan underscored respect for regional stability and warned against unilateral external interventions in the Horn, aligning with Ethiopia's long-standing call for African-led solutions. In doing so, Ankara indirectly reinforced Addis Ababa's insistence that Red Sea connectivity must emerge through partnership, not fragmentation.

The signing of an energy cooperation accord further translated rhetoric into institutional architecture. Agreements covering renewable energy, hydroelectric technology, transmission infrastructure, and industrial collaboration demonstrate that Ethiopia is not merely seeking diplomatic endorsements but tangible capacity enhancement. Both sides pledged to elevate bilateral trade beyond one billion dollars, expanding into railways, logistics corridors, manufacturing, tourism, and investment platforms that link Ethiopia to broader African markets. The strategic implication extends beyond economics: Türkiye's technical expertise and diversified engagement strengthen Ethiopia's leverage in regional negotiations while preserving decision-making autonomy. Rather than aligning exclusively with any single bloc, Addis Ababa is cultivating multidirectional partnerships that reinforce sovereign agency.

This diversification extended westward with the signing of a memorandum of understanding with Ireland, broadening economic and political dialogue beyond traditional development assistance frameworks. By institutionalizing cooperation in investment and enterprise, Ethiopia signaled its intention to reposition itself from aid recipient to structured economic partner. The cumulative diplomatic tempo, Türkiye in strategic infrastructure and security dialogue, Ireland in economic modernization, illustrates Addis Ababa's layered outreach strategy: expand partnerships, reduce dependency, and convert geographic constraint into economic leverage.

The Tigray People's Liberation Front's 51st anniversary reeks of nostalgia for a force that, by its own contradictions, built and then bulldozed its own legitimacy: once celebrated as liberators who toppled a dictatorship and built federal structures, they later centralized power, narrowed political space, and helped ferment mistrust that fueled violent conflict. Today their anniversary feels less like introspection and more like a performative echo chamber for a faction trapped in its own past, failing to reconcile history with present realities, and mocking the idea of peace by clinging to grievances that have cost millions dearly.

## **2. Sudan**

Sudan's war escalated this week amid intensifying drone warfare, mounting allegations of genocidal violence in Darfur, expanding regional diplomatic friction, and growing international pressure for civilian protection. Military dynamics continue to shift toward aerial and drone-based strikes, while diplomatic tensions particularly involving Uganda and Gulf states underscore the widening regional dimension of the conflict.

Drone attacks significantly increased across Darfur and Kordofan. At least 15 children were reportedly killed in a strike, while three aid workers were killed and four wounded in a drone attack in Kordofan attributed to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). More than 30 countries expressed alarm over the expanding use of drones and their impact on civilians and humanitarian operations. The UN humanitarian chief urged the United Nations

Security Council to take stronger measures to protect civilians and aid personnel, warning that attacks on humanitarian workers are further shrinking access in already besieged areas.

In El Fasher, UN officials stated that patterns of violence bear the “hallmarks of genocide,” citing ethnically targeted killings, systematic attacks on civilians, and siege tactics. Fighting in North Darfur continues to generate mass displacement and acute shortages of food and medical supplies. While limited aid reached parts of Kordofan this week, humanitarian access remains heavily constrained by insecurity and aerial threats.

On the battlefield, the RSF claimed it had captured a town near the Chad border, signaling continued efforts to consolidate control over western supply corridors. Clashes remain active across Darfur and Kordofan as both sides seek territorial advantage, with aerial capabilities playing an increasingly central role in operational strategy.

Diplomatic tensions deepened after Uganda hosted RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. Sudan’s government condemned President Yoweri Museveni’s reception of Dagalo as a “blatant disregard” for alleged genocide crimes. Kampala framed the meeting as part of regional peace efforts, but Khartoum views such engagement as legitimizing the paramilitary leadership.

Meanwhile, Gulf rivalries appeared to intersect more directly with the Sudan file. Reports indicate Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman sent a letter to UAE National Security Adviser Tahnoun bin Zayed Al Nahyan outlining grievances over alleged Emirati support for the RSF and seeking US mediation. US President Donald Trump publicly acknowledged tensions between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. The correspondence signals increasing friction between key Gulf actors whose rival approaches may be influencing conflict dynamics.

Economically, the war’s toll continues to deepen. Sudan’s General Authority for Geological Research reported that losses in the mining sector have reached \$7 billion over the 34-month conflict. Operations have contracted from 18 states to six, severely disrupting exploration and public revenues. Although authorities announced the resumption of activities in Khartoum with upgraded geophysical and GIS technologies, approximately 75% of Sudan’s mineral resources remain underexplored, reflecting long-term structural damage to a critical revenue sector.

## **Assessment**

This week highlights three converging trends: intensified drone warfare, escalating genocide allegations in Darfur, and widening regional diplomatic entanglement. The growing use of drones marks a tactical evolution that increases civilian exposure while complicating humanitarian access. Simultaneously, Uganda’s engagement with RSF

leadership and emerging Saudi–UAE tensions indicate that Sudan’s conflict is increasingly embedded within broader regional rivalries.

While international pressure for civilian protection is rising, battlefield momentum and external involvement continue to outpace diplomatic containment. Sudan’s war is now characterized by aerial escalation, deepening humanitarian collapse, and expanding geopolitical competition layered onto an already fragmented internal conflict.

### **3. Egypt**

Egypt has ramped up diplomatic maneuvers in East Africa, with Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty visiting Nairobi on February 16, 2026, to forge stronger ties with Kenya on Nile Basin issues, emphasizing consensus and rejecting unilateral actions like Ethiopia's operations of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. This push, including offers of \$100 million for Kenyan dam projects, strategically aims to isolate Ethiopia and restrict its legal rights to equitable water development, prioritizing Egypt's water security amid its severe scarcity, where per capita share dips below 490 cubic meters annually.

This focus on resource control extends to broader African stability, as Egypt urged the UN Security Council on February 18, 2026, to support Sudan's unity and oppose parallel political structures that could fragment the nation and spill instability across borders. By advocating for humanitarian truces and diplomatic settlements, Cairo seeks to safeguard its southern flank, countering potential threats from Sudan's civil war that could disrupt Nile flows and regional alliances.

Complementing border security efforts, Egypt's intelligence chief met with eastern Libyan commander Khalifa Haftar in Benghazi on February 15, 2026, to enhance coordination against arms smuggling, extremism, and trafficking. This alliance bolsters Cairo's influence in Libya's fractured politics, strategically securing its western frontier and positioning for gains in Mediterranean energy resources amid ongoing divisions.

Turning to Middle Eastern tensions, Egypt condemned Israel's resumption of land registration and settlement activities in the occupied West Bank on February 16, 2026, deeming it a violation of international law and a blow to the two-state solution. This stance, calling for global intervention, serves Egypt's interest in maintaining Arab solidarity and leveraging Palestinian issues to enhance its regional leadership role.

In a similar vein, Egypt, along with 13 Arab and Muslim nations, rebuked US Ambassador Mike Huckabee's February 21-22, 2026, remarks endorsing a Greater Israel from the Nile to the Euphrates, labeling them inflammatory and contrary to UN principles. This collective outcry underscores Cairo's strategy to rally allies against perceived threats to sovereignty, protecting its territorial integrity while amplifying its voice in international forums.

Amid these condemnations, Egypt's Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly and Foreign Minister Abdelatty attended the inaugural US-led Board of Peace meeting in Washington on February 17, 2026, focusing on Gaza reconstruction and wider conflicts. Representing President al-Sisi, this participation highlights Cairo's pursuit of influence in US-mediated diplomacy, aiming to shape outcomes favorable to its security and economic interests in the Levant.

