



# Weekly Geopolitical Report

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

**Coverage Period:** Mar 16 – Mar 22

**Publication Date:** March 23, 2026



**Issue No. 12 | 2026**

**For analytical and informational purposes only**

# Horn Review: Weekly Report

Mar 16 – Mar 22, 2026

## 1. Ethiopia

In the evolving landscape of a multipolar world where alliances shift rapidly and crises demand nuanced navigation, Ethiopia continues to demonstrate masterful diplomacy through a series of deliberate, high-impact engagements from March 16 to March 22, 2026. This period stands as a compelling showcase of how the country asserts principled positions, builds bridges across divides, and transforms challenges into opportunities for deeper partnerships, all while maintaining strategic autonomy and a firm commitment to dialogue over division, effectively positioning itself as a proactive architect rather than a passive observer in the emerging global order.

The week opened with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed holding a productive telephone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin on March 16, where the leaders reviewed bilateral cooperation in political, trade, economic, and humanitarian spheres, reaffirmed commitments stemming from Abiy's September 2025 visit to Moscow, and agreed to intensify ministerial contacts, with President Putin extending condolences for the tragic landslides and floods in Ethiopia's south. This exchange underscored Ethiopia's deliberate effort to sustain balanced, multi-vector relationships even amid global tensions, proving that non-alignment remains a strength rather than a limitation and allowing the nation to draw on diverse partnerships for resilience in an increasingly fragmented international system.

On the same day, amid escalating disruptions in global oil supplies triggered by the Middle East crisis, Prime Minister Abiy issued a clear and responsible call for prudent fuel use, urging distributors, service stations, and citizens to prioritize essential needs, direct supplies toward basic services, avoid unnecessary consumption, and use petroleum products economically until normal supply resumes. Framing the external shock as a shared moment for collective discipline rather than panic, this measured warning not only stabilized domestic expectations but subtly signaled to the broader international community Ethiopia's maturity in managing cascading global risks, reinforcing its image as a responsible actor capable of turning volatility into disciplined national cohesion.

Ethiopia's recent engagements across the Middle East reflect a deliberate and increasingly refined balancing strategy aimed at preserving strategic autonomy in a polarized environment. Following high-level visits, Abiy Ahmed's direct communication with the leadership of the United Arab Emirates, alongside parallel consultations led by State Minister Hadera Abera with diplomats from Iran and Iraq, illustrates a calculated effort to engage all sides without entanglement. Rather than aligning with competing blocs, Addis Ababa is maintaining open diplomatic channels across divides, reducing vulnerability to

external shocks while expanding its relevance. This approach positions Ethiopia not just as a participant in regional affairs, but as a flexible interlocutor capable of navigating tensions and linking the Horn of Africa to broader Middle Eastern dynamics.

The follow-up call between Abiy Ahmed and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan further reinforces this calibrated posture. By condemning violations of sovereignty while simultaneously advocating de-escalation and dialogue, Ethiopia demonstrated a dual-track diplomacy that blends principled positioning with restraint. This signals an ability to support key partners without closing space for mediation, sustaining trust while avoiding escalation. The broader implication is that Ethiopia is steadily building a reputation as a stabilizing actor whose diplomatic influence lies in its capacity to balance firmness with engagement, turning short-term interactions into longer-term strategic leverage.

Ethiopia's security diplomacy shone through on March 17 when trainee military officers from Kenya's Joint Command and Staff College, joined by counterparts from Uganda, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Rwanda, Malawi, and Tanzania, visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. African Affairs Director-General Zerihun Abebe briefed them extensively on Ethiopia's pivotal contributions to counter-terrorism, maritime security, Red Sea stability, Nile affairs, and collective frameworks under the African Union and IGAD, effectively exporting its regional peace-and-security playbook and fostering dialogue on shared challenges, which highlights Ethiopia's role as a knowledge exporter that invests in the next generation of African leaders to build enduring continental stability from within.

That same day, Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos welcomed the African Union Pre-Election Assessment Mission led by former Nigerian Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyeama, commending the AU's proactive deployment ahead of national elections and pledging full facilitation, a gesture that reflected quiet confidence in Ethiopia's democratic trajectory and internal stability while demonstrating how transparent engagement with continental bodies bolsters legitimacy and deters external skepticism in a world wary of electoral uncertainties.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Ambassador Hadera Abera advanced structured engagement by hosting Japan's Director-General for African Affairs Misako Takahashi, commending Tokyo's development support and proposing a formal political consultation mechanism to deepen ties in investment, trade, peace, and security, thereby converting longstanding goodwill into institutionalized architecture that ensures sustained cooperation beyond episodic visits. In separate meetings, he also engaged the ambassadors of Iran and Iraq, focusing on bilateral strengthening while stressing dialogue's vital role in fostering stability and collective security across the Middle East, keeping channels open precisely when escalation risks closure and illustrating Ethiopia's

unique ability to maintain dialogue with all parties amid flashpoints, a hallmark of bridge-building diplomacy that prevents isolation and amplifies influence.

From March 16 to 18, Finance Minister Ahmed Shide led a high-level delegation to Rome for intensive talks with Italian officials, including Deputy Foreign Minister Edmondo Cirielli, who explicitly commended Ethiopia's strong economic growth and its critical anchoring role in promoting Horn of Africa stability, and Economy Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti. These discussions advanced economic cooperation, private investment, and regional stability/integration, yielding a landmark bilateral debt restructuring agreement under the G20 Common Framework alongside Italy's reaffirmed support for World Bank-co-financed macroeconomic reforms, commitments to closing financing gaps for the Koyssha Hydropower Project, and readiness to finance components of the Bishoftu International Airport, all aligned with the Mattei Plan for Africa and positioning development as a cornerstone of long-term peace; this economic offensive reveals how Ethiopia weaponizes prosperity-building to embed security gains, turning infrastructure wins into strategic depth that outlasts transient crises.

Taken together, these actions, including the added layers of youth-skills investment, agricultural institutionalization, and Italy's explicit recognition of Ethiopia as a regional anchor, form a coherent demonstration of Ethiopia's diplomacy in the new world order: condemning aggression without severing ties, offering solidarity while championing de-escalation, converting crises into disciplined responses, and weaving development, security cooperation, inclusive dialogue, and forward-looking institutional frameworks into every engagement. After high-profile visits and amid global pressures, Ethiopia is not retreating or hedging passively, it is advancing boldly, speaking clearly, expanding its influence through principled, multi-directional leadership, and leveraging every tool from fuel prudence to infrastructure pacts to youth empowerment, thereby helping shape rather than merely adapt to the emerging global script and emerging as a standout model of agile, value-driven statecraft in turbulent times.

## **2. Sudan**

This week in Sudan reflects a deepening convergence between intensified battlefield contestation, expanded civilian targeting, and visible regional spillover. The conflict continues to evolve beyond static frontlines into a highly mobile and externally entangled war, where territorial control, aerial warfare, and cross-border dynamics increasingly intersect. The operational tempo remains high across Darfur, Kordofan, and Blue Nile, while the humanitarian and geopolitical consequences are becoming more pronounced and geographically diffuse.

A defining feature of the week was the continued normalization of high-casualty attacks on civilian infrastructure, particularly in the health sector. A major strike on a hospital in East Darfur killed at least 64 people, including children, drawing strong condemnation

from international actors including the World Health Organization and the International Organization for Migration. The attack underscores a broader pattern in which medical facilities, once considered protected spaces, are now systematically exposed to violence. This reflects a strategic environment in which neither party appears constrained by humanitarian norms, and where infrastructure destruction is embedded within military logic rather than treated as collateral damage.

Drone warfare continues to play a central role in this escalation. The persistence of such strikes, including earlier incidents involving students and densely populated civilian zones, reinforces the transition of Sudan's war into a technologically mediated conflict where aerial capabilities are used to inflict psychological and material damage at scale. The cumulative effect is not only immediate casualties but also long-term disruption of civilian life, displacement patterns, and service delivery systems.

Battlefield dynamics also remain fluid, particularly in central and western Sudan. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have both made tactical advances, with key locations such as Bara continuing to change hands. RSF offensives, supported by coordinated artillery, drone, and ground operations, have disrupted SAF supply lines and reinforced RSF control in western regions, including parts of Darfur. At the same time, SAF has pursued counteroffensives in southeastern areas, particularly along the Blue Nile axis, targeting RSF-aligned positions and attempting to secure strategic border zones. These developments suggest that neither side has achieved decisive dominance, but both are positioning for sustained offensives aimed at logistical disruption rather than outright territorial consolidation.

The conflict's regional dimension has become increasingly visible this week. A drone strike originating from Sudan reportedly killed civilians in Chad, prompting heightened tensions along the border and triggering a significant military response from N'Djamena. Chadian forces have reinforced their presence near the border town of Tine, initiated disarmament campaigns, and warned of potential incursions into Sudanese territory. The situation reflects a dangerous shift from indirect regional involvement to direct security consequences for neighboring states. Cross-border ethnic linkages, particularly among Zaghawa communities, further complicate containment efforts and risk localizing broader regional confrontations.

At the same time, external involvement in the conflict continues to shape battlefield realities. Reports indicate ongoing arms flows and operational support to both sides, despite broader regional instability linked to Middle Eastern tensions. Allegations of continued weapons transfers to RSF positions through neighboring countries, alongside expanded Egyptian involvement in support of SAF, highlight the extent to which Sudan's war is embedded within a wider geopolitical contest. These dynamics are contributing to

the persistence of the conflict by sustaining military capacities and undermining diplomatic initiatives.

