



# 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

Mar 09 - Mar 16, 2026

## 1. Ethiopia

During the week, the working visit of Abiy Ahmed to the United Arab Emirates signaled Ethiopia's continued effort to consolidate strategic partnerships with key Gulf actors at a time when the Red Sea and Middle East corridors are becoming increasingly central to global economic and security dynamics. During the visit, discussions with UAE leadership focused on strengthening bilateral relations, expanding economic cooperation, and reinforcing political coordination between the two countries.

Strategically, the visit reflects Ethiopia's broader foreign policy approach of deepening ties with influential Gulf partners that play a major role in investment, infrastructure development, logistics, and financial support across the Horn of Africa. The Ethiopia-UAE relationship has increasingly evolved into a multidimensional partnership built on economic cooperation, diplomatic trust, and shared regional interests. The implication is that strengthening relations with the UAE could further position Ethiopia as a key geopolitical bridge between the Horn of Africa and the Gulf region. In the near term, this partnership may translate into increased investment, economic cooperation, and political coordination on regional stability. Over the longer term, deeper Ethiopia-UAE engagement could enhance Ethiopia's strategic leverage within Red Sea geopolitics while supporting its broader economic transformation agenda.

At the regional level, developments on March 11 highlighted Ethiopia's continuing role in shaping Horn of Africa security diplomacy when leaders of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia held tripartite discussions aimed at strengthening cooperation on peace and security in the region. The dialogue, which coincided with Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's visit to Djibouti for consultations with President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh, reflects growing recognition among regional leaders that coordinated political frameworks are necessary to manage shared security challenges, including maritime security, extremist threats, and economic integration. Ethiopia's participation in the trilateral format reinforces its long-standing position as a central diplomatic actor in Horn politics and suggests that Addis Ababa is attempting to institutionalize regional consultation mechanisms rather than relying solely on ad hoc bilateral engagements. If sustained, such coordination could help stabilize political relations across the Horn and strengthen collective responses to emerging security threats.

Parallel diplomatic activity during March 9-11 further illustrated Ethiopia's effort to maintain balanced engagement with multiple actors amid escalating tensions in the Middle East. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hadera Abera held a series of consultations in Addis Ababa with diplomats from Qatar, Oman, Jordan, Kuwait, and the

United Arab Emirates, while also meeting separately with ambassadors from Israel and Saudi Arabia to exchange views on the rapidly evolving regional situation. These consultations highlight Ethiopia's emerging role as a diplomatic interlocutor capable of maintaining communication with diverse Middle Eastern actors whose interests often diverge. By engaging multiple sides simultaneously, Addis Ababa signals its intention to preserve diplomatic neutrality while advocating dialogue and stability, an approach that helps safeguard Ethiopian economic interests tied to Gulf trade routes, remittances, and diaspora communities.

On March 11, 2026, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio held a phone conversation with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed focusing on cooperation in regional stability in the Horn of Africa, counterterrorism coordination, economic prosperity, and long-term security. The discussion reflected continued strategic engagement between United States and Ethiopia at a time of shifting regional dynamics. Strategically, the emphasis on security and economic cooperation indicates Washington's recognition of Ethiopia's role as a key stabilizing actor in the Horn, while Addis Ababa's engagement reinforces its effort to maintain strong relations with major global partners and position itself as an essential security and diplomatic hub in the region.

Domestically, political developments on March 10 introduced a more conciliatory tone into a sensitive electoral dispute when the opposition group Tigray Democratic Solidarity (Simret) withdrew its lawsuit challenging the decision of the National Election Board of Ethiopia concerning five contested constituencies in the Tigray Region. The withdrawal suggests recognition that the dispute may require political dialogue rather than purely judicial resolution, highlighting the ongoing complexities of post-conflict governance and electoral preparation in northern Ethiopia. While the issue remains politically delicate, the move reduces immediate legal confrontation and may open space for negotiation between federal authorities and regional actors.

Simultaneously, from March 8–10, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, accompanied by First Lady Zinash Tayachew, visited Dire Dawa and Harar to review ongoing development initiatives and public service reforms. During the visit, he assessed the progress of Dire Dawa's corridor development project, which is improving public spaces while creating economic opportunities through facilities such as electric vehicle charging stations, shops, and standardized parking areas. He also toured urban farming initiatives and the Dire MESOB One-Stop Service Center, which integrates multiple institutions to deliver dozens of government services through a single platform. In Harar, the Prime Minister reviewed a similar MESOB service center designed to modernize public service delivery and enhance institutional coordination. The visit also included stops at Nasiol Cave and Kundudo Mountain, and concluded with community engagements during Ramadan Iftar, highlighting efforts to combine development oversight, administrative reform, and community connection.

Alongside these political developments, recent governance initiatives have emphasized Ethiopia's continuing efforts to strengthen internal administrative capacity and institutional coordination. Reforms aimed at improving service delivery, strengthening institutional effectiveness, and advancing national development planning indicate a broader policy direction focused on consolidating governance structures as the country prepares for its next electoral cycle.

Meanwhile, reports indicate that the Tigray People's Liberation Front recently denied circulating claims that its leaders were holding negotiations with the government of Ethiopia led by Abiy Ahmed, rejecting rumors that senior figures had traveled to Addis Ababa for talks. From a strategic perspective, this posture reflects a pattern in which certain TPLF actors generate political tension while simultaneously distancing themselves from dialogue channels that could ease the situation. By dismissing engagement while amplifying political confrontation, such messaging risks creating unnecessary anxiety for ordinary citizens in the Tigray Region, effectively prolonging uncertainty for communities that have already endured years of conflict.

In practical terms, this approach risks turning political rhetoric into a persistent burden for the people of Tigray themselves. Continued denial of engagement and escalation of political narratives can delay normalization, undermine the spirit of the Pretoria Peace Agreement, and keep the region trapped in cycles of political uncertainty rather than advancing toward stability, development, and reintegration within Ethiopia's broader national recovery process.

Taken together, the week's developments reveal a multi-layered strategic trajectory. Ethiopia is deepening ties with influential Gulf partners, reinforcing regional diplomacy within the Horn of Africa, maintaining balanced engagement amid Middle Eastern tensions, and cautiously managing internal political disputes. The convergence of these diplomatic and domestic dynamics suggests that Addis Ababa is pursuing a strategy aimed at stabilizing its internal political environment while simultaneously positioning itself as a key diplomatic and economic actor within the wider Red Sea and Horn of Africa geopolitical landscape.

## **2. Sudan**

This week in Sudan reflects continued escalation in aerial warfare, intensifying humanitarian collapse, and growing geopolitical positioning around the conflict's eventual outcome. Drone strikes against civilian areas expanded across several regions, while international organizations warned of mounting civilian casualties and worsening protection conditions. At the same time, diplomatic and geopolitical developments indicate that external actors are increasingly positioning themselves around both the conflict's trajectory and potential post-war reconstruction.

Drone warfare remained the defining operational feature of the conflict. A strike attributed to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in White Nile State killed at least seventeen people, including students, after a drone attack struck a civilian area. The incident reflects a broader pattern of aerial attacks targeting populated locations rather than strictly military objectives. Markets and other civilian gathering sites also came under attack in West Darfur and South Kordofan during the week. These incidents reinforce concerns that drone operations are increasingly embedded into the war's operational strategy, exposing civilians directly to the battlefield.

International monitoring bodies report a sharp rise in casualties linked to these strikes. According to United Nations reporting, more than 200 civilians have been killed in drone attacks across Sudan in recent weeks. Officials have expressed concern that the proliferation of unmanned aerial systems is accelerating the scale and reach of violence. Analysts warn that the expanding use of drones allows both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and RSF to strike targets deep beyond frontline areas, effectively broadening the war's geographic footprint and increasing civilian vulnerability.

Beyond the immediate battlefield effects, international observers continue to warn about the risk of mass atrocities, particularly in Darfur. Analysts note that patterns of violence in the region echo earlier phases of the Darfur conflict that drew global concern in the early 2000s. Reports documenting targeted killings, destruction of villages, and widespread displacement have renewed warnings about the possible reemergence of genocide-level violence. The continued deterioration of security conditions in Darfur remains one of the most alarming dimensions of the conflict.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. United Nations agencies describe Sudan's war as one of the most severe and prolonged humanitarian crises in the world. Millions of people remain displaced internally or across neighboring countries, while humanitarian access remains severely constrained by insecurity and infrastructure destruction. Refugee impacts are particularly visible in neighboring Chad, where reports indicate that approximately 76 percent of Sudanese refugee children are currently out of school due to overcrowded camps, limited education facilities, and funding shortages. Aid organizations warn that the long-term social consequences of this educational disruption could be severe.

Inside Sudan, humanitarian organizations also highlight the growing burden of the war on women and vulnerable populations. Activists report widespread violations affecting women, including displacement, loss of livelihoods, and exposure to violence. The collapse of basic services and protection mechanisms has compounded these risks, leaving many communities without access to healthcare, education, or legal support.

Economic pressures and war related disruptions are also becoming increasingly visible in daily life. This week, the government moved to reassure the public that there is no

nationwide fuel shortage despite long queues forming at fuel stations in Khartoum and other areas. Authorities stated that gasoline and diesel stocks remain sufficient for several weeks, though panic buying has been triggered by concerns over regional tensions in the Middle East and disruptions to fuel storage infrastructure following recent drone attacks on facilities near Port Sudan. Officials indicated that some storage infrastructure had been damaged, complicating supply logistics even as authorities attempt to maintain stable distribution.

