



Weekly Geopolitical Report

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

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Horn Review: Weekly Report

Feb 23 – Mar 01, 2026

1. Ethiopia

This week's diplomatic engagements, alongside ongoing domestic preparations ahead of the 2026 elections, reflect a structured effort to expand external partnerships while maintaining internal stability. The sequence of high-level interactions across the Middle East demonstrates a deliberate widening of Ethiopia's diplomatic reach. The meeting between Saudi Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Waleed A. M. Elkhareiji and Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos in Addis Ababa, following Saudi discussions in Asmara, highlights the growing complexity of regional diplomacy in the Horn of Africa. By engaging Riyadh within this broader context, Ethiopia reinforces its willingness to participate in multi-layered regional conversations that intersect political dialogue, security considerations, and economic cooperation.

The close succession of Türkiye's visit and Israel's engagement further underscores this trajectory. These back-to-back interactions signal Ethiopia's capacity to maintain active relations with diverse regional actors. Türkiye's discussions centered on infrastructure, energy, trade, and economic cooperation, while the Israeli engagement advanced collaboration in innovation, agriculture, water management, technology, and regional stability. Together, these visits illustrate Ethiopia's expanding diplomatic bandwidth and its ability to sustain constructive ties across different strategic environments. The sequence of visits positions Ethiopia as a diplomatic hub in intensifying Red Sea/Horn rivalries, with back-to-back engagements from Türkiye (President Erdoğan warning against unilateral recognitions like Israel's Somaliland move), Israel (President Herzog's visit amid discussions of Ethiopia potentially joining Israel's emerging "hexagon" alliance against Iran-aligned actors), Saudi Arabia (multiple high-level talks urging restraint on Eritrea and regional peace), and Italy (Prime Minister Meloni advancing cooperation). This clustering reflects competing influences rather than purely independent flexibility.

Collectively, these developments reflect a consistent approach of broad-based engagement designed to enhance flexibility within a changing international system. By deepening partnerships across multiple regions simultaneously, Ethiopia strengthens access to investment, technology, and cooperation while preserving room for independent decision-making.

Parallel to these developments, engagements with Azerbaijan further expanded Ethiopia's diplomatic and economic reach. The agreements concluded during the official visit to Baku covered defense cooperation as well as aviation, industrial development, energy, and investment frameworks. This outreach into Eurasia signals a calculated effort to build

partnerships beyond traditional corridors, creating new channels for economic expansion and institutional exchange. By engaging multiple regions concurrently, Ethiopia is constructing a networked foreign policy model that enhances resilience through balance.

At the same time, domestic institutional adjustments are unfolding as the country prepares for the 7th general elections. In a move aligned with electoral administration prerogatives, the House of Federation removed five districts, Humera, Adi Remets, Tselemti, Korem Ofla, and Raya Alamata , from the Tigray Region’s oversight for the upcoming polls. The decision reflects constitutional mechanisms designed to clarify jurisdiction and electoral administration in contested areas, underscoring the federal government’s emphasis on legal frameworks and institutional order ahead of a critical political transition. Although politically sensitive, the measure reinforces structured governance and the rule of law, signaling commitment to credible electoral processes.

These developments have generated institutional and political reactions. A Federal High Court issued a temporary injunction in late February 2026 suspending NEBE implementation, while protests emerged across Tigray. Concurrently, tensions within Tigray’s political movements continue to surface, illustrating the fragile nature of ongoing post-conflict reconciliation even as preparations for the seventh general election advance. The Tigray Democratic Solidarity (Simret) rejected the House of Federation’s decision, warning of a potential boycott and other disruptive actions if grievances remain unresolved. Their call for boundary disputes and political disagreements to be addressed through constitutional channels reflects concerns regarding regional inclusion, representation, and electoral fairness. If left unaddressed, such grievances risk complicating the broader effort to sustain an inclusive political transition.

The Tigray Interim Administration, led by Lt. Gen. Tadesse Worede, further cautioned that the dispute could escalate into broader conflict, introducing heightened rhetoric into an already delicate electoral environment. Framing administrative and constitutional disagreements in terms of nationwide war elevates procedural disputes into security narratives, potentially intensifying public anxiety and narrowing space for dialogue. As Ethiopia advances toward the 2026 elections, maintaining institutional coordination, judicial engagement, and measured political communication becomes essential to preserving stability. Sustained reliance on constitutional mechanisms offers the most constructive pathway for resolving disagreements while safeguarding electoral credibility and national continuity.

2. Sudan

This week reflects a deepening internationalization of Sudan’s conflict, marked by expanded drone warfare, sharper diplomatic polarization over arms flows, renewed Egyptian strategic consolidation, and mounting alarm from the United Nations regarding atrocity levels and state collapse. While limited humanitarian access signals modest

openings in parts of the country, the overall trajectory remains one of protracted fragmentation, expanding foreign entanglement, and escalating infrastructure warfare. The confrontation between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is increasingly shaped not only by battlefield dynamics but by regional rivalries, external sponsorship, and competing claims to sovereign legitimacy.

Militarily, the expansion of coordinated drone operations represents a defining development. In the Blue Nile region, RSF forces operating alongside the SPLM-N faction aligned with Abdel Aziz al-Hilu intensified strikes around Al-Kurmuk and Geissan following the seizure of Deim Mansour. Drone attacks reportedly struck schools and residential areas, damaging civilian infrastructure and triggering panic-driven displacement. The deterioration of security in Al-Kurmuk, long a strategic gateway in prior civil wars, increases pressure on SAF defensive lines in the southeast. Allegations that supply routes may be facilitated through Ethiopia's Benishangul-Gumuz region introduce a cross-border logistical dimension that heightens regional sensitivities.

In North Kordofan, RSF "suicide" drones targeted El Obeid, including areas near the University of Kordofan campus, reinforcing a pattern of infrastructure degradation rather than purely territorial confrontation. Simultaneously, violence in Darfur intensified, including a reported RSF assault on a town that resulted in the killing of 28 doctors. The targeting of medical personnel underscores the systematic erosion of civilian protection norms and further cripples already devastated healthcare systems.

The UN Security Council formally condemned RSF attacks in Kordofan and called for an end to hostilities, signaling growing concern at the highest multilateral level. This diplomatic censure adds institutional weight to earlier warnings issued by the UN human rights apparatus. At the Human Rights Council, High Commissioner Volker Türk described Sudan as a "land of despair," reporting a 250 percent increase in civilian killings over the past year. His briefing documented over 500 cases of sexual violence in 2025 alone, including rape, sexual torture, and sexual slavery. Türk emphasized that Sudan's war has evolved into a foreign-supported "high-tech" conflict, with advanced long-range drones expanding the battlefield into previously stable regions and targeting power stations, water systems, and urban infrastructure. He called for the expansion of the Darfur arms embargo to cover the entire country and urged referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court.