Diplomatic efforts, while ongoing, remain structurally disconnected from battlefield developments. A proposed humanitarian ceasefire within the Quad framework continues to face significant obstacles, with both SAF and RSF maintaining maximalist positions. Statements from Sudanese leadership reaffirm that any lasting ceasefire is contingent on the surrender of opposing forces, indicating limited willingness to engage in compromise. Meanwhile, broader discussions linking Sudan to regional diplomatic tracks, including Saudi-Iranian rapprochement, suggest that the conflict is increasingly viewed as part of a larger geopolitical bargaining landscape rather than a standalone crisis.

Overall, this week reinforces the trajectory of Sudan's war as a protracted, high-intensity conflict characterized by technological escalation, civilian exposure, and regional spillover. The combination of shifting frontlines, sustained external support, and limited diplomatic traction suggests that the conflict is entering a phase where containment becomes increasingly difficult. Without a coordinated mechanism to address both internal military dynamics and external sponsorship, Sudan's war is likely to persist as a destabilizing in the broader regional order.

### **3. Egypt**

The recent diplomatic engagements by Egypt, led by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, highlight Cairo's strategic prioritization of Gulf security as an extension of its own national interests amid escalating regional tensions. On March 19, 2026, Sisi conducted brief visits to the UAE and Qatar, expressing Egypt's full support for these states against what he described as unjustified assaults on their territories and resources.

He condemned attacks attributed to Iran, stressed that the security of Arab Gulf states directly impacts Egypt's stability, and affirmed readiness to provide all necessary backing while pushing for de-escalation and diplomatic solutions. These moves underscore Egypt's interest in strengthening alliances with wealthy Gulf partners to counter perceived threats from non-Arab actors, safeguarding economic ties, energy routes, and collective Arab security.

This Gulf-focused solidarity connects to broader Arab coordination on other fronts, including efforts to stabilize Gaza without compromising Palestinian presence on their land. Egypt has consistently opposed any displacement from Gaza, viewing it as a direct threat to national security that could fuel extremism, border instability, and long-term Israeli pretexts for intervention.

President Sisi has reiterated that reconstruction must keep Palestinians in place, with Cairo advancing a plan endorsed at an Arab summit involving a temporary Palestinian technocratic committee to manage aid and governance before reintegrating the Palestinian

Authority. This position aligns with Egypt's role as a mediator and border guardian, protecting the Sinai Peninsula from spillover violence or demographic shifts that could strain resources and internal stability.

Collectively, these developments illustrate Egypt's multifaceted strategy: fortifying Gulf partnerships to counter Iran-linked threats and leading Arab initiatives on Gaza to prevent displacement and secure borders. By linking Gulf security and Palestinian stability, Cairo aims to preserve its core interests in territorial integrity, resource access, and regional influence amid a volatile neighborhood.

#### **4. Eritrea**

“The Sudan Times” published a widely circulated report this week confirming the extent of Eritrea's military involvement in Sudan's civil war. Over twelve armed factions are fighting alongside the Sudanese Armed Forces, several trained and equipped in Eritrea. Among them, the East Sudan Liberation Movement held its founding conference in Eritrea in 2024 and now fields roughly 2,000 combatants. Darfuri factions operating under the Juba Peace Agreement are also active in eastern Sudan, with fighters believed to have trained in Eritrean camps. The report reinforces an established pattern of Eritrean proxy engagement across a corridor of direct strategic relevance to Asmara's rivalry with Addis Ababa.

An OSINT report this week placed the U.S. Treasury-sanctioned LPG tanker CLIFTON at Massawa port, confirmed through satellite imagery dated March 13, 2026. The vessel is linked to Iran's IRGC-Quds Force and has been sanctioned for facilitating Iranian oil and gas shipments in evasion of international sanctions. Its presence at an Eritrean port carries broader significance: with Iran selectively controlling passage through the Strait of Hormuz amid the ongoing conflict, preferential access to Iranian energy shipments represents tangible strategic value. The docking at Massawa points to the operational dimension of the longstanding asymmetric alignment between Tehran and Asmara, a relationship that has historically provided Eritrea with diplomatic cover and material support in exchange for Red Sea access and regional positioning.

Similarly, another OSINT report traced the general cargo vessel GREENWAY from Tekirdağ, Türkiye, arriving at Massawa on March 15, 2026. Tekirdağ hosts facilities associated with Turkish drone manufacturer Baykar, prompting speculation that the shipment could involve military equipment. The development carries two plausible readings. Eritrea serves as a primary supply corridor for the Sudanese Armed Forces, and given Ankara's backing of Khartoum and the increasingly drone-intensive character of Sudan's civil war, the shipment may represent a Türkiye-facilitated transfer of equipment destined for SAF through Eritrean territory. Alternatively, the cargo could reflect a direct Eritrean procurement, a reading that complicates the regional picture considerably, since Türkiye maintains a strategic partnership with Ethiopia, and Addis Ababa and Asmara

remain in deep tension. No official confirmation of the cargo's nature exists, and the voyage is consistent with routine general cargo movements.

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect released its updated Eritrea country profile on March 16, maintaining the country among its populations at risk. The report finds that core repressive policies, including indefinite national service, arbitrary detention, and collective punishment, remain in place with no meaningful reform since the UN Commission of Inquiry's 2016 findings. On the regional dimension, the profile flags Ethiopia's pursuit of Red Sea access and Eritrea's formal rejection of those claims as factors further entrenching domestic repression. Eritrean forces are noted as continuing to operate in Ethiopian border areas in violation of the 2022 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. The Centre calls for targeted sanctions against senior PFDJ officials and urges support for the UN Special Rapporteur's mandate ahead of the June Human Rights Council session.

## **5. Djibouti**

Rwandan officials conducted targeted diplomatic outreach to Djibouti this week to secure support for the re-election of Louise Mushikiwabo as Secretary-General of the International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF). The engagement underscores the importance of Djibouti's vote within African and Francophone blocs highlighting efforts by Rwanda to consolidate regional backing ahead of the leadership vote. Djibouti's position as a member of the OIF places it in a key role amid broader coalition-building efforts within the organization.

In a series of high-level economic diplomacy engagements Djibouti Ports and Free Zones Authority (DPFZA) Chairman Aboubaker Omar Hadi met with Nicolas Sartini, Senior Vice President of Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), to discuss plans to expand the Doraleh Container Terminal's capacity to 5 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs). The discussions addressed current global supply chain disruptions and security challenges in the Red Sea region. A follow-up summit with MSC President Diego Aponte is scheduled for March 25 to focus on financing arrangements, reflecting Djibouti's continued efforts to deepen international maritime partnerships and expand its role as a regional logistics hub.

Official notices released this week confirmed that the upcoming April 2026 presidential election will feature only one challenger with limited political infrastructure against President Ismail Omar Guelleh. President Guelleh, who has held office since 1999 and is eligible for a sixth term following constitutional reforms in 2025, is expected to face minimal opposition. The rejection of a former adviser's candidacy further illustrates the restricted political space and the tightly managed electoral environment. Djibouti's strategic significance anchored by its hosting of foreign military installations near the Bab

el-Mandeb strait remains a key consideration for international observers monitoring the electoral process.

Djibouti's Battalion 13 has deployed to Beledweyne and Bulo Burde, Somalia as part of the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). The deployment is intended to reinforce ongoing counterterrorism operations against Al-Shabaab and to strengthen regional security coordination between Djibouti, Somalia, and Ethiopia.

Reports dated March 22 indicated that the United States quietly pre-positioned Airborne special forces at Camp Lemonnier, the sole permanent U.S. military base in Africa, located adjacent to the Bab el-Mandeb strait. The personnel arrived via a Boeing 747 flight from Fort Liberty on March 19. The deployment was framed in coverage as a precautionary measure amid ongoing regional threats including instability in the Red Sea and heightened tensions involving Iranian-aligned actors and Houthi forces. Camp Lemonnier continues to serve as a critical space for counterterrorism and security operations in the region, though no new operational actions or incidents were reported on March 22.

## **6. South Sudan**

This week in South Sudan reflects a deepening convergence between political fragility, localized violence, and intensifying humanitarian strain. The country's transition framework continues to erode under the weight of unresolved elite competition, weak institutional capacity, and mounting pressure from both internal and external actors. Developments across Jonglei, Upper Nile, and diplomatic channels suggest a system increasingly stretched between formal commitments to peace and the lived reality of conflict recurrence.

Violence in Jonglei State remains a central driver of instability, with continued clashes and armed mobilization displacing large populations and exposing civilians to acute risk. Recent updates indicate that tens of thousands have been affected, particularly in areas such as Akobo, where forced evacuations and ongoing insecurity have triggered chaotic displacement patterns. Civilians have fled under extreme conditions, including crossing rivers in makeshift boats, underscoring the absence of organized protection mechanisms. Humanitarian actors report that many displaced communities are now sheltering in open areas without access to basic services, reinforcing the structural vulnerability of populations already affected by years of conflict.

The humanitarian dimension continues to deteriorate in parallel. Access constraints, insecurity, and funding shortfalls are limiting the ability of aid agencies to respond effectively. Medical organizations report operating in conditions where communities are forced to live without shelter, often under trees, while essential services such as

healthcare, food distribution, and protection programming remain severely disrupted. The situation is compounded by the broader regional displacement dynamic, with movements linked to both internal violence and spillover from Sudan further stretching already limited capacity.