Political developments also drew attention during the week. Former senior official Osman Mohamed Yousuf Kibir denied the authenticity of a leaked video in which he appeared to criticize Sudan's military leadership. The video suggested that Islamist groups had previously pressured Abdel Fattah al-Burhan during the 2019 transition period. Kibir dismissed the footage as fabricated and accused external media outlets of promoting narratives intended to justify recent sanctions targeting Sudanese Islamist groups. The controversy emerges amid heightened international scrutiny following the United States designation of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood and the Al-Baraa bin Malik Brigade as terrorist entities earlier in March.

At the geopolitical level, Sudan is increasingly being viewed through the lens of wider regional rivalries. Analysts suggest that Sudan could become a bargaining element within broader diplomatic engagement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, particularly as regional powers seek to stabilize tensions while maintaining influence across Red Sea and Horn of Africa security dynamics. Such developments reflect how Sudan's conflict has become intertwined with wider geopolitical negotiations rather than remaining solely a domestic crisis.

Meanwhile, China signaled its intention to play a role in Sudan's eventual reconstruction. Beijing's acting diplomatic representative in Sudan announced that China has incorporated proposals to assist with rebuilding the country into its foreign policy planning. The announcement reflects Beijing's interest in supporting infrastructure recovery and economic development once hostilities subside. Chinese officials emphasized support for Sudan's unity and territorial integrity while expressing readiness to invest in rebuilding damaged infrastructure, including water systems, energy facilities, and industrial assets that have been heavily damaged during the war.

Despite these long-term discussions about reconstruction, the immediate reality on the ground remains one of continuing instability. Drone warfare continues to expand, civilian casualties are rising, and humanitarian needs are deepening across multiple regions. The convergence of military escalation, economic disruption, and geopolitical maneuvering suggests that Sudan's conflict is evolving into a prolonged and multidimensional crisis.

Overall, this week's developments highlight three major trends shaping the trajectory of Sudan's war. First, the normalization of drone warfare is accelerating civilian casualties

and expanding the battlefield. Second, humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate both inside Sudan and among refugee populations in neighboring states. Third, external actors are increasingly positioning themselves for influence over Sudan's political and economic future, even as the conflict itself shows little sign of near-term resolution.

### **3. Egypt**

Egypt confronted the escalating Iran-related regional conflict this week by first addressing its immediate economic vulnerabilities. With Strait of Hormuz disruptions driving up global energy costs and shipping risks, the petroleum ministry on March 10 raised gasoline, diesel and vehicle natural-gas prices by up to 30 percent, the fifth adjustment under the IMF programme, to pass on exceptional pressures from disrupted supplies and insurance premiums. Simultaneously, on March 9 Cairo proactively offered international traders leases on 29 million barrels of surplus Red Sea storage capacity at Ain Sokhna and Ras Badran, deliberately positioning its ports as the safest alternative logistics hub, generating fresh revenue streams and reducing dependence on vulnerable Gulf transit routes.

These pragmatic economic safeguards flowed directly into a proactive diplomatic strategy aimed at collective Arab defence against the very threats disrupting those routes. At the emergency Arab foreign ministers' meeting on March 9, Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty called for activating "Arab national security" through a joint Arab force, condemning Iranian strikes on Gulf states as violations of sovereignty and urging unified frameworks to deter further escalation without exposing Egypt to direct combat. This leadership posture, protecting Cairo's strategic depth while avoiding unilateral costs, was reinforced through targeted bilateral outreach: Abdelatty's March 15 calls with his Kuwaiti and Bahraini counterparts reaffirmed Egypt's "full solidarity and support," rejected any justification for attacks on Gulf stability, and explicitly pushed for intensified joint Arab mechanisms plus immediate diplomatic de-escalation to shield shared economic interests.

President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi echoed the same calculation on March 15 in a direct call to Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, condemning attacks on Qatar, pledging various forms of assistance and stressing the need to strengthen joint Arab action for regional security. By embedding itself as the indispensable coordinator among Gulf partners, Egypt intends to safeguard its massive Emirati and Qatari investments, Suez revenues and energy partnerships while elevating its own influence as Washington's preferred mediator.

To broaden containment beyond Arab ranks and maintain leverage with Western powers, Egypt aligned with European partners on March 14 when Abdelatty told French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot that combined diplomatic efforts were essential to prevent an all-out regional war, including halting Israeli violations in Lebanon; the ministers committed to sustained coordination within their strategic partnership to prioritise de-

escalation and practical solutions. This European track complements the Arab and Gulf moves, giving Cairo balanced channels should Arab unity efforts stall.

Extending the same logic of controlled engagement to secure its southern flank, Cairo has deepened its calculated involvement in Sudan's civil war. Since the Rapid Support Forces' advances and El Fasher setbacks, Egypt has intensified political and material backing for General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan's regular army, deploying targeted support to prevent extremist spillover, refugee waves and threats to its 1,200-kilometre border and Nile water lifeline, while carefully avoiding direct ground intervention.

These layered responses earned external validation when the UK Foreign Office on March 12 updated its Egypt travel advice amid the Middle East war yet preserved ferry services between Aqaba and Taba/Nuweiba, retained standard visa protocols and stopped short of evacuation lists or crisis registers. By demonstrating effective crisis management across economic, diplomatic and security fronts, Egypt signals to investors and partners alike that it remains the region's most stable anchor, intent on converting geopolitical turbulence into reinforced alliances, diversified energy income and unchallenged strategic depth from the Red Sea through the Gulf and into the Nile basin.

#### **4. Eritrea**

According to a BBC report, Eritrean satirical cartoonist Biniyam Solomon has been released by the regime after 15 years of detention. His release forms part of a recent pattern of Eritrean authorities freeing various detainees. In December 2025, 13 individuals arrested in 2007 for an alleged "assassination attempt" on a senior regime figure were also released.

A meeting reportedly held in Asmara brought together senior officials, scholars, and diplomats "to deepen understanding of Eritrea's true history." This gathering appears aimed at promoting the regime's narrative in light of current geopolitical realities, particularly its position in the Horn of Africa and ongoing tensions with Ethiopia.

Kjetil Tronvoll, an academic specializing in Ethiopia and Eritrea, warned in a recently circulated interview that rising tensions between the two countries could escalate into a major regional conflict. Tronvoll suggested that overlapping alliances, proxy relationships, and existing regional crises could transform a bilateral confrontation into a broader war, which he described as potentially "Africa's World War II."

Eritrea's Information Minister, Yemane Gebremeskel, has consistently criticized analyses emerging from Ethiopia. This week, in response to a Horn Review publication on Eritrea's ties with Iran, he denounced the portrayal of Eritrea as a "malleable proxy" of external forces, warning that such narratives harm regional peace and stability. This reflects the regime's growing frustration at its inability to control the narrative on its regional actions and clandestine relationships with external actors.

## 5. Djibouti

President Ismail Omar Guelleh formally submitted his candidacy for the upcoming presidential election scheduled for April 10, 2026. The Interior Ministry confirmed the filing which follows recent constitutional amendments that removed previous age limits for candidates. This development marks President Guelleh's bid for a sixth term in office extending his tenure which began in 1999. The announcement has garnered support from his governing coalition though it has also drawn expressions of concern from opposition figures regarding the pace and nature of political transition.

Djibouti hosted a trilateral meeting convening President Guelleh, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. The leaders gathered at President Guelleh's private residence in Haraamous for consultations framed around strengthening regional coordination. Discussions encompassed peace and security in the Horn of Africa, the road of economic integration among sub regional states and shared responses to prevailing political and security challenges. The meeting described by the Djiboutian presidency as part of a series of high-level engagements signals an on going effort to define a new direction for trilateral and regional cooperation.

Foreign Minister Abdulkader Houssein Omar held a telephone conversation with Egyptian Foreign Minister Dr. Badr Abdelatty focusing on strengthening bilateral relations and exchanging views on key regional issues. The discussion scored the positive momentum in Egyptian-Djiboutian ties with emphasis on expanding economic, trade and investment cooperation particularly in infrastructure, logistics zones, energy and agriculture. On regional matters the two ministers affirmed the importance of preserving state sovereignty and territorial integrity with the Egyptian minister explicitly rejecting recognition of "Somaliland" and expressing full support for the unity of the Federal Republic of Somalia. The conversation also addressed the interconnected security of the Red Sea and stability in the Horn of Africa.

In a separate diplomatic initiative, Foreign Minister Omar held a phone call with his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein, to discuss escalating military developments in the Middle East. The minister expressed Djibouti's solidarity with Iraq warned of the risks of wider regional conflict and stressed the importance of sustained diplomatic efforts to achieve ceasefire and stability.

The U.S. Embassy in Djibouti issued a security alert citing on going regional tensions emanating from the Middle East conflict and specific public threats against U.S. interests. The alert advised increased caution in areas near the U.S. Embassy and Camp Lemonnier, the sole permanent U.S. military base in Africa hosting approximately 4,000 personnel. The embassy implemented a reduced onsite presence, cancelled routine consular services and remains operational for emergencies only. This elevated posture reflects broader concerns regarding the potential for regional spill over, with analysts highlighting Camp

Lemonnier's importance and its possible vulnerability to Iranian or proxy actions amid the expanding US-Israel military campaign against Iran. The Bab el-Mandeb strait's proximity and its critical role in global trade further amplify security considerations for Djibouti.