Further strengthening military postures, Egypt hosted talks between its air force chief and Turkey's counterpart in Cairo on February 15, 2026, to expand cooperation in training and armaments. This engagement reflects Cairo's calculated shift toward Ankara to counterbalance rivals, enhancing defense capabilities and navigating a volatile geopolitical landscape for strategic advantages in the eastern Mediterranean.

#### **4. Eritrea**

Speculation over the risk of renewed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, including spillover into Tigray, has intensified across international media and policy circles. Outlets including Bloomberg, Deutsche Welle, and Al Jazeera have carried reports citing Ethiopian troop mobilizations in the north following claims of Eritrean forces advancing deeper into Tigray. The International Crisis Group published a detailed report titled *Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tigray A Powder Keg in the Horn of Africa*, urging preventive diplomacy and mediation, including by regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Türkiye.

Unverified reports suggest that President Isaias Afwerki has appointed senior PFDJ figure Abdella Musa as Minister of Local Government. The position would effectively place Abdella as a deputy to the president. The appointment has not been confirmed by official government outlets, including the Ministry of Information. If accurate, the move would fill a senior post that has remained vacant for decades and could signal adjustments within Eritrea's internal power structure.

The Ministry of Information announced the passing of Abune Petros, a senior figure within the Eritrean Orthodox Church. His death is likely to be closely observed given the church's sensitive relationship with the state and its symbolic importance within Eritrean society.

Eritrean officials and pro-government voices have intensified rhetorical campaigns against Ethiopia and its leadership. Statements from the information minister and aligned commentators on social media have increasingly targeted Ethiopia's leadership and its pursuit of maritime access. The tone of this discourse, accompanied by contested analysis and widespread misinformation, has contributed to a more polarized information environment around Eritrea Ethiopia relations.

## **5. Djibouti**

The development of the week in the realm of bilateral security cooperation was the formal inauguration of the upgraded Maryama Regional Peacekeeping Centre. President Ismail Omar Guelleh presided over the ceremony on February 17, 2026, officially opening extensive enhancements to the Djiboutian Armed Forces' principal training base at Maryama camp. The project funded by the United States represents a substantial investment in the facility's infrastructure and operational capacity. The renovation has resulted in the construction of 76 permanent buildings and the installation of a state-of-the-art shooting simulator. With its expanded footprint, the centre now possesses the capacity to accommodate up to 1,000 personnel. The facility is intended to serve as a primary training ground for contingents preparing for deployment in United Nations and African Union missions.

Efforts to enhance Djibouti's position as a regional trade space advanced with the meeting of the Ethiopia Djibouti Joint Railway Commission. Co-chaired by Ethiopia's Minister of Transport, Alemu Sime and Djibouti's Minister of Infrastructure Hassan Houmed Ibrahim the commission convened in Djibouti to accelerate critical port rail connectivity. The discussions focused on expediting the construction of rail links connecting the existing Ethio Djibouti Railway to key maritime facilities, including the Doraleh Multipurpose Port and the Horizon Djibouti Terminals oil facility. The parties have set a target for project completion by November 2026, with the objective of significantly improving trade efficiency and streamlining logistics between the two countries.

In a parallel advancement for national infrastructure, Djibouti secured a formal financial guarantee from the African Development Bank for the construction of a new international airport. The agreement for the Al Haj Hassan Gouled Aptidon-Biidley International Airport project was finalized on February 21, 2026, following high-level discussions in Abidjan between AfDB President Sidi Ould Tah and project coordinator Simon Mibrathu.

## **6. South Sudan**

South Sudan faced renewed diplomatic scrutiny and worsening humanitarian pressures this week as violence in Jonglei intensified, international actors debated the future of accountability mechanisms, and tensions within the transitional political framework resurfaced. The convergence of localized conflict, stalled reforms, and fragile governance continues to test the durability of the 2018 peace agreement.

Clashes in Jonglei State escalated, prompting fresh displacement and civilian casualties, according to the latest humanitarian flash update. The World Food Programme intensified its emergency response as fighting disrupted supply routes and heightened food insecurity risks. Several embassies condemned the killing of humanitarian workers, underscoring rising dangers for aid personnel. Médecins Sans Frontières warned that populations

caught in border and conflict-affected zones remain “lost between borders,” facing limited access to health services and protection.

At the diplomatic level, the United Nations Security Council held deliberations on South Sudan amid growing concern over deteriorating conditions. UN Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed members on persistent security volatility and the fragile implementation of transitional arrangements. Statements from China and Russia emphasized respect for sovereignty and caution against external pressure, while other members stressed accountability and civilian protection.

Calls to extend the mandate of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan intensified as international legal organizations warned of a worsening human rights crisis. Advocacy groups urged the Human Rights Council to prolong investigations and stand ready for further action should violations continue unchecked.

Political tensions resurfaced domestically. The government dismissed Nigeria’s call for the release of opposition leader Riek Machar, describing it as the view of a single country rather than a collective regional stance. Meanwhile, international reporting highlighted growing uncertainty around electoral timelines and governance arrangements, reinforcing concerns that delayed reforms could destabilize the transition.

Humanitarian actors reported severe operational constraints. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs documented escalating needs amid insecurity, while UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Kristin Davis visited South Sudan and called for urgent international support for displaced communities. Aid agencies continue to warn that funding gaps and access restrictions are compounding vulnerability across multiple states.

On the development front, the European Union backed investment in green telecommunications infrastructure aimed at expanding digital connectivity, and international partners signaled continued economic engagement despite instability. These initiatives contrast sharply with the deteriorating security environment, highlighting the dual trajectory of limited development progress amid persistent fragility.

## **Assessment**

This week reflects a pattern of mounting international concern paired with limited structural progress on the ground. Escalating violence in Jonglei, attacks on humanitarian workers, and renewed debate over accountability mechanisms underscore a deteriorating protection environment. At the same time, political friction surrounding opposition figures and election timelines suggests the transitional framework remains vulnerable.

Diplomatic discussions at the Security Council reveal diverging international approaches balancing sovereignty, accountability, and stabilization while humanitarian actors warn

that operational space is narrowing. South Sudan remains caught between fragile state-building efforts and recurring cycles of localized conflict, with the coming months likely to determine whether the transition consolidates or fractures further.

## **7. Somalia and Somaliland**

### **Somalia**

The Federal Government of Somalia in coordination with international partners sustained military pressure against militant groups this week with operations concentrated in multiple regions. On February 22, the Somali National Army (SNA) launched a targeted offensive against Al-Shabaab elements entrenched in the Hawadley area of the Middle Shabelle region. The operation which involved house to house searches and the securing of main roads aimed to clear militant hideouts and caves reinforcing stability in the southeast. This follows a broader announcement by officials including State Minister for Defense Omar Ali Abdi on February 18, asserting that Somali forces with U.S. support have successfully reclaimed territories long held by Al-Shabaab some for up to 18 years. The operations have specifically targeted the group's leadership and bomb making networks with plans underway for reconstruction and aid delivery in liberated areas.

In another development in the north, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) conducted an airstrike in the Golis Mountains approximately 70 kilo meters southeast of Bossaso in the Puntland region. The strike carried out in coordination with the Federal Government specifically targeted ISIS-Somalia capabilities to degrade the group's operational strength. Concurrently state level forces achieved successes against Al-Shabaab. Jubaland security forces concluded a four-day offensive in the Lagta Hola–Wajeer area of the Badhaadhe district killing more than 60 fighters including senior operatives. The operation conducted with international air support targeted militant positions in the Black Sea forested zone destroying logistics hubs, weapons depots, and bomb making sites.

Complementing these operations, the government also highlighted progress in disrupting militant financing. On February 22, state media citing intelligence sources announced that Al-Shabaab is facing a severe financial crisis. This strain is attributed to targeted operations that killed key revenue managers including Mohamed Mire Jama described as the group's interior minister and Abdullahi Wadaad the head of finance thereby disrupting their funding networks. However, the security landscape remains complex. A report from the Saldhig Institute highlighted in a media review on February 20 pointed to a deepening alliance between Al-Shabaab and Yemen's Houthis. The cooperation which includes arms smuggling, training exchanges, and financial links, is complicating regional security dynamics amid competing Gulf rivalries.