Politically, the underlying drivers of instability remain tied to the fragile power-sharing arrangement between President Salva Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar. Regional and international actors continue to emphasize that the sustainability of peace hinges on the relationship between these two figures. Recent diplomatic engagements have reinforced this assessment, with external envoys warning that the country's trajectory remains highly dependent on elite-level cooperation rather than institutional resilience. This reinforces a broader pattern in which the peace process is personalized and therefore inherently unstable.

At the same time, South Sudan's regional diplomacy has intensified, particularly through engagement with South Africa. High-level meetings between President Kiir and President Cyril Ramaphosa focused on electoral preparations, trade cooperation, and broader political support. These discussions signal an aim to project progress toward elections and state consolidation, while also seeking external legitimacy and economic partnerships. However, the gap between diplomatic signaling and internal conditions remains significant, with ongoing violence and institutional weakness raising questions about the feasibility of credible electoral processes in the near term.

Governance challenges are also becoming more visible, particularly around issues of corruption and accountability. Recent scrutiny linked to corruption-related arrests has highlighted persistent concerns about transparency and the management of public resources. These developments point to deeper structural issues within the state apparatus, where governance deficits continue to undermine both domestic legitimacy and international confidence.

Regionally, South Sudan's integration trajectory is also under reassessment. Commentary surrounding its accession to the East African Community suggests that the move may have been premature, given the country's limited institutional readiness and ongoing instability. The costs of integration without sufficient domestic capacity are becoming more apparent, particularly as economic coordination and regulatory alignment remain constrained by internal dysfunction.

Diplomatic engagement at the regional level continues to emphasize de-escalation and political dialogue. Troika and other international partners have raised alarms over rising violence and called for renewed commitment to the peace agreement. At the same time, bilateral engagements, particularly with South Africa, indicate a need to sustain diplomatic momentum and prevent further deterioration. However, these efforts remain

constrained by the lack of enforcement mechanisms and the continued prioritization of short-term political survival by domestic actors.

Overall, this week underscores the extent to which South Sudan's crisis is defined by the interaction between fragile political arrangements, localized conflict dynamics, and limited state capacity. The persistence of violence in Jonglei, combined with humanitarian deterioration and uncertain electoral prospects, suggests that the transition process remains at risk of further fragmentation. Without a shift toward genuine political compromise and strengthened institutional frameworks, the country is likely to remain in a cycle of intermittent conflict, humanitarian emergency, and externally mediated stability.

## **7. Somalia and Somaliland**

### **Somalia**

The period under review was seen by an escalation in the fracturing of Somalia's federal system centered on the relationship between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in Mogadishu and the South West State (SWS) administration. On March 17 SWS officially suspended all cooperation and relations with the central government. President Abdiiaziz Hassan Mohamed Laftagareen cited alleged federal interference in regional affairs as the basis for this decision, which effectively aligned SWS with Puntland and Jubbaland in suspending ties with Mogadishu. The move was interpreted as a direct challenge to President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's administration and a rejection of recent constitutional amendments which SWS and other federal member states have criticized as non-inclusive and a threat to the federal system.

In a show of defiance, President Laftagareen returned to the SWS capital, Baidoa on March 17 via an Ethiopian military helicopter circumventing a travel ban reportedly imposed by the federal government. His return scored the deepening rift. In subsequent statements Laftagareen formally resigned as deputy chairman of the ruling union of parties and warned against unilateral federal actions that he argued would undermine federalism. He accused the FGS of interference in regional governance and rejected the recently approved constitutional amendments as illegitimate.

Tensions escalated rapidly from rhetoric to military posturing. The FGS airlifted hundreds of elite Haramcad (Cheetah) special police units from Mogadishu to Barawe, the administrative capital of South West State with subsequent deployments of Somali National Army (SNA) forces reported sources indicate thousands of troops overall including plans for 1,100+ SNA reinforcements and Turkish-trained Haram'ad units specifically, plus airlifts to Buurhakaba (Burhakaba) as recently as March 22. The FGS characterized the deployment as an effort to assert federal control while SWS officials condemned it as an act of destabilization aimed at undermining the regional

administration. Pro-Mogadishu forces reportedly took control of several towns including Barawe, Buur Hakaba, and Huddur, with operations appearing to advance toward Baidoa.

Adding to the political crisis, the Speaker of the South West State Assembly Dr. Ali Said Fiqi, alleged that small arms donated by the Egyptian government for national counter terrorism efforts had been diverted to local militias in the Burhakaba district. The Speaker claimed these weapons were being used in an internal conflict against the SWS administration characterizing the diversion as a dangerous violation of the original aid agreement.

The rift has resulted in a political realignment. A coalition of opposition leaders and regional figures publicly endorsed President Laftagareen further isolating the administration of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. The backing of SWS by key opposition and other regional actors highlights the growing national consensus against the federal government's handling of constitutional reforms and federal-state relations.

The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) conducted multiple airstrikes in coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia throughout the reporting period, targeting both Al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia.

- A strike was conducted targeting Al-Shabaab on March 15.
- A strike was conducted targeting ISIS-Somalia in the Golis Mountains area, southeast of Bossaso in the Puntland region, on March 16.
- A precision airstrike was conducted targeting Al-Shabaab positions on March 19.

The operations are part of ongoing efforts to degrade the capabilities of both terrorist organizations.

On March 22, Al-Shabaab released an Eid-themed video featuring the group's spokesman, Ali Mohamud Rage (Ali Dhere). The video depicted the spokesman sending his son on what the group characterized as a deadly mission in Mogadishu serving as a propaganda tool to demonstrate the group's commitment to its insurgency.

As the crisis between the FGS and South West State intensified the federal government engaged in diplomatic outreach. Officials reportedly reached out to members of President Laftagareen's family in an attempt to establish communication channels. Concurrently, President Mohamud's planned visit to Ethiopia presented the most significant diplomatic effort of the week aimed at de-escalating the confrontation by seeking to influence of a key external actor with a military presence in Baidoa.

In another development for bilateral relations, Ambassador Abdikarim Ahmed Mohamed, Somalia's ambassador to Sweden presented his credentials to Finnish President Alexander Stubb. This appointment marks the first time Somalia has appointed an ambassador to

Finland, an advancement welcomed by the Somali community in Finland as a step that will streamline access to embassy services.

## **Somaliland**

Throughout the reporting period, the Federal Government of Somalia continued to voice strong opposition to reports of an Israeli military or security installation in the Somaliland region, specifically near the port city of Berbera. Somali officials reiterated that any such presence would constitute a direct violation of Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In public statements, Somali authorities warned that such a development risked drawing the Horn of Africa region into broader external conflicts, particularly given ongoing hostilities between Iran and Israel as well as heightened tensions involving Houthi forces in the Red Sea. Somali officials further argued that the establishment of a foreign military installation would undermine regional stability and complicate existing security dynamics.

On March 20, Somaliland-focused advocacy efforts received visibility in U.S. media showing ongoing engagement with American political circles. These efforts centered on promoting Somaliland's pro-Western alignment and advancing support for the Republic of Somaliland Independence Act (H.R. 3992), a bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. Advocacy groups utilized social media platforms to coordinate outreach to members of Congress aiming to build momentum for legislative recognition. While the bill itself is not new, the recent coordinated push coincides with broader international dynamics, including Israel's reported engagement with Somaliland.

In a related development, the Central Bank of Somaliland issued an official statement praising a U.S. Congressional bill understood to be associated with broader financial integration and recognition efforts as a historic step toward ending Somaliland's economic isolation. The statement carried by the Somaliland Standard on March 22, characterized the legislative initiative as a potential gateway to connecting Somaliland with global financial systems. The Central Bank's endorsement framed the measure as a critical component of Somaliland's broader push for international legitimacy, linking it to recent diplomatic engagements, including recognition-related developments involving Israel. The statement emphasized that financial integration would serve as a foundation for sustainable economic development and enhanced international cooperation.

## **8. Yemen**

A Wall Street Journal analysis published March 21 examines the Houthis as Iran's most consequential unused lever in the current conflict. With Iran having effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, Saudi Arabia's primary workaround runs through the Red Sea port of Yanbu, routing crude across the peninsula before passing hundreds of miles of Houthi-controlled coastline and the Bab el-Mandeb strait. Houthi entry into the conflict would

place both chokepoints under effective Iranian influence, threatening the last viable energy export corridor in the region. Senior Houthis officials have signalled readiness to escalate, though the group has held back, constrained by its own domestic calculus and reluctance to be seen fighting Iran's battles against Arab states. Saudi Arabia is working to maintain a 2022 detente with the group. Analysts cited in the piece suggest the Houthis are deliberately preserving this option, either as a final escalatory card or as leverage in eventual negotiations.

## **9. Kenya**

One of the most significant security and diplomatic developments in Kenya was the government's agreement with Russia to prevent Kenyans from being recruited to fight in the Ukraine conflict. Following widespread concern that hundreds or more Kenyans were being lured into contracts with Russian forces often job offers Foreign Minister Musalia Mudavadi confirmed in Moscow that no new enlistments will be permitted, and Nairobi will provide consular support for any existing Kenyan fighters abroad. This move came after intense domestic pressure from families and advocacy groups worried about exploitation and human trafficking networks tied to foreign recruitment, and it reflects a delicate balancing act by Kenya between protecting its citizens and maintaining strategic ties with a major global power.