## **6. South Sudan**

This week in South Sudan was marked by intensifying political instability, escalating violence in Jonglei State, and growing concerns that the country's fragile power sharing framework is beginning to unravel. Humanitarian organizations warned that recent military decisions and rising insecurity are accelerating displacement and restricting aid access, while political developments surrounding corruption investigations, election preparations, and international diplomacy highlight the uncertain trajectory of the country's transition.

Violence and displacement in Jonglei State remained the most urgent security development. Clashes and rising tensions around Akobo continued to drive mass civilian movement following a military evacuation order issued by government forces. Humanitarian organizations estimate that more than 200,000 people have been affected by the removal of aid operations and support structures in the area after humanitarian actors were forced to withdraw. According to field updates from humanitarian agencies, the evacuation order and subsequent insecurity have left large civilian populations without food assistance, medical services, or protection mechanisms. Aid groups warn that the sudden loss of humanitarian presence could deepen already severe conditions in a region that has long faced food insecurity and chronic violence.

The broader conflict environment reflects deeper political fragmentation linked to the weakening of South Sudan's power sharing system. Analysts warn that growing tensions between government forces and opposition factions are contributing to renewed localized violence and increasing displacement across several regions. The deterioration of political cooperation within the transitional government is widely viewed as a key factor driving instability, raising concerns that the fragile peace agreement that ended the country's civil war is gradually losing effectiveness.

International humanitarian organizations and civil society groups have called for urgent de escalation and stronger protections for civilians. Advocacy groups emphasize that all armed actors must comply with international humanitarian law and allow humanitarian access to affected populations. The security situation continues to restrict aid delivery in multiple areas, with humanitarian access reports indicating persistent obstacles including insecurity, bureaucratic restrictions, and logistical constraints that limit relief operations.

Political dynamics within the country also intensified during the week. Human rights organizations raised concerns regarding recent corruption related arrests carried out by authorities. According to the Human Rights Watch, the arrests raise questions about

transparency and due process. Observers note that while anti corruption efforts are necessary, selective or politically motivated prosecutions risk undermining trust in government institutions during an already fragile transitional period.

Debate over the country's proposed electoral process also continued to grow. Government officials have been discussing preparations for future elections as part of the transitional roadmap. However, critics and analysts argue that the political and security environment is not yet stable enough to sustain credible elections. Many civil society actors maintain that sustainable peace and institutional reforms must precede any national vote to avoid exacerbating existing tensions. Analysts note that unresolved security issues, weak institutions, and persistent political rivalries could undermine electoral legitimacy if elections are held prematurely.

Economic pressures are also shaping the country's political environment. Authorities in Juba are pressing oil companies for approximately \$2.5 billion in payments amid ongoing financial disputes related to the country's petroleum sector. Oil remains the backbone of South Sudan's economy, providing most government revenue. However, disruptions linked to regional instability, infrastructure challenges, and disputes with industry partners have strained the sector's performance. The government's push for additional payments reflects the urgent fiscal pressures facing the state as it struggles to fund public services and maintain stability.

At the diplomatic level, President Salva Kiir traveled to South Africa for diplomatic discussions aimed at strengthening bilateral relations and exploring avenues for political and economic cooperation. Such diplomatic outreach reflects Juba's effort to maintain regional support and attract investment during a period of domestic uncertainty.

Humanitarian conditions across South Sudan remain deeply concerning. Aid agencies report persistent access constraints that limit their ability to deliver assistance to vulnerable communities. These restrictions include security risks, administrative barriers, and infrastructure limitations that complicate transportation and logistics. The humanitarian access snapshot for February highlights how such obstacles continue to affect operations across multiple regions, reducing the reach of aid programs at a time when needs remain extremely high.

Overall, developments this week underscore the fragile balance currently shaping South Sudan's political and security environment. Escalating violence in Jonglei, continued mass displacement, and growing tensions within the power sharing system illustrate the risks facing the country's transition. At the same time, economic pressures, humanitarian access challenges, and debates over the timing of elections reveal the broader structural difficulties confronting the state. Without renewed political cooperation among key actors and improved protection for civilians, the trajectory of instability and displacement in South Sudan is likely to continue.

## 7. Somalia and Somaliland

### Somalia

The formal endorsement of revised constitutional provisions by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has precipitated a political schism. The move which transitions the national charter from a provisional framework has drawn immediate and severe criticism from key stakeholders. Former President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo publicly condemned the action asserting that it threatens national cohesion and governance structures. This sentiment is echoed by the Federal Member States of Puntland and Jubbaland which have warned that the process risks excessive centralization of power and unilateral mandate extensions. The Somali Future Council has also weighed in declaring its opposition to any extension of the presidential and parliamentary terms showing the potential for a protracted legal and political standoff.

A severe political rift between the federal government and the Southwest State has devolved into armed confrontation. Opposition factions seeking to remove Southwest State President Abdiasis Laftagaren have received reinforcements and weaponry leading to intense military mobilization in the Bay region. This friction culminated in armed clashes resulting in the capture of the town of Qansah-dhere by opposition forces. This incident highlights the volatile intersection of federal politics, regional power struggles and the contentious nature of the recent constitutional changes posing a direct challenge to the federal member state's stability.

Puntland has signaled its intention to proceed with regional elections independently should national consensus fail by the mandated deadlines. This development scores the growing centrifugal forces within the federal system and the potential for a de facto fragmentation of the electoral process further complicating the national political landscape.

The operational tempo against Al-Shabaab remained high throughout the week. The United States Africa Command conducted airstrikes in coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia targeting militant positions as part of sustained counterterrorism efforts. Concurrently the Somali National Army (SNA) advanced ground operations under the banner of "Operation Badar," successfully seizing a key militant hideout in the Xawaadley area of Middle Shabelle. The Ministry of Defense highlighted this as a gain in clearing insurgent strongholds. Further south in the Hiran and Mudug regions, the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), with international backing, executed two operations that resulted in the elimination of 22 Al-Shabaab fighters including individuals reportedly involved in planning future attacks. These actions demonstrate a continued, multi-pronged approach to degrading the group's capabilities.

On the international front Somalia's Foreign Minister Abdisalam Abdi Ali engaged in diplomatic outreach holding a phone conversation with his Azerbaijani counterpart,

Jeyhun Bayramov. During the call, the Minister condemned recent drone strikes on Azerbaijani territory reaffirming Somalia's solidarity and its commitment to the principles of sovereignty and international law. This act serves as a clear articulation of Somalia's foreign policy stance regarding state-on-state aggression.

## **Somaliland**

The diplomatic development is the accelerated pace of engagement between the Somaliland administration and the State of Israel. Following Israel's formal recognition of Somaliland in late 2025, this week saw moves toward deeper ties. The Somaliland administration publicly extended an invitation for Israel to establish a presence at the Berbera port emphasizing its location on the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb corridor. This invitation follows high level exchanges, including a January visit by Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar and the exchange of ambassadors. The administration has framed this as a mutual opportunity for economic and security cooperation, signalling a shift toward operationalizing the recent diplomatic recognition.

President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi "Irro" articulated a new phase for the region stating its focus has shifted from internal consolidation to prioritizing global recognition. This assertion which cites recent diplomatic gains including ties with Israel scores the administration's intent to leverage its current foreign policy momentum to build a compelling legal, political, and historical case for sovereignty on the international stage. An upcoming visit to Israel at the end of March is positioned as a further step in this campaign.

In an escalation of its sovereignty claims the Somaliland administration announced it has lodged a formal complaint with United Nations agencies regarding the administration of its airspace. This legal move asserts its right to full control over aviation management and directly challenges the Federal Government of Somalia's authority in this domain. This action represents a new front in the dispute seeking international adjudication or intervention on a core attribute of statehood.

Parallel to diplomatic overtures reports emerged detailing discussions regarding a potential Israeli security or military presence in Somaliland. Citing sources familiar with the matter these reports suggest Israel is exploring coastal sites, potentially including elevated terrain west of Berbera for intelligence gathering and possible operational capabilities against Iran-aligned Houthi forces across the Gulf of Aden. Somaliland officials have confirmed on going discussions without denying the potential for a security component, framing any such arrangement as contributing to regional stability.

The Federal Government of Somalia has issued a formal warning against any establishment of a foreign military facility in Somaliland. Somalia's State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ali Omar, stated that such an action on what it considers Somali territory would lack legal standing without the federal government's consent and would risk

regional destabilization and external confrontations. This statement presents a firm diplomatic counter to the reported Israel-Somaliland discussions and reasserts Mogadishu's claim of sovereignty over the territory, setting the stage for a potential international legal and diplomatic conflict.

## **8. Yemen**

Yemen's internationally recognized government rejected new port shipping surcharges and fee increases, introduced amid the broader Iran-US-Israel conflict and disrupted maritime traffic in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Authorities argue that higher fees would worsen an already severe humanitarian and economic crisis, raising import costs and complicating aid delivery.

An Al Jazeera opinion piece warned that Yemen's humanitarian crisis is intensifying, with over half the population, around 18 million people, projected to face worsening food insecurity in early 2026. Market collapse, insufficient humanitarian funding, and constrained aid delivery exacerbate the situation, underscoring urgent calls for international intervention to avert famine.