Khartoum rejected the proposal outright, framing it as an adoption of RSF demands and reiterating accusations that the United Arab Emirates is violating the existing embargo by supplying advanced weaponry to the paramilitary force. Sudan's justice minister criticized what he described as UN silence regarding states allegedly breaching sanctions provisions and reaffirmed the government's refusal to equate the national army with the RSF. This reflects an intensifying legitimacy contest in which SAF leadership positions itself as the

constitutional defender of sovereignty while portraying the RSF as an externally enabled militia network.

Diplomatic friction with Abu Dhabi was further underscored by Sudan's selective condemnation of Iranian missile strikes across the Gulf, which notably excluded the UAE from its statement of solidarity. The omission reflects sustained bilateral hostility and signals that Sudan's leadership increasingly views the conflict through a broader regional prism. External supply corridors, including alleged routes through eastern Libya and across the Chad border, reinforce concerns that Sudan's war economy is deeply embedded in transnational networks.

Parallel diplomatic engagement centered on Egypt's expanding role. Prime Minister Kamil Idris visited Cairo for talks with President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly. Egypt reaffirmed its full support for Sudan's Sovereign Council and armed forces and agreed to provide expertise in constructing a new administrative capital. The request signals forward-looking institutional planning despite ongoing conflict and mirrors Cairo's own administrative restructuring experience. Both sides agreed to activate a joint reconstruction task force and deepen cooperation in infrastructure, electricity, and water sectors. The talks also reaffirmed adherence to the 1959 Nile waters agreement and jointly rejected unilateral Ethiopian actions regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, consolidating an Egypt-Sudan alignment on Nile Basin geopolitics. Cairo's posture suggests a strategic effort to prevent Sudanese fragmentation while anchoring post-war reconstruction within an Egyptian-aligned institutional framework.

The United States simultaneously engaged Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE in consultations aimed at advancing a humanitarian truce. While discussions emphasized the gravity of civilian suffering and the need for a sustainable ceasefire, no concrete breakthrough emerged. Egypt highlighted its ongoing coordination within African Union frameworks and stressed the imperative of preserving Sudan's territorial integrity. Diplomatic channels remain active but structurally constrained by battlefield escalation and entrenched external alignments.

Humanitarian indicators continue to deteriorate sharply. A UN aircraft landed in Khartoum for the first time in three years, marking a symbolic reopening of access to the capital. However, this limited operational development contrasts with the scale of national collapse. The UN projects that 34 million people in Sudan will require assistance in 2026, the highest humanitarian caseload globally. Gender-based violence has evolved into a structured protection crisis with multi-year response planning now underway, reflecting recognition that abuses are not episodic but systemic. Thirteen million children remain out of school as buildings are destroyed or repurposed for military use. Infrastructure destruction, including power stations, has triggered secondary crises such as cholera

outbreaks, demonstrating the cascading humanitarian impact of infrastructure-targeted warfare.

Beyond Sudan's borders, UN officials warned of instability risks in South Sudan, cautioning that political deterioration there could trigger wider regional spillover. Given historical militia networks and cross-border movements, renewed instability in Juba would further complicate Sudan's security landscape.

Collectively, this week's developments illustrate a conflict entering a more technologically advanced, diplomatically polarized, and regionally entangled phase. Drone warfare is redefining operational dynamics, external sponsorship is central to battlefield momentum, and reconstruction diplomacy is proceeding in parallel with escalating violence. While symbolic humanitarian openings provide limited relief, the structural indicators point toward continued protraction. Sudan's war is no longer solely an internal power struggle; it is increasingly embedded within Gulf rivalries, Nile Basin geopolitics, and multilateral accountability debates, with resolution likely contingent on shifts in regional power calculations rather than immediate military breakthroughs.

3. Egypt

Amid escalating tensions over the Nile, Egypt reportedly proposed facilitating Ethiopia's commercial access to the Red Sea via ports in Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti, contingent on Addis Ababa showing concessions in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam negotiations, while subtly threatening to block such access using its regional leverage. This move, conveyed to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and shared with US mediators, underscores Cairo's strategy to wield influence over landlocked Ethiopia's trade needs to protect its near-total reliance on Nile waters, viewing the dam as a direct threat to its water security.

However, Egypt swiftly denied these reports, labeling them unfounded and reaffirming its unyielding stance on water rights under international law, insisting Red Sea governance remains exclusive to coastal states. This denial likely serves to maintain diplomatic deniability while pressuring Ethiopia without overt commitments, aligning with Cairo's interest in preventing non-coastal military footholds that could disrupt its naval dominance in the region.

Building on shared water concerns, Egypt and Sudan issued a joint statement rejecting Ethiopia's "unilateral" Nile actions, urging adherence to principles like prior consultation and no harm to downstream states, while pushing for consensus in the Nile Basin Initiative. This coordination reinforces Egypt's alliance with Khartoum to counter upstream developments, securing its water monopoly and regional stability to avert any shifts that might dilute its control over the river's flow.

In a related environmental push, Egypt signed a €1.575 million grant agreement with the

Netherlands to fund feasibility studies for protecting Nile Delta shores using nature-based solutions, targeting five priority sites amid erosion threats. This collaboration exploits long-standing Dutch expertise to bolster coastal defenses, strategically safeguarding agricultural heartlands dependent on Nile sediments and mitigating climate impacts that could exacerbate Egypt's water scarcity challenges.

Turning to neighboring conflicts, Egypt condemned the Rapid Support Forces' attack on Mosteriha in North Darfur, which killed 28 civilians, wounded 39, and destroyed the town's sole health facility, labeling it a violation of international humanitarian law. By highlighting this atrocity, Cairo positions itself as a defender of Sudanese civilians while indirectly supporting the Sudanese army against the RSF, aiming to stabilize its southern border that could threaten joint Nile management.

Reinforcing this support, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi met Sudanese Prime Minister Kamil Idris in Cairo, reaffirming Egypt's commitment to Sudan's unity and territorial integrity amid the ongoing civil war. Discussions emphasized coordination on mutual interests, including water security, allowing Egypt to deepen ties with Khartoum's transitional government, ensuring a compliant partner on Nile issues and facilitating humanitarian aid flows to bolster its regional mediator role for influence and border security.

Extending diplomatic efforts to the Middle East, Sisi met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah during Ramadan, focusing on bilateral ties, Gaza developments, and rejecting Palestinian displacement while advocating a two-state solution under US President Trump's peace plan. This engagement strengthens Egypt's alliance with Riyadh, leveraging Saudi economic support to navigate regional tensions and position Cairo as a key player in Arab solidarity, ultimately securing financial inflows amid its domestic challenges.