Security at home also saw targeted action this week in Turkana County, where authorities issued a two-week ultimatum for people holding illegal firearms to surrender them, highlighting ongoing concerns around small arms proliferation and local violence that can fuel broader insecurity in the northwestern region. Meanwhile in Nairobi, a planned demolition during an urban regeneration initiative went tragically wrong, collapsing a building and killing at least four people while injuring several others, drawing attention to persistent safety and regulatory enforcement challenges in the capital.

Kenya continued to push forward major economic and infrastructure engagements that also have security implications. The government revived the stalled China-backed extension of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) toward the Ugandan border after a six-year financing pause, using a new revenue securitization model to secure funding without over-leveraging public debt. This move not only advances regional connectivity and trade but also signals Nairobi's evolving approach to large infrastructure partnerships in a shifting global landscape. At the same time, Kenya's official posture on the Middle East conflict remains cautious yet active, with government statements emphasizing the safety of the more than half-million Kenyan nationals in the region and appealing for diplomatic resolution while working to secure safe air corridors for those who choose to return.

On the domestic political and security front, although not current week headlines, longstanding pressures continue to shape Kenya's stability environment, including

ongoing concerns about extremist threats along the Somalia border where al-Shabaab retains operational capabilities, and the social aftershock of last March's deadly Garissa attack that still informs security policy along the northeastern frontier.

## **10. The Gulf Countries**

Foreign ministers from twelve Arab and Muslim states convened in Riyadh on March 19 to formulate a unified response to Iran's sustained strikes on Gulf infrastructure. The meeting produced a joint statement asserting the right to self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter, collectively condemning Iranian attacks on civilian and economic targets including desalination plants, oil facilities, and airports. Ministers called on Tehran to halt attacks, cease support for regional proxy forces, and refrain from threatening maritime passage through the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan stopped short of specifying a timeline for potential action but left little ambiguity, stating that Gulf states possess significant capacities they could bring to bear if necessary. Speaking at the summit, Turkish Foreign Minister Fidan characterised the gathering as a final warning to Tehran. Iran's response, framed by the IRGC as a new phase of warfare, offered little indication that the strikes would cease.

A DW analysis published on March 19 examines growing disillusionment among Gulf states over their security arrangements with Washington. The central argument is that US military bases have made host countries targets rather than providing deterrence, a perception reinforced by Iran's sustained strikes and reports that Gulf states received no prior consultation before the US and Israel launched their campaign. Saudi Arabia has publicly criticised Washington's conduct, while Oman's Foreign Minister wrote in *The Economist* that Washington has lost control of its own foreign policy. Analysts cited in the piece suggest the war will prompt a post-conflict reassessment of Gulf-US relations, though deep military integration makes swift realignment unlikely. Pre-existing hedging strategies toward Turkiye, Pakistan, China, and European states have taken on renewed significance.

### **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia expelled Iran's military attaché and four embassy staff on March 21, giving them 24 hours to leave the kingdom following what Riyadh described as repeated Iranian attacks on its territory. The move came after a drone struck the Aramco-Exxon SAMREF refinery near Yanbu, disrupting oil loadings at the Red Sea port that serves as Saudi Arabia's sole export outlet following Iran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz. The Foreign Ministry warned that continued attacks would carry significant consequences for bilateral relations. Qatar had taken a similar step days earlier, expelling Iranian military and security attachés from Doha. The expulsions mark a concrete deterioration of the Beijing-brokered Saudi-Iran rapprochement concluded three years ago.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi conducted a regional tour of Gulf states on March 21, holding talks with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah and Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in Manama, following earlier visits to the UAE and Qatar. In both meetings, Sisi described Iranian strikes on GCC states as dangerous escalations and violations of national sovereignty, reaffirming Cairo's solidarity with Gulf partners. The tour reflects Egypt's public alignment with the Gulf position as diplomatic activity across the region intensifies.

Iran's strikes on Saudi Arabia intensified through the week, with Saudi air defenses intercepting 51 drones in the first five hours of March 21 alone, bringing the total number of strikes on the kingdom to 575 drones and 49 missiles since February 28. Attacks have concentrated on the Eastern Province, home to Saudi Arabia's principal oil fields and refineries. Across the Gulf, Kuwait's Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery was struck twice in successive days, sparking fires at one of the region's largest refining facilities. The UAE's cumulative intercept totals since the onset of the conflict stand at 1,740 drones, 338 ballistic missiles, and 15 cruise missiles.

## UAE

Iran continued its strikes on UAE infrastructure during the week, targeting Fujairah port and Dubai International Airport on March 16. UAE air defenses intercepted six ballistic missiles and 21 drones on the day, bringing the total number of Iranian missiles and drones fired at the UAE to over 1,900 since the onset of the conflict. A fire broke out at Fujairah's oil storage facilities following a drone strike, temporarily halting oil loading operations. A separate drone-related incident near Dubai International Airport caused flight suspensions and cancellations. Fujairah's strategic significance lies in its position on the Gulf of Oman, outside the Strait of Hormuz, making it the UAE's primary channel for continued energy exports while Iran maintains its blockade of the strait. Iran's targeting of the facility reflects a deliberate effort to close off that alternative route.

Le Monde published an investigation this week alleging that the UAE is reorganising its arms supply network to Sudan's Rapid Support Forces, developing new logistical routes through Ethiopia and the Central African Republic as existing corridors face greater scrutiny. The report traces cargo aircraft allegedly linked to a conglomerate partly owned by a brother of UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed, operating under a recently registered freight company with apparent ties to a previously flagged Emirati air cargo operator. Libya's Cyrenaica, controlled by Khalifa Haftar, allegedly remains a primary corridor, with around 600 flights said to have connected Abu Dhabi to a southeastern Libyan airbase in 2025. Egypt, backing Sudan's regular army, has reportedly responded by deploying drones to strike RSF-linked convoys near the border.

## **Oman**

Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi published an op-ed in *The Economist* on March 19, offering one of the most direct critiques of Washington's conduct to emerge from the region. Albusaidi argued that the US had lost control of its foreign policy and entered a war that was not its own, noting that joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran were launched hours after what he described as the most substantive round of nuclear negotiations to date. He contended that Israel had persuaded Washington that Iran's weakened state would produce a swift capitulation, a miscalculation now evident in the conflict's trajectory. Achieving Israel's stated objectives, he argued, would require a prolonged ground campaign of the kind Trump had previously vowed to avoid.

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

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

Democratic Republic of the Congo has been dominated by efforts to reduce tensions along its eastern border with Rwanda. After months of escalating concerns over cross-border hostilities involving the March 23 Movement (M23) and other armed groups, officials from Kinshasa and Kigali met in Washington, D.C., on March 17–18 under U.S. mediation. Both sides agreed on concrete steps to de-escalate military activities, including mutual respect for sovereignty, withdrawal of forces from contested areas, and coordinated measures to protect civilians in conflict-affected regions. The DRC also committed to intensifying operations against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, a longstanding cross-border threat, as part of these diplomatic measures. While this represents a significant step toward dialogue, on-the-ground realities remain challenging, with armed groups still exerting influence over territories in North Kivu and South Kivu, and sporadic clashes continuing to disrupt local life. Humanitarian concerns remain acute, as the fighting has displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians, disrupted markets, and created widespread food insecurity, particularly in rural areas where families are unable to farm safely.

### **Mali**

Although this week's report did not report a new major attack inside Mali, intelligence and coverage from broader Sahel reporting show that violent extremism in the region remains at critical levels, driving instability not just in Mali but in neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger as well. In addition, while there is no new report this week on internal clashes with Tuareg armed movements or separatist fronts, the absence of major peace progress underlines the ongoing fragility of internal reconciliation and the unresolved legacy of past conflicts and dissolved accords.

Mali continues to navigate a deep realignment away from former Western partners and toward alternative alliances, trends that have not shifted this week but remain central to the country's outlook. Bamako's military leadership remains integrated in the Alliance of Sahel States with Burkina Faso and Niger, an alliance explicitly formed to replace older regional security frameworks and pursue security and political cooperation on their own terms.

There were no major new diplomatic breakthroughs this week, but broader reporting on regional trends shows that these groups including Mali's are continuing to reshape Sahel geopolitics, balancing relationships with global actors such as Russia, Turkey, and others as Western military missions and influence have retreated. These realignments are not just military; they influence economic and resource partnerships as well, with governments in the bloc looking to cultivate diversified external ties amid rising insecurity and shifting global competition.

### **Burkina Faso**

Official Burkina Faso sources and regional partners moved quickly to counter misinformation aimed at deepening diplomatic tensions, especially about the Sahel's stance on wider global conflicts. Authorities in Ouagadougou publicly denied the authenticity of a document falsely attributed to the Alliance of Sahel States that was circulating online, which purported to show the bloc taking sides in the Middle East conflict. The government labeled it "fake news" and reiterated that official positions are only communicated through authorized channels, reflecting ongoing sensitivity about how the Sahel coalition is perceived internationally amid broader geopolitical strains. This effort to clarify diplomatic positions comes as the AES comprising Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger continues positioning itself as a sovereign regional partner, distinct from other global power blocs, even as external tensions escalate elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East.