An analysis published on Barron's notes that the 2026 Iran war, now in its third week, has focused global attention on the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has effectively blocked, affecting about 20 % of global oil shipments. The report highlights emerging threats at the Bab El Mandeb Strait, where Iran-aligned Houthi forces could disrupt maritime traffic if called upon by Tehran. Strategic importance, internal Houthi factionalism, and potential Red Sea disruptions could further destabilize global energy markets and trade.

## **9. Kenya**

Kenya has been dominated by security pressures at home and diplomatic responses abroad, alongside emergency state action to deal with one of the deadliest natural disasters in recent years. The government has been issuing official statements and travel guidance for Kenyan citizens in the Middle East after the conflict there escalated, activating emergency helplines through embassies and consulates, setting up evacuation plans, and coordinating with airlines to facilitate safe movement of nationals as the wider Gulf conflict unsettles regional stability. Meanwhile, explosions from extreme weather have transformed into a major domestic security challenge

Nairobi has publicly expressed concern over the expansion of the Middle East conflict theatre and its potential targeting of critical infrastructure, while continuing to engage its foreign missions in contingency planning and citizen protection. At the same time, media reporting highlights fears that the deteriorating Middle East situation could reduce Gulf states' engagement in the Horn of Africa and potentially weaken regional stability if key partners scale back involvement, adding uncertainty to Kenya's external security environment.

Internally, national security agencies are also dealing with ongoing extremist threats and the longstanding risk from al-Shabaab along Kenya's northeastern border with Somalia, a challenge that continues to shape defence priorities, even as official reporting over the past week has focused more on international tensions and disaster response than direct cross-border incidents. Finally, regional diplomatic efforts and discussions about security cooperation, peacekeeping roles, and Kenya's influence in East Africa remain in motion behind the scenes, about which detailed developments beyond government statements and travel advisories have not been widely reported in the past few days.

## 10. The Gulf Countries

Ethiopia's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Hadera Abera, held meetings with Gulf representatives in Addis Ababa over the week. On 9 March, he met Saudi Ambassador Abdullah Hassen Alzahrani; on 10 March, he engaged with Qatari Ambassador Saad bin Mubarak Al Nuaimi, Omani Ambassador Afkar Nadhim Al Farsi, Kuwaiti Chargé d'Affaires Abdulaziz Hamadah, and UAE Chargé d'Affaires Rashed Abdulla Alzoy Alshehhi. These meetings appear prompted by the ongoing Middle East conflict, where Gulf states have been primary targets of Iranian retaliatory attacks.

Iran carried out a new wave of missile and drone attacks across the Gulf from 13–14 March, targeting multiple states hosting US assets. UAE air defenses intercepted nine ballistic missiles and 33 drones, though debris from an intercepted drone ignited a fire at the Fujairah oil bunkering hub, causing minor injury and temporary disruption. Qatar intercepted four ballistic missiles and several drones over Doha, prompting evacuations, while Saudi Arabia destroyed six missiles aimed at al-Kharj. In Kuwait, two drones struck the Ahmed al-Jaber Air Base, injuring three personnel and causing material damage, with additional drones hitting radar infrastructure at Kuwait International Airport. Jordan intercepted 79 of 85 missiles and drones, though debris fell across multiple governorates.

Gulf energy producers, including Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain, have declared **force majeure** on oil and gas shipments since late February 2026, citing Iranian attacks on infrastructure and threats to the Strait of Hormuz. These declarations excuse contract obligations due to "events beyond control," reflecting disrupted exports, unsafe shipping routes, and rising global oil and LNG prices amid heightened market uncertainty.

Ukrainian military drone defense experts are being deployed this week to Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia to share experience in intercepting Iranian Shahed drones. The teams are assisting Gulf partners in counter-drone tactics, leveraging Kyiv's operational experience from defending against nightly drone barrages in Ukraine. The deployment accompanies broader discussions on potential equipment and training exchanges, signaling growing defense cooperation between Ukraine and Gulf states under aerial threat.

## Saudi Arabia

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed visited the UAE last week, meeting President Mohammad Bin Zayed and Vice President and Dubai Ruler Mohammed bin Rashid. The visit underscores the consolidation of a partnership that has steadily deepened since 2018, anchored in sustained political dialogue and close leadership ties. Amid heightened Gulf tensions, Ethiopia prefers quiet diplomatic engagement with key partners rather than public positioning.

Iran continues to target the UAE. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has warned that ports, docks, and “American hideouts” in the UAE could be legitimate strike targets, urging local evacuations following US strikes on Iran’s Kharg Island. Gulf officials interpret these warnings as part of Tehran’s ongoing pressure on regional states hosting US military assets.

On 10 March, a drone strike caused a fire at the **Ruwais industrial zone**, home to the UAE’s largest refinery with over 900,000 bpd capacity. No injuries were reported. This incident adds to a series of attacks across the Gulf, including temporary shutdowns of Saudi Arabia’s largest refinery and Qatar’s LNG export facility.

A drone attack near fuel storage at Dubai International Airport caused a fire and temporary flight suspensions, with some flights diverted to Al Maktoum Airport. Emirates briefly halted services. The attack forms part of a broader wave of Iranian-linked strikes on Gulf infrastructure, including oil facilities, ports, and airports.

On 13 March 2026, an Iranian-linked drone struck the **Dubai International Financial Centre**, with debris damaging a building. No injuries were reported, and air defenses intercepted additional threats. Iran had previously warned it could target Western financial infrastructure, highlighting escalating risks to Gulf economic hubs amid ongoing hostilities.

## UAE

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah on 12 March 2026, expressing full support for Saudi Arabia amid heightened regional tensions linked to the US–Israel–Iran conflict. The leaders discussed regional developments and reaffirmed commitments to joint peace and stability initiatives, reflecting longstanding strategic cooperation under the Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement.

US Senator Lindsey Graham publicly warned Saudi Arabia and other GCC states of “**consequences**” if they do not participate in the US–Israel military campaign against Iran. He questioned why Riyadh should expect continued US defense support despite repeated Iranian attacks, reflecting frustration among some US lawmakers over Gulf restraint and sparking debate on the future of security cooperation.

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

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

The security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has continued to deteriorate, particularly in the eastern provinces of North Kivu Province and Ituri Province, where multiple armed groups remain active. Fighting between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the March 23 Movement (M23) has persisted around strategic areas close to Goma, maintaining pressure on government forces and contributing to a worsening humanitarian crisis as thousands of civilians continue to flee the violence. Kinshasa has repeatedly accused Rwanda of supporting the M23 rebels, allegations that Kigali denies, while tensions between the two countries remain a major source of instability in the Great Lakes region. At the same time, insecurity in Ituri province has also remained severe due to attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces, an armed group linked to the Islamic State, which continues to carry out deadly assaults on villages and civilian populations. These overlapping conflicts have reinforced concerns among regional analysts that eastern Congo remains one of Africa's most complex conflict zones, where multiple insurgencies, ethnic militias, and cross-border tensions intersect.

Diplomatically and geopolitically, the crisis in eastern Congo has continued to draw significant regional attention during the past week as mediation and military initiatives attempt to prevent the conflict from escalating further. Regional diplomacy led by João Lourenço, president of Angola and a key mediator in the peace process, has focused on reducing tensions between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo while encouraging dialogue aimed at implementing ceasefire commitments. At the same time, the regional military presence has remained an important part of the security landscape following the deployment of troops under the Southern African Development Community mission to eastern Congo, which replaced the earlier East African regional force and aims to support Congolese military operations against armed groups. The conflict has also continued to draw international diplomatic attention, including discussions within the United Nations Security Council regarding the evolving mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as the country gradually moves toward a phased withdrawal of the long-standing peacekeeping mission. Together these developments illustrate how the Congolese conflict remains not only a domestic security crisis but also a regional geopolitical issue involving neighboring states, international organizations, and complex mediation efforts aimed at stabilizing the Great Lakes region.

## **Mali**

Mali has remained at the center of the Sahel's escalating security crisis as jihadist groups continue to intensify their operations across the country. Armed organizations linked to al-Qaeda, particularly Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), have sustained pressure on Malian state authority through attacks on military forces, supply routes, and strategic infrastructure, reflecting the broader deterioration of security conditions across the central Sahel. The growing insurgency is widely viewed as one of the most severe security crises in Africa, with militant groups exploiting governance gaps, fragile institutions, and regional fragmentation to extend their territorial influence while threatening both civilian populations and government control across large rural areas.

In a significant diplomatic shift, Mali and the United States are reportedly nearing an agreement to resume American drone surveillance and intelligence operations over Malian territory. Following the loss of its strategic base in Niger, Washington is seeking to re-engage with the Sahel to monitor jihadist networks and salvage its declining regional influence. This move places Mali at the center of a high-stakes balancing act. While the military leadership in Bamako continues to strengthen ties with Russia and lead the "Alliance of Sahel States" toward a security model independent of the West, it remains open to pragmatic cooperation with the U.S. when it serves national interests. Ultimately, Mali has emerged as a primary arena for strategic competition, where global powers must now navigate a complex landscape of regional realignment and counter-terrorism recalibration.