The politics this week was dominated by a fragile and ultimately stalled dialogue between the Federal Government and the opposition Somali Future Council. Formal talks opened

in Mogadishu on February 17 focusing on the upcoming elections, constitutional review and the ongoing drought crisis, marking an initial step toward narrowing political differences. The initial round was welcomed by international stakeholders like the European Union issued a statement on February 18 praising the start of dialogue, followed by the United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) on February 19 which emphasized the need for inclusive consensus building.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre chaired a high-level consultative meeting with the Council at Villa Somalia on February 19. Discussions extended the political roadmap to include coordinated national responses to severe droughts and the ongoing security offensive scoring the need for a unified front against terrorist groups. Despite this promising start momentum faltered. On February 21, negotiations were delayed as the two sides clashed over the election roadmap and constitutional amendments. This impasse culminated on February 22 when a second round of high-level negotiations collapsed without agreement. Sources reported hardened positions on the electoral model, the sequencing of local versus federal elections, and state level mandates, with no joint statement issued. Parties indicated plans to reconvene later.

The political tensions were further underscored by Puntland President Said Abdullahi Deni a key member of the Somali Future Council. In a speech delivered in Mogadishu on February 22, Deni accused the Hassan Sheikh Mohamud administration of attempting to dismantle Somalia's federal system. He called for genuine reconciliation and dialogue to resolve the deepening political crisis, highlighting the fragility of federal state relations.

The reporting period witnessed intense diplomatic activity as Somalia navigated its relations with international partners. A development was the formalization of a strategic maritime and port development agreement with Saudi Arabia on February 20. Ministers from both countries signed the cooperation deal aimed at enhancing maritime transport, ports, and broader economic ties. This came amid reports of Mogadishu's diplomatic pushback against the United Arab Emirates following Israel's recognition of Somaliland with Somalia successfully garnering support for its territorial sovereignty from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, China, and the EU.

Turkey continued to play an assertive role in Somali affairs. On February 17, Turkey deployed three warships to waters off Somalia, the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea to support offshore oil drilling activities. Concurrently President Recep Tayyip Erdogan embarked on a regional tour visiting Ethiopia. During his visit to Addis Ababa on February 17, Erdogan criticized Israel's recognition of Somaliland aligning with Mogadishu's position and reaffirming Turkey's commitment to Somalia's territorial integrity.

In a move signalling a major shift in defense posture Somalia entered advanced talks with Pakistan to acquire up to 24 JF-17 Thunder Block III fighter jets. Reported on February

21 this potential deal represents one of the government's efforts to modernize its air force. Additionally, Somalia's relations with Qatar remained close with President Mohamud and the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, discussing bilateral cooperation and support for Somalia's stability in a phone call on February 16.

## **Somaliland**

The most significant diplomatic development this week was the firm reiteration of opposition to the recognition of Somaliland by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. During a joint press conference with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, President Erdoğan stated that such recognition benefits nobody and carries the risk of destabilizing the Horn of Africa. His remarks, published widely on February 18 are viewed as a strong signal of Ankara's continued commitment to Somalia's territorial integrity and its partnership with Mogadishu which includes defense and economic cooperation.

In a parallel diplomatic overture Somaliland has intensified its engagement with the United States. On February 21 the Minister of the Presidency, Khadar Hussein Abdi, formally articulated an offer to the United States during an interview in Hargeisa. The proposal dangles exclusive access to Somaliland's substantial yet largely untapped, mineral resources specifically citing rare earth elements, lithium, and coltan along with the potential for establishing military bases in exchange for formal diplomatic recognition. The offer which garnered extensive global coverage on February 22 presents a recalibration of Hargeisa's foreign policy aiming to leverage its geostrategic location and resource wealth to secure a powerful patron following the precedent set by Israel's recognition in late 2025.

The domestic political arena was dominated by a high-profile demand for transparency from a key political figure. In a self-recorded video statement circulated this week former President Muse Bihi Abdi issued a formal call for the current administration of President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdillahi (Cirro) to publicly disclose the full text of the bilateral agreement that culminated in Israel's recognition of Somaliland. Citing constitutional provisions that prohibit any pact contradicting Islamic principles, the former president framed his demand as essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring national cohesion.

## **8. Yemen**

Yemeni security forces killed one person and injured several others during clashes with supporters of the Southern Transitional Council outside the al Maashiq Presidential Palace in Aden. The incident followed the return of the internationally recognized government to the city. The STC, which receives backing from the UAE, rejected the government's legitimacy and warned that its presence in Aden would carry limited political weight. The

episode highlights the persistent fragmentation of authority in southern Yemen and the continued impact of regional rivalries on domestic stability.

The European Union and the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Programme for Yemen signed a joint contract with a Yemeni organization to expand access to water in Marib Governorate. The initiative reflects continued donor engagement in humanitarian and stabilization efforts amid Yemen's prolonged conflict and fragile recovery process.

## **9. Kenya**

Over the past week Kenya's peace and security agenda was dominated by concerns about illegal foreign recruitment and national safety and strengthened domestic security coordination. National intelligence figures presented to Parliament showed that more than 1,000 Kenyan nationals have been lured into fighting in the Russia–Ukraine war through deceptive recruitment networks, prompting public alarm and urgent government action on both diplomatic and citizen-protection fronts; in response, Foreign Affairs Principal Secretary Korir Sing'Oei met separately with the Ukrainian and Russian ambassadors in Nairobi to urge clear mechanisms for consular protection, repatriation of Kenyans in conflict zones, and stronger action against fraudulent recruitment schemes. At the same time, the The Russian embassy in Nairobi publicly denied involvement in recruitment, framing any enlistment of Kenyan citizens as voluntary under Russian law and distancing itself from accusations of collusion. Meanwhile, the government partnered with the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) to launch a national security framework for major events, requiring formal risk assessments and coordination among police, emergency services, and event planners to protect large gatherings from violence or disruption. Additionally, a strike by Jomo Kenyatta International Airport workers on 16 Feb caused serious flight delays and highlighted broader labour and infrastructure pressures intersecting with national security and public confidence in Kenya's main travel hub.

On the diplomatic and geopolitical front, Kenya was highly active regionally and internationally. President William Ruto attended the 39th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly in Addis Ababa on 14–15 Feb, where he reaffirmed Kenya's commitment to continental institutional reform, advocated for Agenda 2063 priorities, and pushed for deeper integration on peace, security, climate finance, and intra-African trade part of broader AU deliberations. At the summit Ruto also presented progress on AU institutional reforms as Kenya's AU champion, and on the sidelines engaged in discussions with former President Uhuru Kenyatta, illustrating how domestic political dynamics intersected with Kenya's continental diplomacy.

In bilateral diplomacy, Egypt's Foreign Minister visited Nairobi and delivered a message from Egypt's President emphasising stronger strategic cooperation on water security, investment, and regional stability, while proposing financing mechanisms for key dam and water infrastructure projects in Kenya and urging inclusive Nile Basin dialogue

grounded in cooperation. Kenya also unveiled new AfCFTA-focused digital trade platforms (BiasharaLink and Deal House) during AU engagements to turn diplomatic missions into trade and investment hubs, signaling a shift toward economic diplomacy across the continent. These diplomatic moves reflect Nairobi's active role in shaping regional policy and economic partnerships, balancing internal security interests with wider geopolitical engagement.