On the security front, there were no widely reported new major militant attacks or battlefield shifts inside Burkina Faso in open sources this week, but the underlying threat environment remains severe. Regional security analyses continue to describe Burkina Faso as one of the Sahel's most crisis-affected states, where violent extremist organizations including affiliates of Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara maintain a significant presence across much of the country and border regions, contributing to persistent instability. These assessments warn that extremists operate over wide swathes of the country and that security forces struggle to regain and hold territory amid continuing jihadist activity and local governance gaps, even if detailed daily incident reports weren't published this specific week. There were likewise no major new diplomatic engagements or external military announcements reported in this period, but the government's drive to counter disinformation and clarify

its bloc's stance is itself a reflection of ongoing geopolitical pressures facing Burkina Faso both domestically and within the Sahel region.

## **Niger**

This week is not a single large attack but a pattern of persistent, smaller-scale assaults, ambushes, and mobility across borders, showing that armed groups retain freedom of movement despite military operations. At the same time, there are growing concerns about threats to strategic infrastructure, including drone bases, military outposts, and transport corridors, following earlier March incidents where Niger's forces repelled attacks on a key drone installation in Tahoua, indicating that jihadist groups are increasingly probing state assets rather than only targeting rural populations. This aligns with a broader Sahel trend where militant groups are testing state authority closer to urban and symbolic centers, raising fears of eventual high-profile attacks. Meanwhile, insecurity along Niger's southeastern flank near Lake Chad remains active, with spillover risks linked to Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province, though less dominant than in the western theater.

Niger this week has continued to consolidate its post-coup realignment rather than shift direction, reinforcing its position within the Alliance of Sahel States alongside Mali and Burkina Faso. The government maintains a strong sovereignty-first stance, with no reversal of its break from Western security frameworks, following the withdrawal of French and many European forces and the downgrading of cooperation with partners such as ECOWAS. At the same time, Niger remains at the center of intensifying geopolitical competition, particularly around security partnerships and strategic resources like uranium, which continue to attract interest from global actors. There are also ongoing signs of security diversification, including deepening ties with Russia-linked actors and alternative military cooperation channels, even as limited and cautious engagement with the United States and others quietly continues behind the scenes. Regionally, Niger is contributing to a reconfiguration of West African order, where junta-led governments coordinate more closely with each other while distancing from traditional multilateral frameworks, raising long-term concerns about fragmentation in regional security governance. Taken together, this week reflects a country under constant militant pressure internally while locking in a new geopolitical identity externally, one defined by reduced Western influence, tighter Sahel alliances, and a more contested strategic environment.

## **Chad**

The security situation around Chad has not just escalated but shifted into a more dangerous phase of cross-border warfare and militarization. The headline drone strike in Tiné that killed at least 17 civilians was not an isolated incident, it followed a pattern of increasing drone warfare along the Sudan and Chad frontier, including earlier strikes just across the border in Sudan that killed civilians and targeted fuel depots and infrastructure.

This signals a clear evolution in the Sudan war, where drones are now regularly used near or across Chad's border, raising the risk of repeated violations of Chadian sovereignty.

At the same time, active fighting inside Sudan has intensified near Chad, particularly in North Kordofan and Darfur, where towns like Barah changed hands multiple times in March, pushing armed groups closer to the border and displacing large populations toward Chad. The immediate response from N'Djamena has been unusually forceful: large-scale troop deployments, rapid military operations to seize weapons and vehicles on the border, and a clear warning that Chad may conduct operations beyond its territory if attacks continue. Alongside this, the border remains effectively sealed, but not stable, with continued military patrols, surveillance, and repeated alerts due to the porous nature of the frontier, meaning

On the geopolitical side, new reporting confirms that external arms networks tied to the UAE are actively being reorganized across the region, with routes shifting through Central and East Africa and becoming more covert, and Chad sitting uncomfortably within this logistical geography even if indirectly. Meanwhile, Chad continues to maintain formal neutrality publicly, but in practice it is increasingly pulled into the conflict's dynamics, balancing three pressures at once.

## **Equatorial Guinea**

Equatorial Guinea has been thrust into the spotlight due to a controversial deportation arrangement with the United States that has drawn strong international criticism. Under a secretive migration deal, at least 29 refugees mainly from other African countries were deported to Equatorial Guinea despite some having legal protections. Some deportees were misled into agreeing to removal and now face detention in poor conditions with very limited access to legal aid or any asylum process, as Equatorial Guinea does not have formal refugee protections. Human rights groups, legal experts, and international advocates have condemned the practice as undermining the spirit of international protection standards and raising serious human rights concerns about how vulnerable people are being treated under bilateral security arrangements.

The week has also seen growing diplomatic and geopolitical activity centered around Equatorial Guinea's upcoming role as a host of a major international summit. Malabo has been preparing to welcome leaders and delegations for the 11th Summit of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) scheduled later this month, positioning the country as a venue for broader diplomatic engagement on development cooperation and peace in the wider Africa-ACP context. Independent analysts note that this event could enhance Equatorial Guinea's diplomatic profile despite ongoing criticisms of its human rights record. At the same time, security experts point to a rising presence of external partners in the country, particularly institutions connected to Russia, including cultural centres and reported deployments of personnel as part of

Moscow's broader footprint in the region, although the government has officially denied any combat or direct military involvement by foreign forces.

In related news, preparations are also underway for a major visit by Pope Leo XIV later this year, who plans to travel to Equatorial Guinea as part of a larger tour of Africa. His itinerary includes meetings with prisoners and visits to key dioceses, reflecting the country's significant Catholic population and highlighting how religious diplomacy is intersecting with broader political narratives on national stability, reconciliation, and humanitarian concerns. Families of two Spanish citizens currently detained in the infamous Black Beach prison in Malabo have publicly appealed to the Pope to raise their cases during the visit, illustrating how international visits can become focal points for heightened diplomatic pressure on domestic justice and human rights practices.

## **12. North Africa**

### **Morocco**

The escalating tensions in the Western Sahara conflict continue to shape regional dynamics in North Africa. On March 12, 2026, the Sahara Press Service reported that units of the Sahrawi People's Liberation Army conducted targeted bombardments on Moroccan military positions in the Hawza sector, including a forward warning post in Fedret Lghrab and enemy bases in Akjkal Dirit. The pro-Polisario outlet described these actions as causing significant losses to what it termed the "occupation army," reflecting ongoing low-intensity clashes since the 2020 ceasefire breakdown.

This persistent dispute contributes to broader security concerns driving military expenditures across the region. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's 2026 trends report on international arms transfers (covering 2021-2025), Morocco has emerged as Africa's leading importer of major weapons, with imports rising 12% compared to 2016-2020, while overall African imports declined 41%. Ranking 28th globally, Morocco sources primarily from the United States (60%), Israel (24%), and France (10%), focusing on advanced systems like upgraded F-16 aircraft and HIMARS rocket launchers to enhance qualitative deterrence amid rivalry with Algeria and the Western Sahara situation. Algeria, despite a larger defense budget, saw imports drop sharply, though data opacity may understate its acquisitions.

Amid these security developments, Morocco demonstrates growing economic momentum in non-military sectors. A March 2026 report on Africa's hotel chain development pipelines shows Morocco ranking second continent-wide with 10,606 rooms in the pipeline across 75 properties, behind Egypt's leading 45,984 rooms but ahead of Nigeria's 8,480 rooms. Egypt and Morocco together represent over 45% of the total African pipeline, signaling strong tourism and hospitality investment in North Africa, driven by new deals and anticipated openings, even as execution varies by sub-region.

These interconnected military, conflict-related, and economic trends underscore Morocco's strategic positioning in a volatile North African landscape, balancing defense modernization with expansion in key growth industries like tourism infrastructure.

## **Algeria**

The recent diplomatic activities highlight Algeria's active engagement in regional and international affairs amid ongoing Middle East tensions and domestic human rights concerns. A notable development involves Algeria's military cooperation with Azerbaijan, as an Algerian Air Force Lockheed Martin C-130J-30 Super Hercules aircraft transited Armenian airspace en route to Baku for diplomatic purposes on or around March 17, 2026. Armenia's Foreign Ministry confirmed the flight's diplomatic nature, noting similar prior usages of its airspace in February for Ankara-Baku and Baku-Algeria routes. This underscores strengthening ties between Algiers and Baku against a backdrop of broader regional realignments.

Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf has been central to multiple high-level discussions addressing escalating regional challenges. In a phone call with his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein around mid-March 2026, the ministers exchanged views on developments including missile and drone attacks linked to Iran-aligned groups in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region since late February. Attaf reaffirmed Algeria's solidarity with Iraq and support for Baghdad amid these pressures. Similarly, on March 17 or 18, 2026, Attaf held a telephone conversation with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, focusing on the latest regional developments and efforts to manage them, reflecting coordinated Arab responses to instability.

These diplomatic exchanges occur against a volatile energy landscape affecting Europe. Italy is negotiating with the United States, Azerbaijan, and Algeria to secure alternative gas supplies following disruptions to Qatari LNG exports caused by Iranian strikes on Qatar. The attacks have halted shipments, reduced Qatar's capacity by about 17%, and prompted force majeure declarations, severely impacting Italy's imports under a major long-term contract that supplies nearly 10% of its annual consumption. These talks aim to mitigate shortfalls through diversified sources, including potential increases from Algeria's established pipeline and LNG capabilities.

Domestically in Algeria, human rights advocates face renewed restrictions. On March 16, 2026, authorities sealed the Algiers office of SOS Disappeared, a key organization advocating for truth and justice regarding thousands of enforced disappearances during the 1990s conflict. The closure, ordered by the Algiers governorate on March 12 citing unregistered status under Law 12-06, follows intensified crackdowns since 2024, including event preventions, website blocking, and entry denials. Amnesty International condemned the move as a violation of freedom of association and a blow to accountability efforts, urging immediate reversal to end impunity and support victims' families in their

long-standing quest for answers. This action highlights persistent challenges to civil society space despite Algeria's outward diplomatic assertiveness.