## **Burkina Faso**

Burkina Faso has remained at the center of a rapidly deteriorating security environment in the Sahel, where jihadist insurgencies continue to shape the country's political and strategic trajectory. Intelligence and security reports indicate that armed groups linked to al-Qaeda have sustained coordinated attacks against military positions and local defense forces across parts of the Sahel region, maintaining pressure on supply routes and state authority. These extremist networks now operate with growing coordination and capacity, conducting large-scale assaults on military installations and expanding territorial influence in rural areas, which has intensified the broader instability affecting Burkina Faso and neighboring states.

At the same time, the internal political environment has shown signs of tension within the ruling military structure led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré. Security alerts and explosions reported near the presidential palace in Ouagadougou during the transition period revived concerns about possible dissent within the armed forces and the fragility of the current junta's internal cohesion, although authorities dismissed speculation about a coup attempt.

This regional shift is also closely linked to the expansion of Russia's influence in the Sahel, where Moscow has deepened political, military, and informational engagement with AES governments amid declining Western security involvement. At the broader diplomatic level, discussions among international policymakers and regional actors have increasingly focused on the urgent need for coordinated responses to violent extremism across the Sahel, with growing concern that the weakening of traditional regional security mechanisms and the fragmentation of alliances could further complicate efforts to stabilize countries such as Burkina Faso. Together, these developments show that Burkina Faso's security crisis is no longer purely domestic but is now deeply embedded in a wider geopolitical contest involving regional blocs, global powers, and evolving counter-terrorism strategies across the Sahel.

## **Niger**

Niger has remained deeply affected by the worsening security environment across the Sahel, where jihadist insurgencies linked to both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State continue to operate across the country's western regions and the volatile tri-border zone shared with Mali and Burkina Faso. Regional monitoring groups reported that extremist networks have intensified pressure across the central Sahel, exploiting weakened regional coordination and the gradual withdrawal of Western counter-terrorism missions that previously supported operations in Niger. These developments come as militant organizations increasingly target military convoys, rural communities, and transportation routes, reflecting a broader trend in which armed groups are expanding their operational reach across the region.

During the past week, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the ongoing detention of Bazoum and calling for his immediate release, a move that highlights continued tensions between Niger's military leadership and several Western governments and institutions concerned about governance, constitutional order, and human rights in the country.

At the same time, the Sahel has become an arena of growing international competition, as global powers reassess their engagement with the region. Western countries are reconsidering diplomatic and security strategies following the loss of several military bases and partnerships, while Russia has expanded political and military cooperation with Sahelian military governments, contributing to a shifting balance of influence across West Africa. These overlapping developments in security, diplomacy, and geopolitical alignment demonstrate that Niger's trajectory is closely tied to the broader transformation of the Sahel's political order and the evolving struggle to address violent extremism across the region.

## **Chad**

Chad has been increasingly drawn into the wider regional security crisis driven by the ongoing war in neighboring Sudan, which continues to spill across its eastern frontier. A major development was a drone strike in the Sudanese border town of Adikong, close to Chad, which killed civilians and raised alarm about the intensifying use of drones in the Sudan conflict and the risk of further destabilization along the frontier. At the same time, cross-border insecurity linked to fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces has already resulted in casualties among Chadian troops and repeated violations of Chadian territory, pushing N'Djamena to deploy thousands of soldiers along its nearly 1,400-kilometer eastern border and maintain the closure of the Sudan–Chad border to contain the conflict's spillover. The war in Sudan has therefore become a direct national security challenge for Chad rather than a distant regional crisis, with armed groups, weapons trafficking, and militia movements increasingly crossing into Chadian territory and threatening stability in the eastern provinces.

Diplomatically and geopolitically, these developments have placed Chad in a delicate strategic position within the broader regional power competition unfolding across the Sahel and Central Africa. The government of President Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno has attempted to maintain official neutrality in the Sudan war while managing accusations and tensions surrounding alleged supply routes and regional alliances linked to external actors such as the United Arab Emirates and other partners involved in the conflict. At the same time, Chad is dealing with the humanitarian and political consequences of the Sudan crisis, hosting roughly 1.3 million Sudanese refugees and returnees, which has placed heavy pressure on already fragile eastern provinces facing food insecurity and limited state capacity. These pressures underline Chad's growing geopolitical importance as a strategic crossroads between the Sahel, North Africa, and Central Africa, where regional conflicts, refugee flows, and shifting external partnerships are increasingly converging and shaping the country's peace, security, and diplomatic posture.

## **Equatorial Guinea**

Equatorial Guinea's government has been focused on both internal preparedness and international engagement rather than direct conflict or acute security crises, continuing a pattern of tightly controlled state activity centered on high-profile diplomatic events and strategic partnerships. Officials in Malabo have been finalizing security coordination and logistical planning for the upcoming historic visit of Pope Leo XIV, including preparations with departments of security and defense to ensure protection for the papal delegation and visiting crowd. Public records from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirm that the country dispatched representatives to the opening of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, underscoring Malabo's ongoing engagement in multilateral diplomatic forums even as domestic news coverage remains state-driven.

Regionally and geopolitically, Equatorial Guinea has continued to occupy a strategic role in the Gulf of Guinea and continental diplomacy, with Malabo's selection as host for the 11th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) from March 27–29 positioning the country as a venue for broader diplomatic convergence and partnership building among African and ACP leaders. This major summit is expected to draw a range of international delegations and position Equatorial Guinea as a focal point for discussions on development cooperation, peace, and security within the wider Africa-Caribbean-Pacific context.

Independent security analysts have noted the expanding presence of Russian institutions and personnel in Malabo, including a newly opened cultural center and reported deployments of Africa Corps personnel described by observers as part of Moscow's broader footprint in the region, although government officials officially deny any Russian combat presence.

## **12. North Africa**

### **Morocco**

Morocco has cast Gulf security as an extension of its own strategic horizon, with Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita stressing collective Arab stability at a League of Arab States meeting and invoking King Mohammed VI's long-standing doctrine of regional solidarity. Rabat framed deterrence against proxy networks and diplomatic cohesion as complementary tools for protecting national interests and partners.

A new arms-transfer snapshot saw the Stockholm data place Morocco ahead of regional peers as Africa's top importer, reflecting a 12 percent rise in major weapons between 2021 and 2025 and underscoring tensions with Algeria. The report highlights diversified suppliers and a rapid modernization push that includes US, Israeli and French deliveries, with implications for force posture, procurement transparency and regional balance.

Fighting along the Western Sahara front flared as the Sahrawi People's Liberation Army reported concentrated strikes on Moroccan positions in the Hawza sector, a claim carried by the Sahara Press Service. The incident underlines persistent kinetic risk in the disputed territory, potential escalation drivers between Rabat and Polisario-aligned forces, and how local clashes can interact with wider Morocco-Algeria strategic friction.

Economic signals show Morocco strengthening soft-power assets even as security spending rises, with the hotel development pipeline placing the kingdom second only to Egypt in African room projects and drawing significant investment interest. Expansion in hospitality and tourism infrastructure complements defense modernization, shaping a dual narrative of growth and securitization that will influence foreign investment, regional connectivity and Morocco's diplomatic leverage.

## **Algeria**

Algeria's parliament approved an amended law criminalizing French colonial rule from 1830 to 1962 this week, holding France legally responsible for tragedies including nuclear tests, killings, torture and resource plundering. Revisions dropped calls for apologies and reparations per the Senate and President Tebboune's stance against compensation, while retaining nuclear victim provisions. Rapporteur Fawzi Bendjaballah stressed Algeria's unyielding defense of its historical memory and sovereignty.

Extending this anti-colonial resolve to present-day causes, particularly given France's recent backing of Moroccan claims over Western Sahara, South Africa's Ambassador Ndumiso Ntshinga reaffirmed support for the Sahrawi people's self-determination during his March 8 meeting with Sahrawi Foreign Minister Mohamed Yeslem Beissat at the embassy in Algiers. The diplomat highlighted South Africa's commitment rooted in its own liberation principles, earning praise from the Sahrawi minister for consistent solidarity with oppressed peoples and international law.

This diplomatic framework is complemented by strengthened military ties, as vessels from Russia's Northern Fleet—the anti-submarine ship Severomorsk and tanker Kama—docked at Algiers port on March 11 for a four-day visit under the 2026 cooperation program. The Russian delegation visited Algerian naval base commanders to discuss enhanced maritime collaboration and officer exchanges, illustrating Algeria's strategy to bolster defense partnerships amid global realignments.

## **Libya**

This week, Egypt and Turkey held the sixth round of consultations in Cairo on March 10, focusing on Libya's political and security developments. Egyptian Assistant Foreign Minister Basel Salah, heading the Libya file, and Turkish Director General Ali Onaner led the delegations, exchanging views on supporting the UN-led political process while preserving Libya's unity and sovereignty. The talks, running parallel to Africa consultations on the Horn of Africa and Sahel, reaffirmed commitment to dialogue among Libyan parties and conditions for simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections that meet public aspirations for stability.

Shifting focus to immediate North African neighbors, Tunisian Interior Minister Khaled Nouri announced plans on March 10 to conclude development agreements with Libya for border regions, mirroring existing pacts with Algeria. Speaking during commemorations of the tenth anniversary of the 2016 Ben Guerdane attacks in Medenine governorate, Nouri highlighted efforts to strengthen security, investments, and economic opportunities along the shared frontier. The initiative aims to curb informal activities and promote joint stability through coordinated border development.