## **10. The Gulf Countries**

### **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia is seeking to reroute a planned fibre optic cable connection to Greece through Syria rather than Israel, according to regional officials cited by Middle East Eye. The shift reflects Riyadh's evolving regional alignments and its interest in strengthening Syria's regional reintegration while recalibrating its engagement with Israel amid shifting political dynamics.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman reportedly sent a letter to UAE security adviser Tahnoon bin Zayed expressing concern over Emirati support for actors in Sudan and Yemen. The communication, which was shared with U.S. officials, highlights growing strategic friction between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi over influence in conflict zones and regional leadership.

In a wide-ranging interview, Saudi intellectual Dr Ahmed Altuwajri criticized the UAE's regional posture, arguing that Abu Dhabi's alignment with Israel has reshaped regional power balances and complicated Saudi Arabia's traditional leadership role. Such commentary reflects broader debates within Saudi policy circles about the direction of Gulf regional politics.

### **UAE**

Donald Trump publicly acknowledged tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, stating that he could "easily" help bridge the rift. Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One after returning from Mar a Lago, Trump described the divergence as manageable, reflecting growing external attention to strains within the Gulf partnership.

DP World, the Dubai based ports operator, sold a 37.5 percent stake in Jeddah Islamic Port to Maersk, forming a strategic partnership while retaining a majority share. The transaction highlights the depth of Emirati Saudi economic ties amid political frictions linked to Yemen, Sudan, and broader regional competition. Recent disruptions in Red Sea shipping have added pressure to port operations and regional logistics planning.

UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan met with U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham in Abu Dhabi amid diplomatic consultations linked to regional normalization efforts. The meeting also served to dispel recent speculation surrounding the Emirati president's

health and underscored Abu Dhabi's continued engagement with influential figures in Washington.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan held a phone call with Mohammed bin Zayed, during which the two leaders discussed expanding cooperation and strengthening bilateral ties. The exchange reflects the steady normalization of Turkish Emirati relations following years of competition across multiple regional theatres.

## **11. Africa and The Sahel Region**

### **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**

The conflict in eastern Congo continues to shape the country's security landscape, though there were no single dramatic clashes during its own reporting period. The government remains locked in ongoing tension with the M23 Movement and its control over key areas like Rubaya, a rich mineral zone where the state is now offering access to U.S. partners under a strategic cooperation pact even though rebels still hold parts of it, highlighting how deeply insecurity is tied to economic assets and foreign investment interests. This moves toward a mineral-diplomacy strategy underscores Kinshasa's effort to link economic development with conflict containment and could shape how external powers like the United States engage with the eastern crisis. Meanwhile, a government-published report on Feb 21 starkly documented thousands of atrocities in rebel-held eastern territories, reflecting the heavy toll on civilians and reinforcing that peace remains elusive as everyday violence continues. At the same time, the European Union mobilised €68 million in humanitarian aid for the country's crisis, signalling that the conflict's humanitarian dimensions remain a priority for international partners.

On diplomacy and regional geopolitics, developments this week show Kinshasa engaging both in external dialogue and bilateral cooperation efforts. On Feb 20–21, U.S. congressional support for implementing the Washington peace accords a U.S.-brokered framework aimed at stabilising the eastern conflict was publicly welcomed by Congolese opposition leader Moïse Katumbi, reinforcing international pressure for a more inclusive political process and dialogue to address the crisis. In complementary diplomacy, the Congolese government's defence leadership held talks in Pretoria with South African counterparts to revise a long-standing military cooperation accord, signalling efforts to bolster military training and cooperation amid persistent insecurity. Additionally, at a Paris diplomatic meeting on Feb 21, Congolese officials emphasised the broader impacts of the eastern war and sought to raise international awareness of the crisis, which continues to influence the country's relations with European partners. There were also calls domestically for vigilance in peace initiatives and strict adherence to UN Security Council resolutions that underline Congo's sovereignty and territorial integrity, reflecting the delicate geopolitical balance with neighbouring states involved in or affected by the conflict.

## **Mali**

Mali's security situation remains deeply fragile and violent extremist groups continue to shape the daily reality on the ground, even if specific new battlefield events weren't widely reported this past week. Armed groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin persist in their campaign against the state, attacking convoys, sabotaging key infrastructure, and leveraging a long-standing fuel blockade that has crippled transport and basic services across much of the country; this insecurity contributes to a broader Sahel-wide crisis of violent extremism that continues to expand in reach, undermine governance, and fuel displacement and humanitarian need. Some stress that these groups exploit the weakening of collective counterterrorism efforts and gaps in regional cooperation to entrench themselves, using areas beyond government control as operational bases and expanding attacks on civilian and military targets alike.

On diplomacy and geopolitics, Mali's relations with many of its traditional partners are strained or under realignment. The military government in Bamako has maintained its celebrated focus on sovereignty and choice of partners, publicly asserting reciprocity in visa policies with Western countries following travel restrictions, and navigating complicated ties with regional actors; this approach reflects ongoing diverging diplomatic paths in the Sahel. Regional power dynamics are also shifting, as Algeria moves to restore influence in the Sahel and engage with key actors, which may affect Mali's geopolitical options even as ties remain tense. Meanwhile, Mali remains part of the Alliance of Sahel States alongside neighbouring military-led states, continuing a strategy of distancing from ECOWAS and reinforcing military cooperation despite mixed results against insurgent networks.

## **Burkina Faso**

Burkina Faso experienced a sharp deterioration in its security environment over the past week, marked by a rise in coordinated jihadist attacks across the northern and eastern regions. Armed groups linked to Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin intensified pressure on military positions and civilian areas, demonstrating improved coordination and mobility. The killing of foreign civilians in the border town of Titao stood out as a critical incident, signaling a shift toward attacks that deliberately internationalize the conflict.

On the diplomatic and geopolitical front, the government moved quickly to manage fallout from the cross-border incident by engaging Ghana, resulting in renewed bilateral coordination on security and border management. This pragmatic engagement reflects Ouagadougou's awareness that prolonged instability risks deeper diplomatic isolation. At the same time, Burkina Faso remains firmly aligned with the Sahelian military bloc and continues to keep ECOWAS at arm's length, reinforcing a sovereignty-first posture under Ibrahim Traoré. The week's events underline a widening gap between the military's

geopolitical positioning and the realities on the ground, as persistent insecurity increasingly shapes regional diplomacy and raises questions about the sustainability of current security strategies.

## **Niger**

Over the past week Niger's security situation has stayed tense, shaped largely by the ongoing armed insurgency that continues to threaten state control and strategic infrastructure. While there wasn't major new battlefield headlines reported this week, the persistent threat from groups linked to Islamic State and other extremist networks remains central to the country's security dynamics, especially after high-profile attacks in recent months highlighted vulnerabilities in key areas like Niamey and border regions. These armed groups continue to carry out asymmetric operations against military and transit targets, exacerbating an already fragile security environment that the Nigerien military cites as justification for its internal counter-insurgency policies and alliances with neighbouring military states. The structural weakness of regional security cooperation since the withdrawal of Western military missions has left Niger and its neighbours to contend with the expanding reach of violent extremist actors across the Sahel, creating chronic instability rather than discrete peaks in violence over the past week.

On diplomacy and geopolitics, saw a notable thaw in relations between Niger and Algeria, following a diplomatic rupture that had lingered since 2025. President Abdourahmane Tiani's visit to Algiers on Feb 16 marked a reset in bilateral ties, and both countries pledged stronger economic and security cooperation, including projects such as a trans-Saharan gas pipeline that could deepen Niger's strategic partnerships and offer financial relief amid its economic challenges. This diplomatic outreach comes as Algeria seeks to reassert its influence in the Sahel and stabilise a region fractured by coups and insurgencies, with Niamey hoping to benefit from support and infrastructure investments. Niger's geopolitical posture continues to balance its membership in the Alliance of Sahel States alongside Mali and Burkina Faso against pressures from external actors, even as this week's developments suggest some opening for selective engagement with regional neighbours outside that bloc framework.