Complementing these talks, Egyptian and UAE foreign ministers stressed accelerating Gaza's ceasefire implementation, supporting a Palestinian committee for governance and deploying an international stabilization force to secure aid corridors. By aligning with Abu Dhabi on de-escalation, Egypt advances its mediation credentials, drawing on UAE investments to rebuild influence in Gaza and prevent security vacuums that could ignite broader conflicts affecting its Suez Canal revenues.

4. Eritrea

The harsh treatment of Eritrean refugees in Egypt was reported by several outlets in the final days of February 2026. This primarily followed an urgent alert from the NGO Human Rights Concern – Eritrea (HRCE), which documented a systematic crackdown involving the detention of over 3,000 individuals. According to the report, detainees are subjected to torture—including chemical burns and sexual violence—and are being

processed for forced deportation through the Eritrean Embassy in Cairo. These actions are described by international observers as a direct violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*, placing asylum seekers at risk of execution or indefinite conscription upon their return.

On February 18, 2026, the African Development Bank Group approved \$58.04 million in grants to fund the Eritrea Energy Integrated Project, targeting the southwest Gash Barka region. The initiative focuses on installing a 34-megawatt solar-powered mini-grid and 542 kilometers of distribution lines to provide clean electricity to approximately 306,000 people in Tesseney, Kerkebet, and Berantu. Beyond residential power, the project aims to modernize local agriculture through solar-powered irrigation and stimulate industrial growth by supporting agro-processing and small enterprises.

On February 24, Eritrean Foreign Minister Osman Saleh addressed the UN Human Rights Council, criticizing the international multilateral system for failing to uphold sovereignty and accusing the Council of being diverted by "narrow political interests." While Saleh asserted Eritrea's commitment to self-reliance and the "right to development," his rhetoric stands in stark contrast to the country's record as one of the world's most closed and repressive states. Critics point out that despite these claims of "constructive engagement," Eritrea has consistently blocked UN investigators and lobbied to terminate the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the country's human rights situation.

The Eritrean Embassy in Washington released a statement on February 26 criticising U.S. Diplomat Tibor Negay, primarily for his piece published around the same time, discussing the ongoing tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Embassy had last month released a similar critical statement against Michael Rubin, who had published an op-ed calling for regime change in Eritrea. These two men are former U.S. government officials and are close to foreign policy decision making circles. The criticism of Negay is not only due to his essay but his overall stance on the regime in Asmara (which is critical) and his support for alternatives to Isaias Afewerki's rule, primarily the Blue Revolution Front, which the Embassy accuses of lobbying for.

5. Djibouti

On February 27, President Ismail Omar Guelleh in an interview with local media stated that establishing an Israeli military base in Berbera, Somaliland would pose a "direct threat" to Horn of Africa stability. He accused Israel of exploiting Somaliland's independence aspirations to gain a regional presence. President Guelleh described relations with Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi "Irro" as "cold," noting he has refused high-level meetings and that commercial flights have been suspended while land borders remain open. This statement built on broader regional backlash to Israel's December 2025 recognition of Somaliland. The warning was

reiterated in additional reporting on March 1, with President Guelleh emphasizing the strategic implications of such a development for regional security.

On February 25 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement backing Kuwait's sovereignty over disputed maritime zones following Iraq's submission of coordinates to the United Nations. Djibouti urged peaceful dialogue in accordance with prior Kuwait-Iraq agreements and memoranda of understanding, while signaling it would monitor potential impacts on regional maritime claims.

U.S. Africa Command's largest annual East Africa exercise Justified Accord 2026 continued throughout the reporting period running from February 23 to March 13. The exercise involves approximately 1,500 personnel from multiple nations across Djibouti, Kenya, and Tanzania led by U.S. Army Southern European Task Force Africa. Djibouti is hosting significant components at its bases including facilities near Camp Lemonnier and Chabelley.

On February 24 formal launch announcements and integration activities marked the exercise's commencement with Djibouti serving as a primary host site. By February 26 Day 4 of the exercise saw Djiboutian forces and international partners integrating for readiness, technology validation in austere environments, humanitarian operations, and counter-threat training.

Prime Minister Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed inaugurated a major renovation project for Ali-Sabieh airfield during the reporting period. The airfield, a key hub near the Ethiopia and Somalia borders will receive upgrades to runways, technical facilities, and logistics infrastructure. The event occurred during the Prime Minister's traditional Ramadan tour of interior regions to assess infrastructure and address local needs. The project aims to enhance connectivity and strategic utility in the Horn of Africa.

Ethiopian and Djiboutian officials announced enhanced collaboration at Doraleh Port during the reporting period focusing on trade facilitation, infrastructure upgrades, and joint logistics. This initiative comes amid rising Red Sea tensions and regional rerouting of maritime traffic. The agreement aims to strengthen economic ties between the two countries and address Ethiopia's reliance on Djibouti for sea access.

6. South Sudan

This week signals a sharp deterioration in South Sudan's political and security trajectory, with mounting warnings from the United Nations and humanitarian agencies that the country is approaching a renewed phase of large-scale conflict. While the 2018 peace agreement formally remains in place, institutional paralysis, economic collapse, elite fragmentation, and rising subnational violence are collectively straining the transitional framework. The dominant theme emerging across diplomatic, humanitarian, and

analytical reporting is that South Sudan is no longer merely fragile, it is at a dangerous inflection point where localized militarization could tip into systemic breakdown.

The most serious alarm came from the United Nations, which warned that South Sudan risks sliding back into full-scale civil war. UN officials stressed that political and military leaders are driving the country toward renewed confrontation, with escalating violence, mobilization of armed groups, and inflammatory rhetoric undermining the Revitalized Peace Agreement. The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported increasing patterns of arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, and repression of civic actors, while Amnesty International called for the renewal of the Commission's mandate amid worsening violations. The convergence of these warnings reflects growing concern that accountability mechanisms remain weak as political elites prioritize factional positioning over national stabilization.

Security conditions are deteriorating across multiple regions, with reports of armed clashes, community violence, and increasing militarization. UN briefings described a surge in violence that risks triggering mass atrocities if unchecked. The characterization of South Sudan as standing at a "dangerous point" reflects both rising field-level confrontations and a breakdown in trust among signatories to the peace deal. International observers increasingly question whether the transitional unity government retains either cohesion or effective command over armed actors.

The economic dimension of the crisis is compounding political instability. South Sudan's fiscal position continues to erode, with severe liquidity shortages, inflationary pressures, and declining oil revenue management transparency undermining the transition. Reporting highlights that the economic crisis is directly impeding implementation of key provisions of the peace agreement, including security sector reform and electoral preparation. Recent arrests of finance officials underscore internal power struggles over resource control, while broader analysis suggests that regime cohesion is weakening under financial strain. Economic paralysis is therefore not merely a background factor but a central driver of political fragmentation.