In bilateral European engagement, Libyan Foreign Minister Taher Al-Baour met French Ambassador Thierry Vallat on March 10 to strengthen ties and review political progress. Discussions addressed the Government of National Unity's work on security, development, and preparations for elections, with the ambassador commending advances in the Misrata Free Zone. Both sides expressed determination to deepen cooperation, linking these efforts directly to broader regional support for Libya's transition.

Advancing global dialogue, Libya's UN Ambassador Taher El-Sonni held a constructive meeting on March 11 with US Ambassador to the UN Mike Waltz. They examined challenges facing the political process, the value of continued US backing for unifying state institutions, and potential economic and energy investments to foster peace. The exchange, occurring as the US assumed the UN Security Council presidency for March, also connected Libya's stability to wider regional and international security.

These international dialogues culminated in Libya's participation, through its chargé d'affaires, in an emergency meeting of Arab Ambassadors in Paris on March 11-12. The session coordinated Arab positions on regional developments and threats to sovereignty, focusing on implementing Arab League Resolution 9241 adopted March 8. Libya emphasized solidarity, preference for dialogue over escalation, and informed French officials, aligning with calls for lasting peace based on international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative.

## **13. Middle East**

### **Iran-Israel-USA war**

Iran's leadership changed dramatically on March 9 when the Assembly of Experts appointed Mojtaba Khamenei, son of the assassinated Ali Khamenei, as the new Supreme Leader. His inaugural message, read aloud on state television without any video or audio of him appearing, demanded national unity, vowed endless revenge for the martyrs, and declared the Strait of Hormuz would stay closed to Western vessels as leverage against the United States and Israel. The format fueled speculation about his condition after earlier strikes, yet the statement reaffirmed Tehran's commitment to resistance and proxy operations through Yemeni and Iraqi groups.

This transition unfolded amid intensifying U.S.-Israeli operations. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth described March 10 as the campaign's "most intense day," with expanded airstrikes across Iran. President Trump announced that U.S. forces had totally destroyed ten Iranian mine-laying vessels in the Strait of Hormuz and later obliterated more than ninety military targets on Kharg Island, including missiles, radar, and munitions, while deliberately sparing oil infrastructure to avoid immediate global market chaos. These actions signaled Washington's determination to degrade Iran's capabilities without triggering broader economic fallout.

Iran retaliated swiftly and broadly. On March 10 the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps launched missiles and drones against U.S. bases in Qatar, Iraq, the UAE, and Bahrain while firing rockets into central Israel. A further barrage on March 15 struck near Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, injuring two civilians. Hezbollah joined the fray with its largest rocket salvo yet on March 12, prompting Israeli forces to expand operations in southern Lebanon, strike Beirut suburbs, and issue evacuation orders. These coordinated responses showed Tehran's strategy of spreading the conflict across multiple fronts.

The fighting quickly spilled beyond bilateral borders. NATO air defenses in Turkey intercepted multiple Iranian ballistic missiles violating its airspace, including incidents on March 9 and a third days later, prompting President Erdoğan to deploy F-16 fighters to Northern Cyprus and warn against further provocations. Gulf states, facing Iranian strikes on ports and infrastructure, quietly requested Ukrainian anti-drone expertise, leading to specialized teams deploying in Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. This regional entanglement heightened fears of wider instability.

International institutions reacted with clear positions. On March 12 the UN Security Council adopted a resolution condemning Iran's attack on its neighbors in a 13-0-2 vote, with China and Russia abstaining. The same day UN human rights experts denounced the U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran and Lebanon as unlawful aggression, citing violations of international law and risks of impunity. These parallel actions reflected global alarm over the conflict's conduct and spillover while exposing deep divisions among major powers.

Israeli leadership matched the escalation in rhetoric. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, during a March 12 press conference, issued a veiled threat against Iran's top figures, stating he would offer no "life insurance" to its generals or leadership. The statement came hours after Khamenei's message and Hezbollah's barrage, underscoring Israel's intent to target command structures and pressuring Tehran amid the two-front pressure involving Lebanon.

The humanitarian toll grew severely. UNICEF reported on March 11 that more than 1,100 children had been killed or injured across the region since late February, including roughly 200 in Iran and 91 in Lebanon. Iranian officials cited over 2,000 total deaths, mostly civilians, with hospitals in Tehran treating hundreds of child casualties and schools and medical facilities heavily damaged. A March 14 airstrike on an Isfahan factory further killed at least fifteen workers, compounding the civilian suffering.

Inside Iran, authorities moved aggressively to secure the home front. Revolutionary Guards and intelligence services detained dozens suspected of aiding Israeli targeting or acting as foreign agents. In a notable March 9 operation in Kurdistan Province, the IRGC dismantled an armed anti-regime cell, seizing weapons and framing the raid as protection against internal collaborators. These crackdowns intensified alongside earlier protest-

related arrests, revealing the regime's focus on eliminating perceived vulnerabilities during external bombardment.

U.S. forces also suffered losses. On March 12 two KC-135 refueling tankers collided mid-air over Iraq while supporting the air campaign, killing six American airmen from units in Florida and Ohio. The Pentagon confirmed the incident as accidental rather than enemy action, yet it marked the first acknowledged U.S. combat-related fatalities and added political pressure on Washington as the operation intensified.

Iran's sustained closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which normally carries about 20 percent of global oil, triggered sharp price spikes and forced Japan to begin releasing a record 80 million barrels from its strategic reserves. With diplomatic channels closed, mediation offers from Oman and Egypt rejected, and both sides insisting on full cessation of strikes before any talks, the conflict evolved by week's end into a prolonged regional crisis marked by leadership uncertainty, relentless airstrikes, proxy involvement, and cascading security and energy consequences.

## **Turkey**

Turkey bolstered its air defenses after repeated ballistic threats over its eastern provinces, announcing deployment of a Patriot battery and coordinating intercepts with allies. The move, framed as a protective precaution, signaled Ankara's urgent focus on border security while preserving strategic ties to alliance partners, and it set the tone for successive diplomatic engagements intended to avoid direct involvement in the widening regional conflict.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan used public addresses to urge restraint in the Iran-Israel escalation while underscoring Ankara's diplomatic activism. His repeated message, that Turkey will not be dragged into open war, paired deterrence with outreach, aiming to reassure NATO allies while preserving bilateral channels to regional powers and minimizing domestic panic as missile incidents tested Turkish airspace.

Turkey's foreign and defense leadership briefed parliament and opposition figures on spillover risks, reflecting an effort to institutionalize crisis management and maintain domestic legitimacy. Hakan Fidan and the defense team presented technical assessments and contingency options as a procedural move designed to show cross party consultation while signaling to external actors that Ankara was coordinating security responses without endorsing escalation.

Ankara publicly attributed technical evidence about missile flights while Tehran officially denied responsibility, creating diplomatic ambiguity that drove behind the scenes consultations. That gap, public claims of evidence on one side and denials on the other, heightened the importance of back channel verification and allied cooperation, making

attribution a central policy challenge as Turkey tried to deescalate without foregoing deterrence.

Turkey's travel advisory for nationals and related evacuation readiness underscored the human security dimension of the regional crisis and showed how diplomatic decisions translated into practical protective measures. Advisories to avoid non-essential travel to neighboring Iraq and contingency evacuation planning highlighted Ankara's dual priorities of citizen security and minimizing politicized cross border incidents that could escalate the wider confrontation.

Ankara's diplomacy remained multi theater as the president telephoned Volodymyr Zelensky and reiterated Turkey's offer to host negotiated talks, showing Turkey's simultaneous push to mediate in Europe and the Middle East. This diplomatic posture reinforced Turkey's self-presented role as crisis manager, linking Black Sea security concerns to wider efforts to prevent diversion of international attention from other conflicts.

Turkey's public warnings about the humanitarian cost of Israeli operations in Lebanon emphasized a balancing act, pressing Israel to limit civilian harm while criticizing potential excesses. The government framed these warnings in humanitarian and regional stability terms, asserting that military campaign spillover in Lebanon could produce mass casualties and complicate Turkey's security calculations and neighborhood diplomacy.

Domestic politics intersected with the regional crisis when the high-profile corruption trial of opposition figure Ekrem İmamoğlu proceeded in Ankara. Observers viewed the case as politically consequential, because while national security dominated headlines the trial reminded domestic audiences that political rivalry and rule of law concerns continue to influence Turkey's internal stability and international image.

Washington and allied travel guidance for their citizens in parts of southeastern Turkey reflected external anxieties and influenced Ankara's messaging, prompting Turkish authorities to emphasize readiness. Those external advisories also amplified Ankara's push to work with NATO partners on air defense coordination while avoiding bilateral ruptures with regional powers.

Taken together, the week left Turkey positioned between deterrence and diplomacy, with strengthened air defenses and technical attribution claims coexisting with sustained outreach to neighbors and global actors. Ankara's clear stated objective, to avoid being drawn into the Iran Israel confrontation, shaped security measures, parliamentary briefings, travel guidance and high-level phone diplomacy throughout March 9 to March 15.

## Syria

Syria opened transit corridors for humanitarian actors to support Lebanon, allowing Red Cross and Red Crescent movement through Syrian territory to bolster cross border relief. By facilitating humanitarian access, Damascus linked its domestic posture to regional humanitarian diplomacy, seeking both practical relief outcomes and a modest rehabilitative signal to neighbors while the Lebanon crisis exerted cross border humanitarian pressures.