## **Libya**

Libya's energy sector highlighted resilience and new potential amid ongoing challenges. Eni, in partnership with the National Oil Corporation (NOC), announced two significant offshore gas discoveries: Bahr Essalam South 2 (BESS 2) and Bahr Essalam South 3 (BESS 3). Located about 85 km offshore in approximately 650 ft of water, roughly 16 km south of the existing Bahr Essalam field, the finds in the Metlaoui formation contain over 1 trillion cubic feet (more than 28 billion cubic meters) of gas in place. Well tests confirmed high-quality reservoirs and strong productivity. Eni plans rapid development via tiebacks to existing infrastructure, including the Sabratha platform and Mellitah onshore plant, to supply gas to the domestic market and export to Italy, boosting Libya's gas output and energy security.

A brief operational disruption occurred at the Sharara field, Libya's largest oilfield with over 300,000 barrels per day capacity. A pipeline leak triggered a fire near a valve on the crude export line, but NOC quickly contained the incident and rerouted flows: part via the El Feel pipeline to Mellitah port and the rest through the 18-inch Hamada line to Zawiyah storage tanks. Production continued with minimal losses, and output was gradually restored to prior levels within days, underscoring effective contingency measures despite infrastructure vulnerabilities.

Maritime and environmental risks emerged with the drifting hulk of the Russian LNG carrier Arctic Metagaz. The 277-meter vessel, damaged by an explosion and fire on March 3 (attributed by Russia to Ukrainian drones), drifted unmanned for weeks across the Mediterranean, carrying heavy fuel oil, diesel, and potentially up to 60,000 cubic meters of LNG in surviving tanks. After approaching Malta and Italian islands, currents pushed it into Libyan waters by March 21. NOC, through Mellitah Oil & Gas and in cooperation with partner Eni, awarded an emergency contract to international salvage experts to secure the wreck, tow it to a Libyan port, and mitigate pollution or explosion threats to offshore platforms and coastal areas.

Diplomatic efforts focused on political stabilization. UN Special Representative Hanna Tetteh met separately in Tripoli with Chinese Ambassador Ma Xuiliang and German Ambassador Ralf Tarraf to advance the UN roadmap for Libya. Discussions covered the political process, elections, security developments, regional dynamics, and creating conditions for sustainable peace. Emphasis was placed on coordinated international support to overcome transitional obstacles and implement all tracks of the plan.

Bilateral consular cooperation progressed as Libyan Foreign Ministry officials met Egypt's Chargé d'Affaires in Tripoli to finalize arrangements for the upcoming Libyan-

Egyptian Consular Affairs Committee meeting. Topics included enhancing coordination on consular services, facilitating movement and residency procedures, and addressing community issues, reflecting strengthened ties between the two nations.

These events interconnect around Libya's dual priorities: advancing energy sector recovery through discoveries, infrastructure resilience, and hazard management, while pursuing political progress via UN-facilitated dialogue and regional partnerships. The gas finds and Sharara incident response signal investment momentum and operational stability in hydrocarbons, even as the Arctic Metagaz case highlights persistent maritime security risks in a geopolitically sensitive zone. International engagement remains crucial for sustaining the roadmap toward elections and lasting stability.

## **13. Middle East**

### **Iran – Israel Conflict**

The US Israel campaign against Iran escalated sharply during March 16 to 22, 2026, with sustained airstrikes targeting missile production facilities, air defense networks, IRGC Navy headquarters in Tehran, and other command structures. These operations aimed to further degrade Iran's retaliatory capacity, building on earlier phases that neutralized much of western Iran's missile launch infrastructure and forced remaining launches from central provinces like Esfahan. Strikes also hit ammunition depots, research institutes linked to nuclear and ballistic programs, and naval assets tied to Persian Gulf operations, reflecting a deliberate effort to cripple long range threats and maritime disruption capabilities.

Iran mounted persistent missile barrages in response, launching multiple waves daily, often six to twelve, incorporating an increasing proportion of cluster munitions to compensate for accuracy limitations and maximize area effects. These attacks struck central and northern Israel, with impacts reported in Rishon LeZion, Jerusalem, Beit Shemesh, Holon, and other locations, causing civilian injuries, structural damage, and occasional fatalities despite high interception rates. Hezbollah intensified parallel rocket and drone assaults from Lebanon, claiming dozens of strikes on northern Israeli positions and towns like Nahariya, extending the multi front pressure and straining Israeli air defenses across dispersed vectors.

A major escalation unfolded as Iranian ballistic missiles directly targeted southern Israel near the Dimona nuclear research center, hitting buildings in Dimona and Arad. These strikes, framed by Iran as retaliation for attacks on its Natanz enrichment site, injured dozens to over 100 people, including children, with shrapnel wounds, serious cases requiring hospitalization, and significant property destruction in residential areas. The proximity to nuclear linked infrastructure amplified international alarms over potential radiological consequences and intentional strategic targeting.

Over a particularly intense 24 hour period, Iranian and Hezbollah barrages caused more than 100 injuries across Israel, including one confirmed death, with sirens sounding nationwide and missiles visible in populated zones. Cluster warheads featured prominently in many launches, contributing to widespread shrapnel damage and underscoring Tehran's evolving tactics to overwhelm defenses amid degraded conventional precision.

The maritime theater intensified dramatically as Iran explicitly threatened to completely close the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global oil chokepoint, and target regional power plants, water desalination facilities, and energy infrastructure if the US struck its power grid. This warning followed disruptions to Gulf energy assets and aimed to impose severe economic leverage on the coalition through potential blackouts and shipping halts.

US President Donald Trump responded with a public 48-hour ultimatum, demanding Iran fully reopen the Strait without further threats or face the obliteration of its power plants, beginning with the largest facilities. Delivered via social media, the statement represented a stark shift toward direct civilian infrastructure threats, heightening fears of widespread energy crises, civilian hardship, and uncontrollable escalation as global oil prices surged.

Iran rejected the deadline outright, vowing major, irreversible retaliation, including indefinite Hormuz closure and strikes on allied Gulf energy and water systems, should power plants come under attack. Revolutionary Guards emphasized readiness to expand the conflict economically and regionally, signaling defiance despite mounting military losses and internal pressures.

Allied cohesion showed cracks, as several US partners rebuffed requests to support naval escorts through the Strait, complicating enforcement amid rising shipping incidents. Broader analyses portrayed the war as spiraling beyond initial containment, with spillover into West Bank missile impacts causing Palestinian casualties, renewed Beirut strikes on Hezbollah infrastructure, and surging civilian tolls driving humanitarian crises, refugee movements, and heightened NATO concerns over nuclear risks and great power involvement.

Iran's furthest attempted strike occurred when ballistic missiles targeted the US UK base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, though one failed in flight and the other was intercepted. This demonstrated extended range capabilities beyond prior self-imposed limits, reshaping assessments of threats to distant assets and potentially Europe.

Throughout the week, the conflict's global repercussions mounted, including energy market volatility from Hormuz threats, disrupted Gulf production, and cascading effects on regional stability, underscoring the war's transformation into a multifaceted crisis with profound implications for international security and economies.

## Turkey

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan conveyed to Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov that Ankara stands ready to host the next round of Russia-Ukraine peace talks, stressing the conflict's dangers to regional stability, global order, and energy infrastructure. The discussion also touched on safeguarding pipelines like TurkStream amid Ukrainian threats, illustrating Turkey's enduring role as a neutral mediator capable of bridging adversaries while protecting its economic stakes in Eurasian energy flows.

Complementing this diplomatic initiative, security concerns dominated as NATO responded forcefully to direct threats from the Iran war. Multiple Iranian ballistic missiles crossed into Turkish airspace, triggering interceptions by alliance defenses with debris reported near Gaziantep. In direct response, NATO deployed additional Patriot systems to Incirlik Air Base, augmenting existing Spanish units to shield southern Turkey and allied personnel from spillover risks.

The missile threats necessitated immediate protective steps by partners. The U.S. State Department ordered non-essential diplomats and families to depart the consulate in Adana, southern Turkey, citing escalating dangers near NATO installations. This evacuation mirrored broader regional withdrawals, highlighting how the Iran conflict has forced foreign missions to prioritize safety while Turkey coordinates layered defenses to maintain operational continuity at strategic bases.

President Erdogan responded to these developments by articulating clear boundaries. Reluctant to entangle Turkey in the Iran-Israel-U.S. war—primarily to safeguard his party's electoral prospects—Erdogan warned Tehran against provocative actions that could damage ties, while reaffirming readiness to defend national interests through NATO channels. Analyses framed this stance as a calculated effort to uphold deterrence without triggering politically costly escalation ahead of future elections.

Regional media captured the nuances of this delicate position. Deutsche Welle portrayed Turkey as caught squarely in the middle of the Iran war, juggling NATO air-defense obligations, Kurdish refugee management, and fallout ranging from tourism cancellations to humanitarian pressures. The coverage emphasized Ankara's attempts to insulate its territory while grappling with wider instability that threatens economic sectors and domestic cohesion.

External pressures only intensified domestic critiques. Freedom House's 2026 report delivered Turkey the globe's lowest due-process score amid a 33-point freedom decline under Erdogan since 2005, designating it the only "Not Free" European country since 2018. The assessment drew fresh EU and NATO scrutiny, linking judicial erosion and political repression to broader questions about Turkey's reliability as a democratic partner.