Humanitarian indicators remain deeply alarming. Nearly two million internally displaced persons face funding shortfalls that threaten life-saving assistance, according to the International Organization for Migration. The World Food Programme continues emergency airdrops to reach hunger-hit populations in inaccessible areas, underscoring the persistence of acute food insecurity. Vulnerability profiling data indicate high levels of exposure among families affected by displacement and conflict spillover from Sudan. Refugee and asylum-seeker movement statistics show continued cross-border flows, particularly involving individuals fleeing violence in Sudan and returning South Sudanese navigating unstable conditions. The strain on host communities and already fragile services intensifies pressure on the transitional government.

The regional dimension further complicates the landscape. UN reporting links instability in South Sudan with broader regional volatility, including spillover risks from Sudan's ongoing war. Cross-border displacement dynamics are increasing, and humanitarian coordination frameworks now treat Sudan and South Sudan as interlinked crisis theaters. Ethiopian peacekeepers serving under the UN Mission in South Sudan were awarded UN medals this week, highlighting the continued reliance on international stabilization forces even as the political environment deteriorates. The symbolic recognition underscores the fragility of domestic security institutions and the ongoing centrality of UNMISS in conflict containment.

Governance challenges extend beyond the security sphere. Legal and institutional disputes, including opposition from Kenyan legal authorities to the admission of South Sudanese lawyers, reflect broader weaknesses in professional accreditation systems and rule-of-law frameworks. Commentary from regional observers emphasizes the need for infrastructure connectivity, such as proposals for a Juba–Torit–Kapoeta–Kenya highway to stimulate economic integration and reduce isolation. However, such development visions contrast sharply with present fiscal constraints and political uncertainty.

Collectively, this week's developments portray a state under severe structural strain. Political fragmentation, economic collapse, localized militarization, and humanitarian deterioration are interacting in mutually reinforcing ways. While international actors continue to urge restraint and reaffirm commitment to the 2018 agreement, implementation gaps are widening. Without renewed elite consensus, credible security sector reform, and urgent financial stabilization, the risk of transition failure will increase.

South Sudan therefore stands at a precarious juncture. The formal architecture of peace remains intact, but the underlying foundations; fiscal capacity, political cohesion, accountability mechanisms, and public trust are eroding. The coming months will likely determine whether the country stabilizes through renewed diplomatic engagement and economic support, or whether incremental deterioration culminates in broader armed confrontation.

7. Somalia and Somaliland

Somalia

High-level negotiations between the Federal Government of Somalia and the opposition Somali Future Council which includes leaders from Puntland and Jubaland ended without agreement following meetings at Villa Somalia during the week of February 23. Disputes focused on constitutional amendments, electoral models universal suffrage versus indirect clan-based elections and timelines ahead of the federal mandate's expiration in May 2026 deepening political divisions and raising concerns about stability.

Following the collapse of talks, the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia and international partners met with both sides to urge continued dialogue. The government reaffirmed its commitment to universal suffrage while blaming opposition "unconstitutional demands" for the impasse. On February 24 the Federal Government issued a formal statement accusing opposition figures of derailing negotiations by introducing new unconstitutional agenda items on elections and reforms. The statement reaffirmed commitment to dialogue and universal suffrage while keeping the door open for future engagement.

Following the collapse of talks, the Somali Future Council announced on February 28 a high-level summit scheduled for April 10 in Mogadishu. The summit aims to unite political leaders discuss next steps, safeguard statehood and address the electoral deadlock. Leaders including former President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed stated that negotiations with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud were exhausted with calls for alternative measures ahead of the May 2026 mandate expiration. The announcement followed a conference in Mogadishu attended by Members of Parliament and civil society representatives.

On February 25, the National Intelligence and Security Agency with international partner support reported killing 23 Al-Shabaab fighters in a security operation conducted in the Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle regions. The militants were reportedly preparing attacks at the time of the operation. In a subsequent announcement during the reporting period NISA reported that 40 Al-Shabaab militants were killed in joint operations with the Somali National Army and partners. These actions are part of ongoing counter-terrorism efforts amid heightened activity in central and southern regions.

In coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia, U.S. Africa Command conducted airstrikes targeting ISIS-Somalia fighters in the Golis Mountains area, approximately 70 kilometers southeast of Bossaso, during the period of February 22–26. The operations aimed to degrade the group's capabilities and reduce threats to U.S. interests, according to an announcement dated February 26.

In response to competing overtures from Somaliland the Federal Government via State Minister Ali Mohamed Omar Balcad proposed renewing a 1980-era agreement granting the United States access to Somali military facilities, including bases, ports, and airports. The proposal reported on February 23 also highlighted potential cooperation on critical minerals. This positioned Somalia as the "lawful" partner amid tensions over Somaliland's independence push and its offers to the United States.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ali Omar met with Saudi Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Waleed Elkhareiji during the reporting period to discuss enhanced cooperation on regional stability, security, and economic ties. Somalia praised Saudi Arabia's stabilizing role in the region. On February 28, on the side lines of an Organization of Islamic

Cooperation emergency session in Jeddah, State Minister Ali Mohamed Omar and Saudi Vice Minister Elkhereiiji reinforced bilateral security cooperation. Saudi Arabia reaffirmed its support for Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud appointed Brigadier General Abdirisaq Mahamud Haji commonly known as Abdirisaq Eritrea as the new Commander of the Somali Air Force in late February. The appointment was announced and reported between February 26–28 as part of a military leadership restructuring to support ongoing counter-terrorism efforts, Air Force modernization, and the integration of personnel trained abroad. Brigadier General Abdirisaq is described as an experienced officer closely associated with Somali troops and Air Force training initiatives in Eritrea over a multi-year program. He previously served as a key figure handling Eritrea-trained forces under the administration of former President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement during the week dismissing a circulating social media document titled "Somalia Reaffirms Support for the Islamic Republic of Iran" as fabricated and not issued by the government. The ministry urged reliance on official channels amid regional tensions in the Middle East.

The Federal Republic of Somalia issued a formal statement condemning terrorist attacks in Nigeria's Zamfara State that killed over 50 civilians and involved abductions. The statement expressed solidarity with the Nigerian government, offered condolences, and called for the release of hostages and justice for the perpetrators.

On February 25, the European Union committed €63 million (approximately \$74 million) in emergency aid to address Somalia's worsening crisis resulting from drought, conflict, displacement, and high food prices. The package prioritizes life-saving health and nutrition support for vulnerable communities. This commitment brings total EU humanitarian aid to Somalia since 2017 to over €750 million.

: Sophie, Duchess of Edinburgh, conducted a historic two-day visit to Mogadishu from February 23–24 at the request of the UK Foreign Office. She met with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud at Villa Somalia and held engagements with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, including victims of Al-Shabaab. Her visit also included meetings with women in Lower Shabelle villages and health clinic staff focused on sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence support. The trip highlighted women's roles in peacebuilding ahead of International Women's Day.