## **Chad**

Chad has been shaped less by new battlefield clashes and more by concerns about internal instability, crime, and regional spill-overs. The international police organisation Interpol reported that its "Red Card 2.0" operation, conducted across 16 African countries including Chad, led to 651 arrests and millions of dollars seized targeting cybercrime and financial fraud networks reflecting how organised crime is now a central security issue alongside traditional threats. At the same time, the Chadian Bar Association publicly sounded the alarm on rising insecurity, citing assassinations, armed attacks, intercommunal conflict in regions like Borkou and Guéra, and alleged abuses by security

forces that undermine rights and civilian protection, and called for independent investigations to stop impunity. Beyond these internal pressures, the military establishment reiterated its stance against external threats after accusing unknown actors of a drone strike on a military position in Tiné, insisting that Chad's sovereignty and territorial integrity would be defended with all lawful means, a sign of continued tension along its border regions even if direct clashes with neighbouring Sudanese forces were not reported this week.

On the diplomatic and geopolitical front, Chad's external engagement progressed through expanded bilateral outreach and diversified partnerships rather than major headline visits or agreements this week. Authorities in N'Djamena continued efforts to broaden diplomatic ties, including recent exchanges with Chinese representatives to strengthen cooperation and signal that Chad is actively seeking varied strategic partners beyond its traditional alliances. This comes amid a broader context where Chad, as an ECCAS and CEMAC member, remains involved in regional integration and collective responses to security and economic challenges, even as it hosts refugees from neighbouring conflicts and grapples with humanitarian pressures tied to the war in Sudan. While there was no new major high-level summit or external mediation effort announced this week, these diplomatic moves reflect N'Djamena's ongoing strategy of maintaining regional cooperation, expanding global partnerships, and presenting itself as a stable interlocutor in a part of Africa facing compound crises

## **12. North Africa**

### **Morocco**

Morocco and Turkey celebrated a milestone in bilateral trade, surpassing \$5 billion in volume for the first time in 2025, driven by a free trade agreement and robust exports from Turkey in sectors like automotive, textiles, and energy. Morocco's ambassador to Ankara highlighted efforts to balance the trade deficit through consultations and invited Turkish investments, leveraging the kingdom's stability, infrastructure, and incentives ahead of co-hosting the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

Amid ongoing diplomatic efforts to resolve the Western Sahara dispute through U.S.-led talks in Madrid, the Sahrawi People's Liberation Army claimed targeted bombardments on Moroccan forces in the Smara and Guelta sectors, reporting casualties and material losses. These unverified actions underscore persistent tensions, as international mediators push for implementation of UN resolutions while Polisario asserts military responses to occupation.

## Algeria

France and Algeria have taken steps to mend strained diplomatic ties, with French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez visiting Algiers for talks amid tensions stemming from Paris's 2024 endorsement of Morocco's Western Sahara autonomy plan, which Algeria opposes in favor of self-determination. The visit, hosted by Algerian counterpart Said Sayoud, included a meeting with President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, signaling a willingness to restore communication channels previously downgraded to chargé d'affaires level.

This diplomatic outreach culminated in an agreement to resume high-level security cooperation, reactivating mechanisms for judicial, policing, and intelligence collaboration that had been suspended. Discussions focused on facilitating the readmission of irregular Algerian migrants from France, combating drug trafficking, and counter-terrorism efforts, leveraging Algeria's strategic position bordering volatile regions like Niger and Mali.

Contrasting with these improving European relations, Algeria's grievances with the United Arab Emirates are deepening due to strategic divergences in areas such as Libya, Sudan, and the Sahel, where competing influences exacerbate regional instability. Algeria has begun canceling its air service agreement with the UAE, a move that could lead to a symbolic diplomatic break with limited economic repercussions, as Algiers seeks to capitalize on the Saudi-Emirati rift for increased Saudi investments.

## Libya

Libya's political impasse drew international attention at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, where Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty and Tunisian counterpart Mohamed Ali Nafti discussed the crisis, stressing the preservation of Libya's unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. They advocated supporting national institutions to restore security, stability, and meet aspirations for peace and development, aligning with broader African efforts to address regional conflicts.

This focus on unity intersects with concerns over external influences, as Egypt and Saudi Arabia intensified pressure on Libyan National Army commander Khalifa Haftar to sever ties with Sudan's Rapid Support Forces, amid allegations of facilitating UAE arms and fuel supplies through eastern Libya. Haftar's son Saddam faced direct warnings in Cairo, highlighting risks to regional stability along the Egypt-Libya-Sudan border.

Compounding these geopolitical tensions, Libya's UN representative Taher Al-Sunni warned the Security Council against parallel spending outside the unified budget, emphasizing its threat to economic stability. The UK delegate echoed that the current deadlock is unsustainable, urging progress to avert explosion, while noting mounting pressures from devaluation, price hikes, and fuel shortages.

Amid economic strains, Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dabaiba halted funding for 2026 projects, cautioning against parallel expenditures that exacerbate foreign-currency imbalances and declining oil revenues. This move aims to safeguard reserves and address growing discontent, as uncoordinated spending deepens hardship nationwide.

In a bid to revitalize the energy sector, Libya awarded its first oil and gas exploration licenses since 2007 to foreign firms like Chevron, Eni, and BP, offering 20 areas with bids on five onshore blocks. The initiative seeks to boost production from 1.4-1.5 million barrels per day to 1.6 million, though political divisions pose risks.

Further supporting oil ambitions, US-based KBR is set to sign a project management consultancy deal in February for the Southern Refinery with NOC subsidiary Zallaf, establishing a local subsidiary to aid development. This aligns with goals to reach 2 million barrels per day by 2028, attracting Western investment despite instability.

Reducing reliance on Russian imports, Libya awarded fuel tenders to Western traders like Vitol, Trafigura, and TotalEnergies for monthly gasoline and diesel supplies, sourced from Mediterranean refineries. The move, including deals with OMV and others, aims to stabilize domestic fuel amid shortages while boosting production capacity

## **13. Middle East**

### **Israel**

Israel has advanced a controversial land registration process in the occupied West Bank for the first time since 1967, approving a mechanism to designate unregistered Palestinian land as state property in Area C. Critics, including Palestinians and rights groups, denounce it as de facto annexation, violating international law and undermining the Oslo Accords, while potentially displacing communities and expanding settlements.

These West Bank measures test U.S. red lines against formal annexation, as Israel incrementally asserts administrative control through legal reforms and settlement expansions. Analysts argue the steps challenge Washington's opposition without a single dramatic move, risking escalation amid ongoing tensions and drawing condemnation from Palestinian leaders for eroding prospects of a two-state solution.

Amid heightened regional security concerns, a senior Israeli defense official warned of potential nuclear ambitions in Egypt and Turkey, urging vigilant monitoring beyond Iran. Yuval Steinitz emphasized Israel's need to track secret weapons development in neighboring powers, reflecting broader anxieties over proliferation in a volatile Middle East landscape.

Escalating threats from Iran prompted Israel to raise its military alert level, anticipating a possible joint U.S.-Israeli strike. Officials cited growing doubts over U.S.-Iran

negotiations, with Prime Minister Netanyahu convening security sessions to prepare for offensive and defensive scenarios, including potential retaliation from Iran's allies.

In Gaza, the inaugural meeting of U.S. President Trump's Board of Peace pledged \$7 billion for reconstruction, envisioning high-rises and infrastructure amid Hamas disarmament goals. However, Palestinians express deep skepticism, viewing it as imposing U.S.-Israeli decisions without addressing ongoing occupation or humanitarian crises, potentially rivaling U.N. efforts.

Ceasefire fragility was underscored as Palestinian militants violated the Gaza truce 14 times between February 5 and 20, totaling 113 breaches since October. The IDF responded with strikes on Hamas targets in Gaza and a command center in Lebanon's Ain al-Hilweh camp, eliminating operatives while emphasizing compliance with international law.