Public manifestations of discontent surfaced through large-scale demonstrations. Thousands rallied in Istanbul backing jailed Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu amid his prominent trial, exposing deep political fissures with possible spillover to EU accession hopes and NATO cohesion. The protests underscored how internal opposition dynamics could complicate Turkey's international positioning at a time of heightened external demands.

International reactions to Turkey's actions extended beyond the Iran theater. U.S. Congressman Rob Menendez sharply condemned Turkey's perceived aggression and sustained military footprint in Cyprus, urging withdrawal of Turkish F-16s and stronger American support for Cyprus to secure Eastern Mediterranean stability. The statement reflected congressional insistence on curbing Ankara's regional assertiveness to protect allied interests.

These geopolitical strains coincided with efforts to strengthen economic resilience. Turkey advanced nuclear power negotiations with South Korea, Canada, China, and Russia for reactors in Sinop and Thrace, seeking diversified energy sources. Simultaneously, the EU proposed Turkey's inclusion in the SEPA payments system to cut cross-border euro costs and deepen integration despite stalled accession talks. Both moves gained urgency amid the Iran conflict's disruption of Gulf exports and Hormuz shipping, exposing critical energy-security vulnerabilities.

Such forward-looking initiatives aligned with collaborative regional strategies. Ongoing U.S.-Turkey coordination on Syria's transitional government and Syrian Democratic Forces integration persisted, addressing Kurdish policy challenges within NATO's wider security framework. The alignment offers pragmatic pathways for post-conflict stabilization while navigating sensitivities that could otherwise strain alliance unity across the Middle East.

Further reinforcing its influence, Turkey was viewed as an ascendant force in a reordered Middle East. Expert forums explored neo-Ottoman ambitions, deepened Qatar partnerships, and Israel-related tensions, framing Ankara's proactive diplomacy as central to shaping outcomes in the post-conflict order and expanding its strategic footprint.

This rising profile, however, operates alongside a foreign policy that tests traditional alliances. Turkey's drive for independence has strained NATO and EU relations while accelerating outreach to China, Russia, and BRICS structures, reflecting a deliberate quest for diversified partnerships and autonomy in defense and economics amid shifting global power balances.

Analyses further probed the implications of these entanglements. Video examinations questioned whether NATO dependencies and logistical ties are inadvertently drawing Turkey into U.S.-led conflicts, challenging its defense-autonomy objectives and

spotlighting the tensions between strategic independence and the practical demands of collective security arrangements.

## Syria

Syrian transitional authorities under President Ahmed al-Sharaa continued efforts to consolidate control and stabilize the country amid the broader regional turmoil from the Iran war. Al-Sharaa reiterated vows to keep Syria insulated from escalation, prioritizing good relations with all neighbors to safeguard reconstruction and internal unity. This neutral stance aimed to prevent spillover while advancing post-Assad reforms, including integration of diverse groups and counterterrorism cooperation.

Israel conducted targeted strikes on Syrian government infrastructure in southern Syria, hitting command centers and weapons depots in response to attacks on Druze civilians in Sweida province. The Israeli military emphasized protection of the Druze community and warned against further harm, reflecting ongoing security concerns along the border and efforts to deter threats from remnants of prior regimes or militias in the fragile transitional environment.

A significant disarmament initiative emerged as Syria unveiled a comprehensive plan to eliminate legacy chemical weapons from the Assad era, backed by the United States and international partners including Germany, Britain, Canada, and France. The proposal established a joint task force under OPCW supervision to inspect up to 100 sites, locate hidden stockpiles, and destroy remaining toxic munitions, marking a historic step toward closing a dark chapter of the civil war and improving Syria's international standing.

The United States pressed the new Syrian government to act against Hezbollah, encouraging consideration of forces into eastern Lebanon for disarmament efforts amid the wider conflict. Damascus remained hesitant, wary of sectarian risks and entanglement in the Iran war, highlighting tensions between U.S. priorities for weakening Iranian proxies and Syria's focus on domestic recovery and regional non-involvement.

Post-Assad transitional politics showed strains in ethnic and sectarian cohesion. Nowruz celebrations in Kurdish areas sparked tensions when an individual removed the Syrian flag at an event, testing fragile national unity and raising questions about Kurdish rights and inclusion under the new administration. Such incidents underscored challenges in balancing central authority with minority demands during integration processes.

Kurdish communities voiced persistent frustration over perceived U.S. abandonment in favor of closer ties with the al-Sharaa government and Turkey. Reports highlighted anger among Kurds after years of partnership against terrorism, with fears that shifting alliances could undermine their autonomy and security in the northeast.

Broader risks persisted in northeast Syria, where potential renewed clashes between the Syrian Democratic Forces and government forces threatened the U.S. counter-ISIS mission. Instability fueled concerns over ISIS resurgence, sectarian violence, and disruptions to oil fields and prisoner camps, complicating stabilization efforts despite prior ceasefire agreements.

U.S. domestic policy reflected evolving Syria dynamics as USCIS updated the termination of Temporary Protected Status for Syrians, with court stays ended and employment authorization documents valid only until March 24. This shift signaled reduced humanitarian protections for Syrians abroad amid perceptions of improving conditions under the transitional government.

Inside Damascus, municipal authorities imposed a ban on alcohol in bars and restaurants, excluding Christian areas, indicating a conservative turn under the Islamist-influenced leadership. The measure highlighted evolving social policies and potential challenges for minority communities and secular elements in the new order.

Turkey reportedly sought British intelligence assistance to safeguard President al-Sharaa from assassination plots, illustrating deepened security ties between Ankara and Damascus. This cooperation aligned with Turkey's influence in Syrian affairs and efforts to stabilize the transitional regime against internal threats.

Ongoing talks between Russian President Putin and al-Sharaa shaped discussions on future Russian military presence, reflecting Moscow's attempts to retain leverage in post-Assad Syria. These negotiations carried implications for bases, influence, and balance against Western engagement in reconstruction and security.

U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham criticized the Syria-Turkey alignment as a threat to Kurds, announcing intentions to introduce the "Save the Kurds Act" for sanctions. The statement captured congressional concerns over Kurdish vulnerabilities and potential reversals of gains against ISIS in the shifting geopolitical landscape.

Throughout the week, these developments interconnected around core themes of transitional consolidation, minority integration, counter-proliferation, and avoidance of Iran-war spillover. International implications remained high for the U.S., Turkey, Kurds, and refugee populations, as Syria navigated fragile unity, security reforms, and external pressures to prevent renewed conflict or extremist resurgence.

## **14. Europe**

Europe's foreign policy apparatus accelerated diplomatic engagement with Tehran amid the ongoing Iran conflict, as Kaja Kallas held direct contact with Iran's foreign minister and officials from neighboring regional actors (Turkey, Qatar, South Korea) to press for

de-escalation and reopening of the Strait of Hormuz—a sign that the EU is seeking direct diplomatic channels outside U.S.-led frameworks.

NATO members and allied partners are publicly coordinating on Hormuz security, with statements from NATO leadership emphasizing preparation for a coalition to patrol and secure the strait; however, this remains at the level of political signaling and readiness rather than an active combat deployment, reflecting European caution about direct military engagement in a conflict triggered by U.S.–Israel actions.

The British government has sought to reassure the domestic public and allies that Iran does not currently pose a direct missile threat to Europe following Iranian long-range attacks and claims by the Israel Defense Forces about capabilities reaching European capitals. A UK cabinet minister clarified there is no intelligence confirming such a threat to Britain, distancing UK assessments from some regional alarmism. The minister also stated that President Trump’s 48-hour ultimatum to Iran over the Strait of Hormuz reflects U.S. policy, not UK policy, and reiterated the UK is focused on protecting national interests and supporting de-escalation through allied cooperation rather than direct involvement in the conflict.

Also in London, Prime Minister Keir Starmer convened an emergency “COBRA” government meeting to address the potential economic impact of the Iran conflict on the UK economy, particularly with respect to energy market disruption, inflation risk, and rising borrowing costs. This reflects growing concern that the wider geopolitical crisis could exacerbate existing domestic economic fragilities.

There is also reporting that the UK has been engaged in preliminary planning with international partners to explore ways to restore navigation through the Strait of Hormuz—emphasizing diplomatic and multilateral options rather than military engagement, in line with the broader European stance.

Germany’s Defense Minister reinforced efforts to strengthen defense supply chains and address systemic vulnerabilities within the European industrial and military base—part of a broader euro-Atlantic trend toward reducing external dependencies on critical components and enhancing resilience in the context of global crises.

There was coordinated support for the March 19 joint statement by the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Japan, and others condemning Iran’s disruption of shipping and urging cessation of threats and attacks, while reaffirming the principle of freedom of navigation. The breadth of signatories underscores continued diplomatic cooperation even as military engagement is declined.

On March 19, 2026, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi visited the White House for talks with President Donald Trump, focusing on the Iran conflict and Washington’s

request for allied support in securing the Strait of Hormuz, alongside broader discussions on U.S.–Japan security and economic cooperation.

Following the missile and drone attack on the USS Garcia in the Gulf region, the United Kingdom stated that the United States could use British bases, such as RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus, for defensive operations only, while emphasizing that the UK would not participate in offensive strikes or broader combat operations against Iran.