Tensions in the disputed Sanaag region escalated on February 26 when authorities in Somalia's Northeast (Puntland) accused Somaliland forces of launching an early-morning assault on civilian areas in Shidan located in the Las Qoray district. Puntland officials vowed to defend their territory marking a military escalation in the longstanding territorial dispute between the two administrations.

Somaliland

On February 23, Somaliland signalled its readiness to grant the United States exclusive access to its mineral resources, including lithium and coltan, and potentially host U.S. military bases. Minister of the Presidency Khadar Hussein Abdi made the statement in an interview with AFP, noting openness to strategic agreements with Washington to advance diplomatic and economic ties. This initiative represents an intensified effort to secure broader international recognition following Israel's December 2025 recognition and came amid rival overtures from federal Somalia offering similar U.S. access.

In a related development, officials during the week highlighted Somaliland's potential in critical minerals, including lithium, tantalum, niobium, gold, copper, and emeralds, as well as oil reserves estimated between one and nine billion barrels. The administration hopes that Israel's recognition will unlock international investment, with President Irro considering privileged access for Israel alongside broader outreach to the United States for exclusive rights and bases to sway wider recognition amid geopolitical stakes.

On February 26, Israel formally accepted Somaliland's first ambassador, Dr. Mohamed Omar Haji Mohamud, granting agrément and marking a concrete step in establishing full diplomatic relations following Israel's December 2025 recognition. Dr. Mohamud, a presidential advisor who helped promote bilateral ties in 2025, will serve as Somaliland's inaugural ambassador to Israel. Israel confirmed it would appoint its own ambassador to Hargeisa in due course, building on Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar's earlier visit and agreements for cooperation in agriculture, health, technology, and economy.

Reports during the week confirmed that President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi (Irro) is scheduled for his first official visit to Israel at the end of March 2026. The historic trip aims to further strengthen bilateral relations following ambassadorial exchanges and recognition, with discussions expected to focus on expanding cooperation in security, economy, and technology.

Somaliland's Foreign Ministry issued an official statement during the week strongly condemning Iranian attacks on Gulf and Middle Eastern countries, describing them as "unprovoked aggression" threatening regional peace and stability. The statement, posted on the ministry's X account, affirmed full solidarity with the targeted Arab Gulf states. This diplomatic position aligns Somaliland with Gulf interests amid broader Middle East tensions.

On February 24, Somaliland's government announced it had dismantled an alleged network aimed at undermining Israel's recognition of Somaliland. Interior and Security Minister Abdalle Mohamed Arab Sandheere held a press conference in Hargeisa, accusing local individuals of acting against national interests on behalf of external powers. The minister claimed the network was purportedly funded by the Somali federal

government and unnamed foreign actors. The action followed parliamentary and cabinet resolutions to counter opposition to the recognition deal.

In a related development from the same press conference, the government admitted detaining individuals suspected of posing threats to national security through actions or statements opposing ties with Israel. Minister Sandheere emphasized that the arrests aligned with Somaliland laws, respected free speech limits, and were necessary during what he described as a "sensitive phase" in foreign policy following recognition.

Presidential Call for National Unity: On February 26, President Irro called for unity and solidarity among Somalilanders as opposition from regional actors, including Somalia, African Union members, and others, intensified following Israel's recognition. In remarks delivered in Hargeisa, he emphasized that Somaliland had harmed no one and was pursuing legitimate national interests, framing the recognition as a step toward legitimacy since the 1991 declaration of independence.

Israel-Launched Water Sector Training: A delegation of 25 Somaliland water sector workers arrived in Israel for training during the week, marking the first hands-on cooperation program since recognition. The training initiative aims to address drought issues affecting the territory and aligns with broader cooperation frameworks in agriculture, health, and technology. Officials indicated this would be followed by additional cooperation programs as bilateral relations continue to develop.

Tensions in the disputed Sanaag region escalated on February 26, when authorities in Somalia's Northeast (Puntland) accused Somaliland forces of launching an early-morning armed assault on civilian areas in Shidan, located in the Las Qoray district. Puntland officials vowed to defend their territory, marking a significant military escalation in the longstanding territorial dispute between the two administrations.

In response to escalating tensions in the same disputed zone, President Irro issued an appeal during the week for an immediate halt to fighting between clans in the Waqdaria and Shidan areas of the Las Qoray district. He urged respect for Ramadan's sanctity and peaceful resolution of the conflict. The appeal addressed escalating clan hostilities in the area, which is often contested with Puntland authorities, following recent accusations of armed incursions.

8. Yemen

The Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) reported a significant escalation in Houthi military activity along critical domestic frontlines, specifically in the oil-rich Marib and coastal Hodeidah governorates. According to the report, the Iran-backed group has mobilized personnel and launched lethal attacks against government-aligned forces—including the Zaraniq and Giants Brigades—threatening the fragile, years-long stalemate. Analysts suggest this surge, accompanied by internal Houthi "emergency preparations" in

Sana'a, may be a strategic attempt to exploit recent fractures within the anti-Houthi coalition following the January 2026 collapse of the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC).

Fears mounted in the final days of February that the Houthis would resume attacks on the Bab al-Mandab strait and open a new front against Israel and US assets in the Red Sea. Houthi leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi described the Iranian strikes on US bases as a 'legitimate right,' but as of February 28 no declaration of war had been issued and no return to maritime operations announced. The situation remains volatile. A resumption of Houthi maritime operations, combined with the closure of Hormuz, would represent an unprecedented disruption to global shipping.

9. Kenya

Kenya has found itself navigating a busy and security and diplomatic moment, shaped by both internal threats and external crises. Domestically, Kenyan security agencies moved aggressively against new and non-traditional risks. The arrest and prosecution of individuals accused of recruiting Kenyans to fight in the Russia Ukraine war exposed how global conflicts are bleeding into Kenya's own security space through human trafficking networks and online recruitment schemes. Authorities acknowledged that hundreds, possibly more, Kenyans had been lured abroad under false promises of jobs, forcing Nairobi to treat the issue not just as a criminal matter but as a diplomatic one, requiring engagement with foreign governments and international partners. At the same time, counterterrorism operations continued inside Kenya, with security forces disrupting suspected cells linked to Al-Shabaab, reinforcing that the threat from Somalia-based militancy remains persistent even as attention shifts to new dangers.

On the diplomatic front, Kenya has been visibly active, especially in response to rising global tensions.

As the situation in the Middle East deteriorated following U.S. and Israeli strikes linked to Iran, Nairobi issued security advisories to Kenyan citizens living or working in the region, urging caution and close coordination with embassies. At the policy level, Kenya publicly called for restraint and United Nations-led diplomacy, signaling its preference for multilateral conflict management over escalation.