Shifting to diplomatic outreach, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit on February 25-26, highlighting strengthened ties in defense, technology, and trade. The trip, Modi's second to Israel, aims to deepen cooperation and explore a "hexagon" alliance against regional adversaries.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu outlined a vision for a new alliance spanning the Mediterranean and Middle East, including India, Arab states, African nations, Greece, Cyprus, and Asian countries. This coalition aims to counter extremist axes: the Shiite led by Iran and the Sunni involving Turkey and Syria.

## **Turkey**

Turkey has condemned Israel's decision to resume land registration in the occupied West Bank, labeling it a violation of international law and an extension of genocidal policies. Communications Director Burhanettin Duran urged global intervention, arguing the move undermines Palestinian rights, peace prospects, and regional stability by altering demographics and legal structures contrary to human conscience.

Turkey has intensified its diplomacy in the Horn of Africa, exemplified by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's recent visit to Ethiopia. Discussions with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed centered on strengthening bilateral ties amid rising regional tensions, underscoring Ankara's expanding influence in promoting stability through enhanced cooperation in trade, security, and infrastructure.

During the visit, Turkey and Ethiopia signed a memorandum of understanding on energy cooperation, focusing on joint projects in electricity generation, renewables, and hydroelectric equipment. Energy Ministers Alparslan Bayraktar and Habtamu Itefa hailed the accord as a blueprint for broader collaboration across sectors.

In a joint press conference, Erdogan criticized Israel's recognition of Somaliland as an independent state, arguing it serves neither Somaliland's interests nor the region's stability and used the visit to assert his stance on Somaliland and trying to give a message to Ethiopia to refrain from doing so.

Extending its push for peace beyond the Horn, Turkey called for a permanent ceasefire and inclusive political dialogue in Sudan during a UN meeting. Envoy Ahmet Yildiz emphasized Sudanese-led solutions, cautioned against external interference, and urged global support for accountability to avert further division.

In parallel Middle East engagements, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan attended the inaugural US-led Board of Peace meeting in Washington, representing President Erdogan. He emphasized resolving the Palestinian issue, ensuring aid to Gaza, and halting Israeli ceasefire violations, while reaffirming Turkey's commitment to a two-state solution.

Amid rising tensions with Iran, Erdogan warned that a new war would destabilize the region and benefit no one, opposing military intervention. Returning from Ethiopia, he highlighted Turkey's diplomatic communications with US and Iranian leaders, positioning Ankara as a mediator urging dialogue over escalation.

Reinforcing this anti-war position, Fidan expressed hope for genuine US-Iran negotiations without conflict, noting positive signals in nuclear talks but monitoring US military deployments closely. Speaking in Washington, he underscored Turkey's preference for diplomatic resolutions to avert regional uncertainty.

Underpinning its security strategy, Erdogan affirmed Turkey's proactive approach to neutralizing threats beyond its borders without seeking permission, citing reduced risks from such operations. This policy reflects Ankara's commitment to preemptive actions for national protection in a volatile geopolitical environment.

Bolstering regional alliances, Egypt and Turkey advanced military ties through air force chiefs' discussions in Cairo on training, armaments, and coordination. Commanders Amr Saqr and Ziya Cemal Kadioglu's meeting signals deepening defense cooperation amid shifting Middle East dynamics.

This collaboration extends to arms deals, with Egypt purchasing Turkish air defenses and planning joint drone production, alongside establishing ammunition factories. The agreements, following Erdogan's Cairo visit, mark a strategic realignment, enhancing both nations' military capabilities and altering regional power balances.

## Iran

Iran and the United States engaged in indirect nuclear talks in Geneva through Omani intermediaries, achieving agreement on general guiding principles after a constructive three-and-a-half-hour session. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi highlighted good progress but noted time is needed to align positions, with Iran offering to dilute its 60% enriched uranium and allow IAEA access to damaged sites, while excluding discussions on missiles or proxies.

Building on diplomatic momentum, Iran proposed nuclear concessions such as exporting half its highly enriched uranium, diluting the remainder, and joining a regional enrichment consortium, in return for U.S. recognition of its enrichment rights and a logical timetable for sanctions relief. However, sharp divisions persist, with Washington insisting on zero enrichment and viewing Tehran's program as a weapons pathway, aiming to prevent conflict through ongoing dialogue.

Amid these negotiations, European powers met with Iran's Foreign Minister in Geneva to urge restraint and de-escalation following Israeli strikes on nuclear sites like Natanz. The E3 nations and EU emphasized verifiable confidence-building measures, with France noting Iran's openness to ceasefire-linked talks, while the U.S. absence signals potential shifts as Trump weighs military options against diplomacy.

Despite diplomatic efforts, President Masoud Pezeshkian affirmed Iran will not succumb to U.S. pressure in nuclear discussions, declaring resilience amid Trump's threats of strikes. Indirect talks in Oman and Switzerland stalled without breakthroughs, as U.S. forces amassed in the region, heightening fears of war within Trump's 10-15 day deadline for a deal.

Escalating pressures included the IAEA's censure of Iran for nonproliferation violations, the first in 20 years, prompting Tehran to announce a new, secure enrichment facility and plans to upgrade centrifuges. Backed by Western powers, the resolution demands answers on undeclared uranium and risks UN sanctions restoration, coinciding with Israeli strikes on nuclear targets.

Further straining relations, the U.S. imposed visa restrictions on 18 Iranian officials and telecommunications leaders, marking the latest punitive action against Tehran amid broader tensions over nuclear ambitions and regional activities. This move underscores Washington's strategy to isolate key figures while diplomacy falters.

As talks eclipse, U.S.-Iran relations veer toward conflict with America's largest regional military buildup since 2003, including carriers and aircraft, while Iran rejects U.S. missile proposals. Trump warned of severe consequences without a deal, spurring Gulf states and Israel to prepare for escalation, with oil prices rising amid the standoff.

Heightening the risk, U.S. strike plans on Iran include targeting individual leaders and potential regime change, inspired by Israel's elimination of IRGC commanders. Officials noted Trump's openness to overthrow, vowing dire outcomes if no agreement is reached soon, as Iran promises strong retaliation, amplifying prospects of regional war and casualties.

## **Syria**

Islamic State militants escalated threats in Syria by claiming responsibility for two attacks on February 21, 2026, targeting Syrian army personnel in Deir al-Zor and Raqqa provinces with pistols and machine guns, resulting in deaths and injuries. The group announced a "new phase" of operations against the country's leadership, labeling President Ahmed al-Sharaa a U.S. proxy and vowing intensified assaults amid recent foiled assassination attempts.

This resurgence of Islamic State activity coincides with the near-emptying of al-Hol camp in northeastern Syria, which once detained thousands of suspected militants' families. Following Syrian forces' takeover from Kurdish-led groups on January 20, 2026, most detainees fled during an unguarded period, leaving fewer than 1,000 families, primarily Syrians now being relocated to Aleppo, while foreign nationals dispersed, raising security concerns across borders.

Compounding these instability risks, the United States began withdrawing some troops from Syria on February 18, 2026, with reports suggesting a full exit of about 1,000 personnel in a conditions-based transition. The move hands primary counter-terrorism duties to the Syrian government, following the handover of a strategic base, as Washington assesses Damascus's capability to contain threats like Islamic State without direct U.S. involvement.

Amid these shifts in security dynamics, Turkey welcomed steps toward integrating Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces into state structures under a U.S.-backed ceasefire from late January 2026. President Tayyip Erdogan, speaking on February 18, expressed satisfaction with the alignment, noting Ankara's role in monitoring and advising the process to address long-standing concerns over Kurdish separatism and foster regional stability.