Ahmad al-Sharaa participated in a high-level videoconference of regional leaders, warning that military escalation threatens national security. Damascus framed participation as solidarity with neighbors and an attempt to shape regional dialogue, leveraging the meeting to emphasize the risks of spillover and to argue for coordinated regional responses to minimize further civilian suffering.

A potentially consequential financial development saw U.S. officials publicly welcome the reactivation of Syria's central bank account at the New York Fed, a technical move with broad economic implications. The step suggested limited U.S. re engagement on specific financial channels, raising the prospect of incremental economic normalization that could affect reconstruction funding, regional trade arrangements and Damascus's leverage with external patrons.

The UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria released findings calling for justice and reforms while documenting persistent abuses, keeping human rights accountability on the international agenda. That report connected normative pressure to diplomatic openings and underscored the tension between reintegration gestures and demands for transitional justice, framing donor confidence and legal risk as central constraints on reconstruction ambitions.

At home, Syrian authorities reported arresting a notorious militia leader in Homs and publicized the capture to demonstrate internal control and a narrative of restoring law and order. The operation fed into Damascus's broader messaging about consolidating sovereignty and dismantling armed remnants, an effort intended to reassure potential investors and neighboring states about improving stability even as questions about due process remained.

Asaad al-Shaibani used a Ramadan diplomatic iftar to signal reassertion of Syria's regional role while highlighting plans for reconstruction and an international donors conference. The speech blended domestic legitimacy with outreach to diplomats, presenting reconstruction as both an economic necessity and a diplomatic lever to re-engage former partners and attract investment conditional on political concessions.

Security operations in the east resulted in coordinated arrests of suspected ISIS operatives, a reminder that jihadist sleeper cells remain a destabilizing threat even as territorial ISIS

control has ended. Damascus emphasized seizures of arms and arrests as evidence of effective security cooperation, and those operations also served to reassure neighbors and backers that eastern desert regions are contested but being actively managed.

A localized explosion in Homs, reported without immediate claims of responsibility, reanimated concerns about remaining insurgent capabilities and covert sabotage. Even when casualty details were limited, the incident underscored persistent vulnerabilities in government held urban areas and linked back to the government's recent law enforcement announcements and high profile detentions as part of a wider counter insurgency narrative.

Economic diplomacy took shape with the establishment of a Syrian side of a Syrian Lebanese business council, an initiative aimed at strengthening bilateral trade ties as Lebanon endures turmoil. This step linked economic normalization to humanitarian and political calculations, because closer commerce with Lebanon can facilitate mutual recovery but depends on security, financial access and regional political dynamics.

Across Syria, official holiday declarations and symbolic commemoration planning reflected Damascus's attempt to project normalcy and national unity during a fraught regional environment. Those domestic measures, public holidays, diplomatic receptions and reconstruction pledges, were coordinated to signal internal cohesion while seeking to reduce the perceived political cost of limited external re engagement and frame Syria's next phase as reconstruction oriented.

## **14. Europe**

Between March 9 and 15, 2026, Germany, Spain, and Italy deployed defensive military assets to Cyprus in response to Iranian drone strikes on the British base at Akrotiri. Germany sent air-defense systems and naval forces, coordinating with France and Greece, while emphasizing protection and solidarity rather than offensive action. Chancellor Friedrich Merz stressed strengthening EU defense to hedge against potential U.S. disengagement and criticized the U.S. lift of Russian oil sanctions for boosting Moscow's capacity to fund the Ukraine war.

Spain, under Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, dispatched the frigate Cristóbal Colón and other defensive assets but refused U.S. base access for operations against Iran, framing the strikes as unjustified and dangerous. Madrid emphasized diplomacy, multilateralism, and UN reforms while maintaining a principled "no to war" stance, which strengthened domestic support but risked diplomatic friction with Washington.

Italy, led by Giorgia Meloni, deployed the frigate Federico Martinengo and air-defense systems, balancing alliance commitments with critique of unilateral U.S.-Israeli actions. Rome condemned the campaign as legally problematic and stressed preventing Iran's

nuclear breakout while monitoring the broader “arc of crises” across the Mediterranean and Gulf.

Between March 9 and 15, 2026, European leaders responded to Iranian drone strikes on the British base at Akrotiri and escalating Middle East tensions. France, Greece, and Cyprus held an emergency trilateral meeting, while France deployed the frigate *Languedoc* defensively. The European Parliament considered activating Article 42.7 TEU, and the G7 discussed releasing strategic oil reserves, lowering Brent from \$119 to ~\$102 per barrel.

European energy markets reacted sharply, with natural gas prices rising 53 percent and stocks falling, highlighting the continent’s vulnerability. Renew Europe and other MEPs called for coordinated protection of maritime routes and accelerated energy independence.

The European Parliament debated the U.S.-Israel military operation against Iran, with Ursula von der Leyen urging stronger European foreign policy, security integration, and strategic autonomy. Renew Europe emphasized de-escalation, while Left lawmakers warned of global destabilization.

At BEDEX 2026, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte stressed adapting to a more dangerous environment, strengthening the European pillar of the alliance, and boosting defense spending toward 5 percent of GDP by 2035 amid ‘hybrid threats from Russia’.

The EU extended sanctions on Russia until September 2026 despite Hungary and Slovakia’s objections, while Antonio Costa criticized U.S. sanctions relief on Russian oil. Russian attacks continued in Ukraine, and the Munich Security Report highlighted Europe’s need to assume greater regional security responsibilities amid U.S. uncertainty.

## **15. Global Superpowers**

### **The U.S.**

The United States intensified its military operations against Iran, with President Trump characterizing the conflict as “ahead of schedule” and framing it as a mission to force Iran into unconditional surrender. U.S. and Israeli strikes destroyed Iranian naval and minelaying capabilities near the Strait of Hormuz, prompting retaliatory missile and drone attacks across the region.

Trump publicly declared that the U.S. had effectively won the initial phase of the war but insisted that operations would continue until Iran’s nuclear and missile programs were fully neutralized. The administration faced internal debates over exit strategies, political risks, and the impact of rising fuel prices. Ukraine contributed interceptor drones and military personnel to defend U.S. and Gulf bases, expanding its role in regional security amid diverted Western attention from its conflict with Russia.

At the United Nations, the U.S., as Security Council chair, successfully advanced discussions on Iran's nuclear program and sanctions enforcement despite opposition from Russia and China. A separate resolution condemning Iranian retaliatory strikes passed unanimously among voting members, though China and Russia abstained. A targeted U.S. bombing raid hit Iran's Kharg Island military facilities, sparing oil infrastructure, which Trump described as "totally obliterating" Iran's military presence there.

During the escalation of the Iran conflict in March, Donald Trump held a telephone conversation with Vladimir Putin that both sides described as "frank and constructive." The discussion reportedly covered the evolving war with Iran and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. According to official readouts, the two leaders exchanged views on the risks of regional escalation in the Middle East and the potential consequences for global energy markets and maritime security, particularly around the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump also urged allied states to deploy naval forces to secure the Strait of Hormuz, a critical chokepoint for global oil supply, while protests in Washington highlighted civilian casualties and public opposition to the war. Over 24,000 Americans were evacuated from the Middle East, and the EU renewed sanctions on Russia in response to ongoing attacks in Ukraine, criticizing U.S. temporary relief on Russian oil sanctions as undermining European security.

## **Russia**

Between March 9 and 14, 2026, Vladimir Putin convened a meeting on the global oil and gas market, warning that escalating instability in the Middle East, particularly the war involving Iran, could threaten global energy supplies, drive up prices, restrict flows, and disrupt investment patterns. The surge in energy prices has nonetheless produced tangible economic gains for Russia, with Russian Urals crude rising to roughly \$72 per barrel, surpassing Moscow's budget assumptions and providing additional fiscal space.

As the conflict intensified from March 9 to 12, global oil benchmarks such as Brent and WTI reportedly climbed above \$100 at peak moments, generating a sharp rise in Russian energy revenues and redirecting international political attention away from the Ukrainian front.

European officials, including Antonio Costa, argued that Moscow has become the primary geopolitical beneficiary of the Iran crisis, noting that higher energy revenues could strengthen Russia's ability to finance the war while Western military resources, including U.S. air defense systems, are increasingly diverted toward Middle Eastern contingencies.

During the same period, the Kremlin provided diplomatic support for Tehran in international forums such as the United Nations while avoiding direct military involvement in order to prevent escalation with United States or Israel. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also indicated that Moscow sees no evidence that the Iran

crisis has diminished U.S. engagement in discussions over the Ukraine conflict, though reports indicate that the shifting global focus has nonetheless created strategic space for Russia to intensify military pressure on Ukrainian targets.

## **16. International and Regional Organizations**

### **United Nation**

From March 8 to March 15, 2026, the United Nations Security Council—under the presidency of the United States—was dominated by escalating tensions in the Middle East. On March 11, the Council adopted UN Security Council Resolution 2817 by a vote of thirteen in favor with China and Russia abstaining. The resolution strongly condemned Iran for missile and drone attacks targeting Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Jordan, demanding an immediate halt to attacks on civilian infrastructure and threats to maritime trade. A competing Russian draft resolution calling for a general ceasefire without identifying responsible parties failed to pass after receiving only four votes in support.