Kenya has continued to position itself as a convening power on peace and security issues in the Horn of Africa. Nairobi hosted and participated in high-level discussions under IGAD, including forums focused on Women, Peace and Security, reinforcing Kenya's soft-power role in regional peacebuilding even as hard security challenges persist.

10. The Gulf Countries

War in the middle east

In the final days of February, Israel and the United States launched strikes on Iran. Iran responded with a wave of ballistic and cruise missile attacks targeting US military infrastructure across the Gulf. Reported targets included US bases in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), the US Naval Support Activity in Bahrain and the 5th Fleet headquarters, Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar (described as the largest US base in the Middle East and a priority target), Al Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi, and Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait. Residential areas in Abu Dhabi and Dubai were struck by missile debris, with at least one civilian death confirmed by Emirati media. Airports across the UAE were closed. Iran also announced the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, raising the prospect of severe disruption to global energy flows.

Saudi Arabia

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman met in Jeddah on Monday February 23 to solidify a strengthening "Cairo-Riyadh axis" amid shifting regional dynamics. Central to their talks was a shared commitment to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the territorial integrity of Sudan, positioning both nations against paramilitary expansion. The leaders also coordinated on the Horn of Africa, specifically reaffirming their rejection of any infringement on Somalia's sovereignty and discussed stabilizing Yemen following the recent collapse of UAE-backed forces in the south. This alignment marks a strategic push for "Arab solidarity" to counter external interventions and manage the fallout of the ongoing Gaza crisis.

The rift between KSA and the UAE, according to a New York Times, reached the current levels of open tensions after Recent U.S. President Donald Trump informed UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed that Saudi Arabia had lobbied for U.S. sanctions against the Emirates due to their support for Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This disclosure follows a high-stakes regional rift where Saudi Arabia has pivoted toward supporting the Sudanese army, while the UAE continues to back the RSF despite international allegations of genocide in Darfur. Although Trump reportedly assured the UAE leader of his personal support.

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, alongside Egypt and Jordan, issued a unified rejection of Iraq's updated maritime coordinates submitted to the United Nations. The dispute centers on claims over the Fasht al-Qaid and Fasht al-Aij shoals, which Kuwait maintains are undisputed territories, and Iraq's potential encroachment into the shared Saudi-Kuwaiti Neutral Zone. While Baghdad defends the move as a sovereign right to secure maritime trade routes under international law, Riyadh has spearheaded a "Gulf solidarity" front, framing the filing as a violation of Kuwaiti

sovereignty and existing bilateral agreements. This friction underscores a growing regional alignment where Egypt and Saudi Arabia are increasingly coordinating to stabilize the Gulf and Red Sea corridors against unilateral geopolitical shifts.

The Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and a coalition of 19 countries, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, France, and Spain, issued a joint statement condemning Israeli measures they characterized as "de facto annexation" of the West Bank. The group targeted recent Israeli Cabinet decisions to reclassify large tracts of Palestinian land as "state land," facilitate direct land purchases by settlers, and strip the Palestinian Authority of civil powers in sensitive areas like Hebron. The communique denounced these actions as a "flagrant violation of international law" and a direct assault on the viability of a future Palestinian state, while calling for an immediate reversal to prevent permanent changes to the territory's legal status.

UAE

On February 28, the United Arab Emirates announced that its air defense systems successfully intercepted a massive Iranian aerial assault, shooting down 132 ballistic missiles and 195 drones. While Emirati officials reported that the majority of threats were neutralized with minimal infrastructure damage, the scale of the barrage marks a significant escalation in direct regional hostilities. This confrontation follows months of heightened tensions and represents one of the largest kinetic engagements between the two nations to date.

UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed concluded a high-level visit to Washington aimed at integrating the UAE into the Trump administration's "America First" and regional security agendas. Key outcomes included a \$1.2 billion pledge for Gaza reconstruction via the newly formed "Board of Peace" and progress on a massive \$1.4 trillion ten-year investment strategy in U.S. sectors like AI, nuclear energy, and domestic manufacturing. Beyond the financial commitments, the visit served to coordinate positions on the wars in Sudan and Gaza, while securing U.S. technology transfers—including advanced semiconductors—that solidify a mutually dependent, "securitized" economic partnership.

11. Africa and The Sahel Region

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The conflict in eastern DRC has remained violent and diplomatically intense. The Congolese army conducted a drone strike near Rubaya in North Kivu, killing Willy Ngoma, a senior military spokesperson of the M23 rebel movement, even as a Qatar- and U.S.-mediated ceasefire was supposed to be observed, showing how fragile the truce is amid escalating clashes and displacement. In nearby South Kivu near Uvira, authorities

uncovered two mass graves containing at least 171 bodies in areas recently vacated by M23 fighters, deepening humanitarian and security concerns as families and local civil society groups attempt to document atrocities amid ongoing fighting. At the same time, the Congolese government has been working to strengthen cooperation with the United States, agreeing on enhanced intelligence sharing and defence collaboration aimed at countering M23 and other armed groups, with planned joint training and military engagement to help improve battlefield effectiveness.

The DRC has taken up the two-year rotating presidency of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (CIRGL), and President Félix Tshisekedi has set up a strategic panel to pursue peace and security priorities across the region, signaling an active role in regional diplomacy. At the United Nations, the Congolese government which is a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council has publicly expressed concern about major global security crises, including in the Middle East. Meanwhile, domestic voices are urging stronger enforcement of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2773 and greater accountability from international mediators in implementing peace conditions tied to that resolution. In bilateral diplomacy, the DRC has also moved forward with ratification procedures for an economic and strategic partnership with the United Arab Emirates, reflecting a push to diversify foreign partnerships alongside security ones.

Mali

Violent extremist groups, especially the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), have continued to shape Mali's peace and security landscape. Ongoing ambushes, interdictions, and clashes involving JNIM have been reported across central and western Mali, with the group sustaining a high operational tempo against joint Malian Army and allied forces in regions like Hombori (Mopti) and along key transport corridors. These operations, documented in conflict monitoring sources, indicate sustained jihadist pressure on state security forces, with disruptions to mobility and supply routes that further strain an already fragile security environment. JNIM's tactics including attacks on convoys, checkpoints, and economic infrastructure continue to undermine national stability and pose persistent threats to civilian safety and regional security cooperation.

A major development over this period was the United States lifting sanctions on three senior Malian officials, including Defence Minister Sadio Camara, that had been in place due to concerns about their ties to the Russian private military group Wagner. Washington's action reflects a shift toward pragmatic engagement with Bamako's military leadership as part of broader Sahel strategy adjustments focused on countering jihadist groups. Bamako has also been at the heart of regional military coordination through frameworks such as the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), which aims to boost transnational cooperation against Islamist insurgencies with joint force structures integrating troops from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. These diplomatic shifts show

Bamako's continuing struggle to balance external partnerships with its own security agenda.