## **14. Europe**

This week, Hungary blocked a €90 billion EU loan to Ukraine, linking its veto to the halt of Russian oil deliveries via the Druzhba pipeline, which Budapest claims Ukraine is responsible for. The veto requires unanimity among EU member states, giving Hungary effective leverage. Kyiv and Brussels reject Hungary's claim, warning that the move disrupts Ukraine's financial support and risks undermining EU unity in backing Kyiv.

Hungary has blocked the adoption of the EU's 20th sanctions package against Russia and tied its support for sanctions and for a €90 billion EU loan to Ukraine to the resumption of Russian oil transit through the Druzhba pipeline, which was halted after damage from a reported Russian strike. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó argue that without oil flows to Hungary and Slovakia, they will not agree to sanctions or financial support, intensifying a rift within the EU over policy toward Moscow. Ukraine rejects these demands as “blackmail” and accuses Hungary and Slovakia of undermining regional energy security while Russia's attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure continue, particularly against energy systems amid a harsh winter.

Slovakia's prime minister, Robert Fico, has threatened to cut emergency electricity supplies to Ukraine if Kyiv does not restart the transit of Russian crude through its territory. Both Slovakia and Hungary have maintained exemptions from broader EU bans on Russian oil imports, reflecting their ongoing dependence on Moscow's energy. Ukraine has condemned the ultimatum as provocative, noting these EU neighbours supply significant amounts of electricity critical to Ukraine's energy grid under strain from Russian attacks.

A cohort of 14 Arab and Islamic states, along with the Gulf Cooperation Council, Arab League, and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, have issued a joint condemnation of remarks by U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, after he suggested in an interview that it would be “fine” for Israel to control broad swaths of Arab lands. The statement described the remarks as reckless and “dangerous and inflammatory,” a violation of international law and a threat to regional stability and peace efforts, underscoring deep regional sensitivities around sovereignty, the West Bank, and the prospects for a two-state solution.

Poland has formally withdrawn from the 1997 Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines, allowing it to produce and potentially deploy such mines along its eastern border with Russia and Belarus. Warsaw's government frames the move as part of its “East Shield” border defence strategy in response to perceived threats from Russia, with the capability to lay mines quickly if needed. This shift aligns Poland with other NATO eastern flank members that have exited the treaty.

Germany is confronting a broader fighter jet procurement and defence industry dilemma. Berlin is reassessing its role in a joint European next-generation fighter project (the Future Combat Air System) and considering deeper dependence on U.S. F-35 aircraft amid industrial and strategic disagreements with France and limitations in European production. This reflects tension between ambitions for a sovereign European defence industrial base and practical constraints tied to technology, export controls, and alliance commitments.

## 15. The United State

On February 17, United States Africa Command, in coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia, conducted an airstrike near Harbole, roughly 75 km northwest of Kismayo. The strike targeted al-Shabaab operatives assessed to threaten U.S. interests and partners. No U.S. casualties were reported. The operation reflects Washington’s sustained, low-footprint counterterrorism model in Somalia: precision strikes paired with reliance on Somali forces rather than expanded troop presence.

Following a U.S. Supreme Court decision that struck down broad tariff authority previously exercised under emergency powers, President Donald Trump announced an immediate increase in the global tariff rate from 10 percent to 15 percent. This adjustment uses an alternative statutory basis under Section 122 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974, which permits temporary tariffs without explicit Congressional approval. The move represents the highest global tariff level permitted under that statute and is intended to preserve protectionist trade measures after the legal setback. Exemptions reportedly include critical minerals, energy products, and select metals. International and domestic reactions are mixed, with foreign governments cautious and domestic political critics linking higher tariffs to inflationary pressures.

Somaliland stated publicly that it is willing to grant the United States access to its mineral resources and to host U.S. military bases as part of its ongoing bid for international recognition. According to Somaliland’s Minister of the Presidency, exclusive access to strategic minerals and potential base locations are offered to strengthen bilateral ties with Washington. This statement comes in the context of Somaliland’s recent recognition by Israel at the end of 2025 and reflects Hargeisa’s strategy to leverage both resources and strategic geography (across the Gulf of Aden) to gain diplomatic legitimacy. Mogadishu continues to assert sovereignty over Somaliland, suggesting potential diplomatic friction if engagement with the U.S. progresses.

The central strategic escalation is with Iran. Indirect talks in Geneva on February 17 produced agreement on general “guiding principles” but no breakthrough. Tehran signaled possible temporary enrichment suspension or participation in a regional consortium in exchange for sanctions relief, while U.S. envoys reiterated red lines including zero enrichment, missile limits, and proxy disengagement. On February 19–20, President Donald Trump gave Iran 10–15 days to reach a deal or face consequences. The deployment of the USS Gerald R. Ford to join the USS Abraham Lincoln in the Gulf marked the largest U.S. regional airpower concentration since 2003. Iran responded with live-fire drills and temporary signaling in the Strait of Hormuz while reinforcing key military and nuclear sites. The situation reflects compressed-timeline coercive diplomacy with elevated risk of miscalculation.

In Washington on February 19–20, the newly formed Board of Peace convened at the United States Institute of Peace, with Trump announcing a \$10 billion U.S. pledge for Gaza stabilization and reconstruction, alongside \$7 billion from other states. Five countries signaled willingness to contribute troops to a potential multinational force. However, the absence of Palestinian representation and limited European participation raised questions regarding mandate legitimacy and implementation viability.

Separately, during a February 16 visit to Budapest, Secretary of State Marco Rubio expanded a civil nuclear cooperation framework with Hungary—up to ten small modular reactors and potential \$20 billion investment—while openly backing Prime Minister Viktor Orbán ahead of elections. This underscores political-energy alignment within a selective bloc approach.

China, meanwhile, extended visa-free entry to Canadian and UK passport holders through year-end, following similar moves toward Australia and New Zealand, leaving U.S. citizens as the only major Five Eyes nationals still requiring visas. The move reflects calibrated diplomatic signaling amid broader strategic competition with Washington.

In the Indo-Pacific context, China closely monitored the transit of the Australian warship HMAS Toowoomba through the Taiwan Strait, reflecting ongoing sensitivities over foreign military presence in waters Beijing claims as its own. The People’s Liberation Army tracked the vessel’s movements over the weekend, reinforcing China’s posture of asserting maritime claims against regional allied naval operations.

## **16. India**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Israel this Wednesday (February 25, 2026) and address the Knesset (Israel’s parliament) as part of a two-day state visit. Netanyahu described the trip as an opportunity to deepen bilateral cooperation across economic, diplomatic, technology, and security sectors, and he framed the visit within a broader strategic vision of strengthening alliances with partners like India. The leaders are expected to discuss collaboration in high-tech fields such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing. Modi’s visit would be his second to Israel, following his first in 2017. No immediate confirmation from Indian authorities had been issued at the time of the announcement.

## **17. International and Regional Organizations**

### **United Nation**

Under the presidency of the United Kingdom, the Council held a ministerial-level meeting on 18 February addressing escalation risks in the West Bank and implementation challenges in the Gaza ceasefire process. Members expressed concern that Israel’s 15 February decision to resume land registration in Area C could amount to de facto

annexation and undermine prospects for a two-state solution. Briefers emphasized urgency in implementing Phase II of the Gaza ceasefire framework, including demilitarization and transitional governance arrangements.

On 20 February, a UN fact-finding mission reported evidence of genocidal acts by the Rapid Support Forces against Zaghawa and Fur communities in El Fasher, intensifying pressure for accountability measures. Diplomatic follow-up continued on Resolution 2772 extending the Sudan sanctions monitoring Panel of Experts through March 2026.

UN envoy Hanna Serwaa Tetteh briefed the Council on 18 February regarding Libya's institutional fragmentation and economic deterioration. Russia convened an Arria-formula meeting on 20 February focused on the "information dimension" of the Ukraine conflict, widely characterized by Western members as disinformation-oriented. The Council adopted Resolution 2816 (2026) on 18 February, extending the sanctions monitoring mandate concerning the Taliban for 12 months. The Secretary-General submitted a mandated report on the Central African Republic on 15 February, outlining MINUSCA transition planning and drawdown considerations.