The Council also addressed multiple other crises. On March 9 it held its quarterly briefing on Afghanistan, where officials from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan warned that restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women and girls continue to hinder international engagement. On March 10, disarmament officials presented new findings indicating that more than 100 undeclared sites may be linked to Syria’s historical chemical weapons program, significantly exceeding previously declared figures. On March 11, the Council received a humanitarian briefing regarding rising civilian casualties in Lebanon, urging both Israel and Iran to avoid turning Lebanese territory into a battleground. Further discussions on March 12 examined tensions surrounding Iran’s nuclear program and the legality of the “snapback” sanctions mechanism invoked by Western states.

The Council also reviewed developments in Sudan, where the Panel of Experts submitted its interim report to the 1591 Sanctions Committee, and monitored the deteriorating political and security environment in South Sudan ahead of the mandate renewal for the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Alongside these operational matters, diplomatic efforts intensified between Japan and African member states to advance broader UN Security Council reform, particularly the demand for permanent African representation to address what has long been described as a historical imbalance in global governance.

### **Africa Union**

During the period from March 8 to March 15, 2026, the African Union (AU) concentrated on electoral integrity, diplomatic engagement, and conflict mediation across several regions of the continent. On March 14, the AU Commission announced the deployment of its Election Observation Mission to the Republic of the Congo ahead of the presidential

election scheduled for March 15, reinforcing the organization's role in safeguarding electoral credibility. Earlier in the week, on March 8, AU Commission Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf issued a continental message marking International Women's Day, emphasizing the importance of women's participation in governance and development across Africa.

Within the AU's peace and security framework, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) chaired during March by the Eswatini addressed several pressing crises. In a communiqué released on March 10, the Council expressed deep concern regarding the political crisis in Madagascar, following the dismissal of the Prime Minister and Cabinet on March 9. The PSC urged Malagasy authorities to respect the agreed 24-month transition timeline and maintain inclusive political dialogue. On March 12, the AU Commission Chairperson condemned attacks on civilians in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, reaffirming support for the Luanda Peace Process and Nairobi Peace Process aimed at stabilizing eastern DRC. The AU also continued operationalizing the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), building on ministerial-level mandates adopted earlier in February.

Diplomatically, the AU engaged in several international issues beyond the continent. On March 9, the AU Commission released a statement addressing the deteriorating security situation in the Persian Gulf, reflecting the organization's expanding interest in maritime security developments with global economic implications. On March 13, the AU joined the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in condemning the closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque, reiterating diplomatic support for the State of Palestine. The same day, the AU convened a ministerial consultation during the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, aiming to harmonize the African common position on gender-related political and security issues.

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

Between March 8 and March 15, 2026, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) prioritized regional security, particularly in relation to the fragile situation in South Sudan, while also advancing migration governance and diplomatic reintegration within the bloc. Following a serious security incident earlier in the month, IGAD convened its 43rd Extraordinary Summit to address the risk of renewed civil conflict in South Sudan. Leaders agreed to establish a ministerial-level sub-committee tasked with traveling to Juba to initiate inclusive dialogue under the framework of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). At the same time, the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM) was instructed to investigate clashes in Nasir and an attack on a United Nations helicopter in order to ensure accountability.

A notable leadership transition also occurred on March 11 when Asrat Denero, who previously chaired the CTSAMVM monitoring mission, was appointed to a senior security position within the Addis Ababa Police Commission, marking a shift in the region's monitoring leadership structure. Diplomatically, IGAD welcomed the Republic of the Sudan back into full participation in the organization, formally ending a two-year diplomatic freeze and reopening a regional platform for negotiations regarding the Sudanese internal conflict.

IGAD also advanced regional governance initiatives addressing migration and security. On March 9, the organization convened a technical workshop in Arta, Djibouti, to finalize guidelines for the harmonization of migration and displacement data across member states. The effort aims to strengthen responses to cross-border security threats and large-scale displacement flows. Further integration progress was recorded on March 13 when IGAD and the Uganda government agreed on a roadmap for ratifying the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, an important step toward deeper regional economic and political integration. IGAD also continued advocacy under its Women, Peace, and Security agenda, promoting a new accountability framework for gender-responsive security policy during events linked to the Commission on the Status of Women. On March 15, the organization published research highlighting the role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in border areas between Ethiopia and South Sudan, particularly in managing refugee flows and local arms conflicts.

## **ECOWAS**

During the same period, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) focused on institutional reforms, mediation efforts involving Sahelian states, and responses to broader international security developments. On March 11, the ECOWAS Commission convened a meeting of regional experts in Accra, Ghana, to validate the operationalization of the ECOWAS Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC). The body is intended to strengthen civil society participation in regional governance by providing a consultative platform for youth organizations, women's groups, and other stakeholders.

The organization also continued preparations for Senegal to assume leadership of the ECOWAS Commission for the 2026–2030 term following decisions taken in late 2025. The transition process includes the nomination of successors to the current Commission President Omar Alieu Touray. At the strategic level, consultations previously held in Côte d'Ivoire from March 3 to March 6 fed into preparations for a forthcoming Special Summit of Heads of State and Government, which will examine the future direction of regional integration.

Security diplomacy remained a central priority. ECOWAS mediators—led by the Presidents of Senegal and Togo—continued attempts to re-engage Mali, Burkina Faso,

and Niger, despite the three states declaring their withdrawal from ECOWAS irreversible earlier in 2026. The bloc maintained an “open-door” approach and transitional negotiation period extending until July 2026 in an effort to redefine political and security cooperation. Meanwhile, an emergency summit of the Mano River Union was scheduled for March 16 in Conakry, Guinea, bringing together the leaders of Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire to address emerging territorial disputes and prevent cross-border instability. On March 15, ECOWAS also issued a statement expressing concern about escalating tensions in the Middle East and Gulf region, warning that broader hostilities could disrupt global trade flows and food supply chains.

## **European Union**

Between March 8 and March 15, 2026, the European Union pursued a major recalibration of its foreign policy posture while preparing for an important leaders’ summit. From March 9 to 13, the EU convened its annual Ambassadors’ Conference in Brussels, gathering more than 145 diplomatic representatives to review global strategic challenges. During the conference, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called for a more “interest-driven” and “realistic” foreign policy, arguing that the EU must adapt to a changing international order rather than relying solely on traditional rules-based frameworks. The EU’s top institutional leaders—including High Representative Kaja Kallas, European Council President António Costa, and European Parliament President Roberta Metsola—presented a coordinated “Team Europe” approach aimed at strengthening institutional cohesion.

In the European Parliament, members debated the EU’s response to escalating tensions involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, while Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister of Armenia, addressed lawmakers on March 12, highlighting the deepening relationship between Armenia and the EU. Concurrently, the European Commission advanced work on a new European security strategy designed to enhance the bloc’s strategic autonomy in a multipolar world. On March 11, the Commission reported progress under the SAFE (Security and Defence Assistance for Europe) program, with the first wave of joint procurement payments expected later in March to strengthen member-state military capabilities. By mid-March, seventeen EU states had also invoked a “national escape clause” allowing them to exceed standard fiscal limits in order to increase defense spending.

Preparations also intensified for the European Council Summit scheduled for March 19–20, after President António Costa formally issued invitation letters to EU leaders on March 12. The summit agenda will focus on sustained support for Ukraine, stabilization efforts in the Middle East, and the future structure of European defense cooperation. Meanwhile, EU foreign ministers prepared for a Foreign Affairs Council meeting on March 16 that will examine a twentieth sanctions package against Russia and include discussions with the Foreign Minister of India.

## NATO

During the same period, NATO concentrated on major military exercises, defense industrial scaling, and diplomatic coordination with partner states. NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte participated in the EU Ambassadors' Conference on March 9, emphasizing the need for a more realistic transatlantic strategy in which European states assume greater responsibility for their defense while maintaining strong cooperation with allies such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Turkey. On March 11, Rutte hosted Mihai Popșoi, Deputy Prime Minister of Moldova, at NATO headquarters to discuss strengthening Moldova's resilience against Russian interference and expanding support for Ukraine. NATO also concluded its 20th Annual Conference on Arms Control, Disarmament, and WMD Non-Proliferation in Berlin, where allied officials reaffirmed support for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

On March 12, during the Brussels European Defence Exhibition & Conference (BEDEX 2026), Rutte warned that the international environment is entering a period of prolonged geopolitical danger. He reiterated the alliance's long-term objective for members to increase defense spending toward 5% of GDP by 2035 and called for faster production of ammunition, ships, and drones through expanded transatlantic industrial cooperation. NATO officials also confirmed that the alliance's ballistic missile defense system had reached a new level of operational readiness following recent infrastructure upgrades.

NATO's operational activity remained extensive. The major Arctic field exercise Exercise Cold Response 26 began on March 9 across Norway and Finland, involving approximately 30,000 troops from 14 nations. On March 13, senior political leaders from Norway, Germany, and Canada visited troops in Bardufoss, demonstrating allied unity on NATO's northern flank. Meanwhile, Exercise Loyal Leda 26, a large-scale command-level simulation involving 4,000 personnel from nine countries, concluded on March 12 after certifying four corps headquarters for rapid-response collective defense. At sea, Exercise Dynamic Mariner 26 continued in the Mediterranean Sea, preparing the Royal Navy of the United Kingdom to assume command of NATO's Allied Reaction Force (Maritime) beginning in July 2026.



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