While not strictly from just a window, its important context is that JNIM's long-running fuel blockade across southern Mali targeting supply routes and destroying hundreds of fuel tankers since September 2025 remains a central factor in the country's security and economic crisis. This blockade has fuelled political tensions in Bamako, strained daily life, and prompted foreign travel advisories and diplomatic concern.

Taken together, Mali's security situation continues to be defined by entrenched jihadist operations that challenge state authority, even as diplomatic engagement with external partners evolves in response to these threats and shifting geopolitical priorities.

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso's security and diplomatic landscape has been marked by escalating militant violence and shifting international engagements. Across the entire country there's been a sharp surge in coordinated jihadist attacks by Al-Qaeda-linked Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), especially in the north and east, where dozens of soldiers, civilian auxiliaries and civilians have been killed in a string of large-scale operations that began in mid-February. These assaults highlight the ongoing struggle between the military junta in Ouagadougou and insurgent groups that have long plagued the Sahel, deepening fears about regional instability and threatening livelihoods and cross-border trade, as Ghanaian traders were among those killed in recent violence. At the same time, broader jihadist activity is rising across neighbouring borderland in Niger, Benin and Nigeria underscoring how militant groups' reach and operational tempo are reshaping security dynamics well beyond Burkina Faso's borders.

On the diplomatic front, Burkina Faso has continued to seek external partnerships even as it battles internal unrest. The United States and Burkina Faso signed a five-year bilateral health cooperation agreement designed to improve regional disease surveillance and public health resilience, reflecting ongoing U.S. engagement in Sahel stability efforts. Though this pact is framed around health security, it carries diplomatic weight given the broader context of shifting U.S. policy in the region, including Washington's recent decision to lift sanctions on top Malian officials as part of a renewed engagement strategy. Meanwhile, Burkina Faso's regional ties have also been tested and strengthened: internal insecurity has pushed cooperation with neighbours like Ghana on cross-border governance and joint security concerns, and broader regional frameworks like the Alliance of Sahel States remain central to collective responses to terrorism and geopolitical alignment.

Niger

Niger has remained mired in a deepening security crisis driven by jihadist violence along its western and tri-border regions with Mali and Burkina Faso. Recent reports from conflict monitors show that Islamist militant attacks by groups linked to both Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (al-Qaeda) and the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP) have sharply increased across border areas that include northwest Niger, parts of Benin and Nigeria, with violent incidents up nearly 90% and deaths more than doubling in 2024-25 compared with the year prior. These armed groups have shifted from sporadic raids to consolidating control of territory and launching ambushes that have overwhelmed weak state presence and undercut regional military responses. Residents in Tillaberi Region in western Niger reported that militants recently killed at least 25 members of local self-defence militias near the Mali border.

Despite the intensified violence, the country's military government in power since the 2023 coup has continued to wrestle with both internal and diplomatic fallout from its governance choices. The military break with earlier Western partners and withdrawal from regional blocs like the ECOWAS, combined with broader shifts in Sahel diplomacy, have reoriented Niger's external ties even as jihadist groups exploit governance gaps. Security analysts have also pointed to recent wider patterns of Islamist militants consolidating their influence across West Africa's borderlands, including in Burkina Faso and Nigeria, showing how Niger's situation is part of a broader regional failure to check these insurgent networks.

Chad

The Chadian government officially closed its entire eastern border with Sudan in response to violent clashes tied to Sudan's ongoing civil war. The move followed deadly confrontations in the border town of Tine in which five Chadian soldiers and multiple civilians were killed and others wounded after Sudanese armed factions crossed into Chadian territory during fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). N'Djamena said the closure which bars almost all trade and movement except for strictly authorised humanitarian cases was necessary to prevent further spread of the conflict, safeguard civilians and preserve national stability, and additional troops have been deployed along the frontier to reinforce security and assert control.

The security pressures have continued even after the closure. Local officials reported that a rocket fired from Sudan struck the Chadian border town of Tine, causing damage to buildings and a police station underlining that the conflict's effects haven't stopped at the frontier despite official steps to seal it and prevent spillover. The closure has wider economic and humanitarian backlashes too: markets in nearby West Darfur have seen sharp increases in the prices of food and staples as trade routes have been disrupted and

border links severed, adding pressure on civilians already grappling with displacement and crisis. These developments have placed Chad in a complicated diplomatic position, balancing border security, refugee flows and its role in broader Sahel stability.

12. North Africa

Morocco

Units of the Sahrawi People's Liberation Army (SPLA) carried out a concentrated bombardment on a corps headquarters in the Guelta sector, inflicting reported personnel and equipment losses, according to the Sahara Press Service. The strike underscores persistent tensions along contested frontiers adjacent to Morocco and demonstrates how localized military operations can elevate regional diplomatic stakes and complicate de-escalation efforts.

King Mohammed VI phoned Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to discuss escalating regional developments; the call, reported by Gulf News, conveyed Morocco's condemnation of recent Iranian strikes on Emirati territory and stressed adherence to international law. Both leaders urged restraint, immediate cessation of attacks, and renewed diplomacy to prevent broader escalation and protect civilians and trade routes.

Taken together, these reports show a bifurcated pressure on the kingdom's foreign policy: while senior leaders publicly align with Gulf partners and press for restraint and diplomacy, localized Western Sahara clashes persist and risk diverting attention and resources. That combination may force a dual-track approach—sustained diplomatic engagement with regional allies alongside stepped-up measures to manage frontier security and prevent local incidents from becoming wider flashpoints.

Libya

Ahmed Al-Tuwaijri accused Abu Dhabi of actively undermining post-2011 stability in Libya, alleging Emirati backing for Khalifa Haftar. Reported by Libya Observer, the critique ties outside patronage to stalled reconciliation, increased militia autonomy and political polarization a backdrop that complicates mediation and raises the stakes for regional diplomacy aimed at restoring unified governance.

Haftar-aligned sources announced the killing of a senior commander in southern territory after clashes with local armed groups, a development that sharpens insecurity along largely ungoverned desert approaches. The reported death heightens the risk of reprisal operations, underlines fragile command-and-control among rival formations, and risks worsening tribal divisions that already complicate efforts to stabilize the south and secure Libya's porous land borders.

The New Arab reported that the Libyan National Army (LNA) said it liberated soldiers seized during late-January ambushes along the frontier with Niger. The LNA's account of a precision recovery operation underscores how cross-border militia activity and trafficking networks feed southern instability, complicating relations with neighbors and exposing gaps in regional security cooperation.

Economic maneuvering followed as Libya Tribune and Reuters sources reported that Western traders won fuel tenders, with Vitol, Trafigura and Total Energies securing contracts to supply gasoline and diesel. Tripoli's shift away from Russian product supplies signals changing commercial alliances that will affect refining logistics, pricing dynamics and the patronage networks that sustain competing factions.