## **Africa Union**

The AU concluded its 39th Ordinary Assembly in Addis Ababa and transitioned from summit-level declarations to early-stage implementation of newly adopted continental mandates. Évariste Ndayishimiye officially assumed the rotating AU Chairmanship for 2026, succeeding João Lourenço, marking a formal leadership transition at the continental level. The Assembly conducted elections for the senior leadership of the African Union Commission, including Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, and six Commissioners, signaling the start of a new administrative cycle. Outgoing and incoming leadership reiterated a "zero-tolerance" stance toward unconstitutional changes of government, though the participation of transitional authorities exposed persistent normative inconsistencies.

The AU remained actively seized of the Sudan crisis following the 12 February Ministerial session, sustaining diplomatic engagement throughout the week. Sudan's Foreign Minister Mohieldin Salem Ahmed Ibrahim was granted access to AU headquarters to lobby member states despite Sudan's suspension, reflecting calibrated diplomatic flexibility. Egypt, as outgoing PSC Chair, proposed an AU observation mission to Sudan, indicating an effort to institutionalize oversight without full normalization. The AU High-Level Ad Hoc Committee (C5) finalized a high-pressure roadmap for South Sudan, including appointment of an AU High Representative and a planned political retreat in Pretoria in March 2026.

A new Memorandum of Understanding between the AU and Regional Economic Communities was adopted to enhance operational readiness of the African Standby Force,

reinforcing subsidiarity within the African Peace and Security Architecture. Leaders officially launched the 2026 theme: “Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063,” embedding climate-security linkages within continental planning. The Africa Water Vision 2063 framework was endorsed, targeting mobilization of approximately \$30 billion annually for water infrastructure and resilience financing.

In another note, The AU Commission signed a strategic partnership with Google to advance sovereign AI capacity and digital transformation across member states. The Assembly extended the continental reparations agenda through 2026–2036, designating Ghana as champion of the initiative and institutionalizing reparative justice as a long-term diplomatic priority.

On 16 February, the AU Commission hosted the Sixth AU–UN High-Level Strategic Dialogue to align Agenda 2063 implementation with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

On 19 February, AUC Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssef engaged the AU Staff Association on administrative reform and institutional welfare, signaling internal consolidation efforts.

### **Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)**

IGAD concluded its engagement at the 39th AU Summit on 15 February under Executive Secretary Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, aligning regional priorities with continental mandates. The bloc formally handed over its chairmanship of the AU Inter-REC Coordination Platform, concluding its term overseeing cooperation among Africa’s regional economic communities.

IGAD aligned its 2026 agenda with the AU water and sanitation theme, prioritizing groundwater investment as a resilience and conflict-prevention mechanism in the Horn of Africa.

The week marked the operational phase of Sudan’s full resumption of IGAD membership following its February 9 reinstatement, framed as a reaffirmation of regional solidarity. The Secretariat initiated work on a renewed political roadmap for Sudan in coordination with transitional authorities, despite continued battlefield volatility.

A reported drone strike near the Ethiopian border on 19 February and rejection of truce terms by military actors on 20 February complicated IGAD’s mediation calculus. IGAD participated in the AU C5 Plus Summit on South Sudan, endorsing calls for immediate de-escalation and adherence to the Revitalized Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS). The bloc advanced its regional Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) strategy, emphasizing community resilience and cross-border coordination. On 16 February,

IGAD's climate center released the March–May 2026 seasonal forecast, incorporating security advisories for Ethiopia–Kenya border areas vulnerable to climate-induced resource tensions.

IGAD launched the Regional Pandemic Preparedness and Response (PREPARE) Project in Kampala with WHO support, strengthening cross-border health surveillance systems. On the margins of summit engagements, IGAD leadership met the World Bank's Regional Vice President to accelerate stabilization and displacement-focused development programming.

## **European Union (EU)**

The 62nd Munich Security Conference concluded on 15 February, serving as a central forum for EU leaders to reassess transatlantic security guarantees and infrastructure vulnerability risks. EU High Representative Kaja Kallas attempted to convene an informal foreign ministers meeting on 15 February, though limited attendance exposed internal coordination strains. Exiled Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya signaled shifting sanction dynamics between the EU and the United States regarding Minsk. Under the SAFE framework, the Council authorized defense financing for 16 member states between 11–17 February, prioritizing ammunition, missile systems, anti-drone platforms, and air defense capabilities.

On 18 February, the EU and Nigeria launched their first Peace, Security and Defence Dialogue in Brussels, formalizing cooperation on Gulf of Guinea maritime security and counter-terrorism. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer signaled closer EU–UK defense alignment toward a strengthened European pillar within NATO structures.

The EU finalized sanctions targeting individuals linked to human rights violations in Sudan and approved a €20 million European Peace Facility assistance package for Armenia. Preparatory work intensified ahead of the 23 February Foreign Affairs Council meeting, focusing on Ukraine peace parameters and Middle East stabilization.

Moreover, The EU advanced drafting of its 2026 New Security Strategy, emphasizing strategic autonomy amid recalibrated relations with Washington and Beijing. Following subsea sabotage risk assessments, the EU began developing enhanced resilience protocols for power grids and data cables as part of its 2026 security cycle.

## **ECOWAS**

During the 55th End-Year Convergence Council meeting in Monrovia (16–18 February), finance ministers and central bank governors intensified preparations toward the July 2027 Eco currency target. Discussions indicated a potential phased Eco launch excluding

UEMOA countries, possibly beginning with Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and The Gambia.

Officials acknowledged that no member state currently meets all primary convergence criteria, underscoring structural macroeconomic constraints. Security reporting during 10–20 February indicated weakened counter-terrorism coordination following AES withdrawal, enabling expanded activity by JNIM and ISGS.

Meanwhile, ECOWAS maintained a pragmatic engagement strategy with AES states, prioritizing bilateral patrols such as Senegal–Mali operations in the Kayes region over broad punitive measures. Post-AU Summit consultations accelerated operationalization planning for a 5,000-strong ECOWAS Standby Force headquartered in Abuja. Nigeria and Angola finalized arrangements easing diplomatic mobility on 16 February, reinforcing intra-African institutional connectivity. Implementation advanced on a regional measure reducing air transport taxes by 25%, aimed at deepening trade and tourism integration. The West African Development Bank (BOAD) launched its 2026–2030 Strategic Plan on 18 February, allocating significant financing toward transport, digitalization, and agricultural resilience.

## NATO

At the conclusion of the Munich Security Conference on 15 February, Secretary General Mark Rutte formalized progress toward a stronger European Pillar within NATO, reinforcing burden-sharing while maintaining the U.S. nuclear umbrella. On 16 February, NATO’s Nuclear Planning Group reviewed readiness of dual-capable aircraft and modernization of B61 gravity bomb systems amid heightened Russian rhetoric. A high-level NATO–Ukraine Council session on 17 February confirmed allied consensus to provide expanded deep-strike capabilities to counter Russian logistics infrastructure. Sweden and Finland hosted a Nordic-Baltic 8 summit within NATO structures on 18 February, declaring full operational capability of the Joint Expeditionary Force for Baltic subsea protection. NATO leadership engaged Jordan and Mauritania on 19 February to address Southern Flank spillover risks from Sudan and Sahel instability. On 20 February, NATO launched its Integrated Cyber Defense Center, enabling potential Article 4 consultations in response to hybrid or gray-zone attacks. The Secretary General issued compliance warnings on 21 February to remaining member states below the 2% GDP defense spending benchmark. On 22 February, NATO finalized tailored partnership programs with Japan and South Korea focused on intelligence sharing related to missile proliferation risks.



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