## **15. Global Superpowers**

Over the past week, Washington intensified pressure on allies not only for naval contributions in the Strait of Hormuz but also for broader burden-sharing, including intelligence, logistics, and basing rights. This has exposed a widening gap between U.S. expectations of alliance compliance and the evolving European doctrine of selective engagement.

The most consequential U.S. development in the past week is the sharp escalation introduced by Donald Trump's 48-hour ultimatum to Iran over the Strait of Hormuz. Washington has effectively shifted from pressure to coercive deadline diplomacy, making the reopening of the strait a non-negotiable objective tied directly to the threat of striking Iran's core energy infrastructure.

Iran responded with explicit counter-escalation, warning it would completely close the strait and target energy and water infrastructure across the region, including in Gulf states hosting U.S. forces. This transforms the conflict from a bilateral confrontation into a wider regional risk environment.

In parallel, the U.S. significantly reinforced its military posture in the Gulf, deploying additional troops, advanced aircraft, and naval assets, signaling preparation for a possible forcible reopening of the strait. The operational focus is now shifting toward a potential direct confrontation over maritime control rather than dispersed strikes across Iran.

This represents a qualitative escalation. Earlier U.S. operations avoided targeting Iranian energy assets due to global market sensitivities; the new threat explicitly places those assets at the center of potential U.S. strikes. The implication is clear: the U.S. is now willing to accept global economic spillover as a cost of restoring maritime access.

Iran's response has been calibrated but equally escalatory. Tehran signaled conditional reopening—allowing passage for neutral shipping while excluding U.S. and allied vessels—effectively reframing the blockade as selective rather than absolute. At the same time, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps warned that any U.S. strike on energy infrastructure would trigger a full closure of the strait and retaliatory attacks on regional energy systems, including those of Gulf states hosting U.S. forces

On the ground, the war intensified through continued exchanges between Iran and Israel, including missile strikes causing significant casualties and damage, further increasing pressure on Washington to act decisively.

A critical but underreported development is that the United States issued a global security alert for its citizens, warning Americans worldwide to exercise increased caution as the conflict escalates. This reflects Washington's internal assessment that the war is no longer geographically contained and that retaliatory risks—state and non-state—are now transnational.

At the strategic level, U.S.–China dynamics remained active despite the Middle East crisis. Ongoing contacts and preparatory talks for a potential summit indicate that Washington is attempting to stabilize great power relations while engaged in war, particularly given China's heavy dependence on energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz. However, the postponement of the Trump–Xi meeting reveals how the war is already disrupting broader U.S. diplomatic sequencing, giving Beijing room to extract leverage in trade and economic negotiations

The United States announced the opening of its Bureau of Disaster and Humanitarian Response, a State Department–controlled global aid network focused on emergency relief and disaster management. The bureau will operate through regional hubs, including one in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, serving as a coordination center for humanitarian crises in Africa.

In diplomatic tensions linked to the Russia–Ukraine war's secondary effects, Russia has publicly accused Ukraine of attempting to destabilize the region through activities in India, following the arrest of several Ukrainian nationals in India on terrorism charges. This represents an escalation in Moscow–Kyiv rhetoric extending beyond the direct battlefield.

India's foreign policy continues to reflect balancing between major powers amid the Iran war and global energy disruption. With oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz disrupted, Indian refiners have significantly altered crude import patterns, increasing purchases of Russian oil to maintain supply stability. Shipping data suggests India's crude imports from the Gulf have declined sharply, while purchases from Russia and other producers have risen, reshaping India's energy strategy in real time.

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

### **United Nation**

From March 16 to March 22, 2026, the United Nations Security Council was dominated by escalating Middle East tensions and critical mandate decisions. The Council adopted Resolution 2818, extending the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for a short-term period to allow for structural review discussions.

Throughout the week, intensive consultations followed Resolution 2817, focusing on ceasefire prospects and the legal dimensions of interstate conflict. Briefings highlighted the risk of regional spillover from ongoing U.S./Israel–Iran exchanges, with concerns extending to Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. The Council also reviewed non-proliferation efforts under Resolution 1540, particularly in the context of heightened risks of illicit weapons transfers.

Simultaneously, attention remained on Sudan and South Sudan, with reports indicating famine conditions in parts of Sudan and critical funding gaps threatening humanitarian operations in South Sudan. Broader institutional discussions included ongoing advocacy for Security Council reform, particularly addressing Africa’s lack of permanent representation. On World Water Day, members underscored the security implications of targeting water and energy infrastructure, warning that such actions could accelerate displacement and deepen humanitarian crises.

### **Africa Union**

During the week of March 16 to March 22, 2026, the African Union concentrated on mediating regional disputes, monitoring political transitions, and embedding gender justice within its peace and security architecture. The AU Commission advanced narrative-building initiatives by welcoming the AU Media Fellowship Cohort 3.0, reinforcing strategic communication around peace and the “Africa We Want” agenda.

Diplomatically, the Chairperson commended a landmark agreement between Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone to pursue peaceful settlement of border disputes within the Mano River Union, while also issuing messages of solidarity for Eid ul-Fitr and Tunisia’s National Day to reinforce continental cohesion. AU engagement at the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) further aligned African positions on gender, leadership, and political participation.

On the security front, a technical mission assessed the fragile transition in Madagascar following the dismissal of its government, while the AU condemned a terrorist attack in Northeast Nigeria and promoted its Accountability Framework against trafficking and exploitation as a core security mechanism. The Peace and Security Council, under Eswatini’s chairship, continued oversight of Guinea-Bissau’s transition in coordination with ECOWAS and the UN.

Humanitarian and environmental security also featured prominently, with the AU issuing condolences to Ethiopia following a deadly mudslide and elevating water security on World Water Day as a strategic pillar linked to conflict prevention and state legitimacy.

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

During the same period, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development prioritized regional stabilization, peace agreement monitoring, and strategic evaluation of its long-term interventions. The Secretariat also intensified efforts to reintegrate Sudan into regional diplomatic and mediation frameworks following its return to the bloc. Regional discourse in Addis Ababa highlighted the absence of a durable security order despite Ethiopia's central stabilizing role, underscoring the need for renewed multilateral engagement.

Operationally, IGAD completed evaluation missions in Ethiopia, Uganda, and South Sudan, assessing the impact of peacebuilding and resilience programs. Concerns deepened over South Sudan's trajectory, with warnings that the Revitalized Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS) risks regression without progress on force unification and constitutional development.

Parallel efforts focused on advocating an inclusive Sudanese-led transition while coordinating humanitarian access. On World Water Day, IGAD explicitly linked transboundary water management to regional peace and state stability, framing resource governance as a central security variable in the Horn of Africa.

### **European Union (EU)**

During this period, the European Union advanced a multidimensional agenda centered on Ukraine support, Middle East crisis management, and strategic defense consolidation. The Foreign Affairs Council reaffirmed Ukraine as the EU's primary security priority while simultaneously addressing Middle Eastern instability and approving humanitarian support to Lebanon.

At the European Council Summit, leaders assessed Iranian escalation, energy security vulnerabilities, and the need to reinforce multilateral frameworks in coordination with the UN. The EU also intensified its use of targeted sanctions, addressing cyber threats, disinformation, and human rights violations, including measures linked to Iran and the Bucha massacre.

Defense policy progressed through investments in mine action in Africa, expanded maritime security operations in the Red Sea, and renewed focus on drone capabilities under the Strategic Compass. Concurrently, energy and migration security remained central, with efforts aimed at stabilizing supply systems and strengthening external migration governance frameworks.

### **ECOWAS**

During the week of March 16 to March 22, 2026, the Economic Community of West African States focused on institutional restructuring, infrastructure diplomacy, and refining its evolving counter-terrorism architecture. Energy diplomacy featured

prominently, with Nigeria reaffirming its commitment to expanding electricity exports to regional partners under commercially viable frameworks.

Institutional reform advanced through a high-level retreat in Accra reviewing the Council of the Wise and adopting a roadmap for a more responsive mediation structure. Strategic infrastructure coordination also intensified, particularly with the synchronization of the Abidjan-Lagos Highway project with AU continental plans. Diplomatically, ECOWAS leadership engaged international partners in Abuja to advance governance reforms and digital transformation.

On the security front, the bloc strengthened its energy security agenda through engagement with major partners while continuing to operationalize its 2,000-troop standby force, focusing on internal financing mechanisms to reduce external dependency. ECOWAS also condemned terrorist activity in Northeast Nigeria and maintained close monitoring of the Sahel states' withdrawal, refining contingency strategies for engagement with the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

## NATO

During the week of March 16 to March 22, 2026, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization concentrated on strategic planning, operational readiness, and technological integration ahead of the Madrid Summit. At the North Atlantic Council ministerial, allies finalized elements of a long-term support framework for Ukraine built on military, financial, and political pillars. NATO-EU coordination deepened through high-level engagement focused on protecting critical undersea infrastructure, while dialogue with Indo-Pacific partners reinforced the concept of interconnected security.

Militarily, the alliance conducted the final phase of its largest exercise since the Cold War, testing rapid deployment capabilities across the High North and Eastern Flank. Institutional expansion continued with the inauguration of a multinational battlegroup in Finland, marking deeper Nordic integration.

NATO also advanced innovation through AI-driven early warning systems designed to counter hybrid threats, while maritime security operations intensified in the Black Sea through a permanent mine countermeasures task group. On the strategic level, NATO linked climate and water security to instability risks, identifying resource scarcity as a key driver of conflict along its southern flank.



# HORN

REVIEW

IDEAS CONNECTIONS SYNERGY

Ideas | Connections | Synergy

---