Fiscal tensions erupted when Libya Herald reported the Tripoli government, led by Abd Alhamid Aldabaiba, rejecting proposed unilateral import taxes from the House of Representatives and blaming the currency collapse on parallel spending outside the Central Bank of Libya framework. The dispute risks deeper inflationary pressures and further erodes cooperation needed for a unified economic recovery.

13. Middle East

Israel

Tensions between Israel and Iran reached a boiling point this week, beginning with Israel's security cabinet convening on February 23 to evaluate the risks of a potential US strike on Iran and multi-front threats, including from Hezbollah. The meeting, delayed to avoid provoking Iran, highlighted internal divisions on involvement in any US-led action, amid ongoing US-Iran talks mediated by Oman, with a third round scheduled for February 26 in Geneva focusing on uranium enrichment.

This precautionary step connected to broader military preparations, as US refueling and cargo aircraft arrived at Ben Gurion Airport on February 24, signaling strengthened US-Israeli coordination against Iranian threats. The deployment occurred alongside the USS Gerald R. Ford's positioning near Israeli waters and warnings from President Trump about possible military action if nuclear talks failed, underscoring the alliance's readiness for escalation.

Building on these alerts, Prime Minister Netanyahu addressed the Knesset on February 24, cautioning of "complex and difficult" days ahead and pledging a severe response to Iranian aggression while calling for national unity. Opposition leaders supported targeting Iran's oil infrastructure, reflecting a consensus on confronting Tehran amid the arrival of US military assets and stalled diplomatic efforts.

Amid these strains, diplomatic outreach expanded as Netanyahu announced Indian Prime Minister Modi's visit from February 25 to 26, elevating ties to a special strategic

partnership. The agenda included finalizing a Free Trade Agreement and defense deals worth up to \$10 billion for drones, missiles, and laser systems like Iron Beam, aimed at bolstering mutual security against regional adversaries.

Modi's trip reinforced enduring bilateral trust, with him addressing the Knesset to condemn terrorism and explore cooperation in water, agriculture, and technology, positioning the alliance as a counter to radical threats. This followed Netanyahu's proposal for a "Hexagon" framework linking Israel with India, Greece, Cyprus, Arab states, and African nations to oppose Shia and Sunni extremism.

Such strategic pivots responded to shifting regional dynamics, including an emerging Turkish-Egyptian alignment potentially forming a "Sunni ring" around Israel, involving Saudi Arabia and driven by shared concerns over radicalism. A February military deal between Turkey and Egypt for arms, intelligence, and trade worth \$15 billion heightened Israeli worries about encirclement and influence in Africa.

Extending alliances further, Somaliland sought Israeli expertise on February 24 to address its water crisis, following Israel's recognition of its independence. A delegation explored desalination and recycling technologies to combat droughts affecting 4.4 million people, amid opposition from Somalia, highlighting Israel's growing role in African resource management and geopolitical outreach.

These efforts contrasted with rebukes from a coalition of 14 Islamic nations and organizations on February 23, condemning US Ambassador Huckabee's endorsement of Israeli control over Arab lands as a breach of international law. The statement warned of fueled extremism and undermined stability, clashing with Trump's peace vision for Palestinian statehood.

Parallel to these tensions, Trump's Board of Peace met on February 19, pledging \$17 billion for Gaza reconstruction from the US and Muslim countries, though without Palestinian input or clear plans for demilitarization and withdrawal. Critics viewed it as prioritizing optics over substance, amid ongoing Israeli violations of the Gaza ceasefire.

The simmering conflicts erupted into war on February 28, when US-Israeli airstrikes targeted Iran's leadership and military sites, killing Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and senior officials in Tehran, alongside strikes on defenses in Kermanshah, Qom, Isfahan, Tabriz, Karaj, and naval bases in Kenarak. The operation, described by Trump as regime change, dismantled much of Iran's aerial capabilities.

Iran retaliated immediately on February 28 with missiles and drones hitting Israel, killing nine civilians in Beit Shemesh, and US bases in Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Oman, resulting in three US soldiers dead and five wounded. Attacks caused airport explosions in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, a ship incident near the Strait of Hormuz, and regional disruptions.

Escalation continued into March 1, with Israel launching fresh airstrikes on central Tehran to dominate airspace and eliminate threats, while the US sank an Iranian corvette in the Gulf of Oman. Iran confirmed Khamenei's death, declared mourning, closed the Strait of Hormuz, and vowed further responses, including targeting the USS Abraham Lincoln, amid international calls for de-escalation.

Turkey

Turkey joined 20 nations and regional organizations on February 23 in condemning Israel's West Bank measures as 'de facto annexation,' warning that reclassifying Palestinian land and expanding settlements violate international law and undermine peace efforts. The joint statement, signed by foreign ministers including Turkey's, highlighted risks to regional stability and a future Palestinian state.

This criticism aligns with shifting regional dynamics, as an Israeli analysis warned on February 25 of a Turkish-Egyptian alignment forming a 'Sunni ring' around Israel, potentially involving Saudi Arabia. Driven by shared concerns over radicalism and Israel's African influence, the pact includes a \$15 billion military deal for arms, intelligence, and trade, heightening Israeli encirclement fears.

Complementing these ties, Ankara-Cairo relations are reshaping the East Med-Red Sea corridor, as crises redraw security orders. The rapprochement, rooted in geopolitical imperatives, focuses on energy security, maritime routes, and containing proxy wars, positioning the axis as pivotal for regional balance and countering threats amid broader realignments.

Extending connectivity, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia met in Baku on February 24 to boost Middle Corridor ties, discussing energy, transport, and regional security. The talks emphasized trilateral cooperation, with Azerbaijan highlighting strategic partnerships, aiming to enhance trade and infrastructure along this vital route linking Europe and Asia.

Amid these developments, President Erdogan turned 72 on February 26, celebrated by ministers and supporters as one of Turkey's most popular leaders. Rising from humble roots, he remains a dominant figure in governance, especially for younger generations, symbolizing continuity in Turkish politics.

As regional tensions simmered, Turkey has emerged as a hub for Iranian businesses and cultural spaces, with increasing cafes, restaurants, and bookstores in Istanbul. Iranian owners cite greater freedom and access to foreign investment, while patrons seek community amid uncertainty, reflected in 2025's high Iranian-Turkish company formations.

Building diplomatic bridges, Foreign Minister Fidan mediated Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions on February 27 through phone calls with counterparts from both nations, Qatar,

and Saudi Arabia. Urging de-escalation after deadly clashes, the initiative follows previous Turkish efforts that secured a ceasefire, aiming to prevent further border escalation.

Anticipating risks, Turkey assessed regional threats from a potential Iran-US conflict on February 25, evaluating measures like border camps without violating sovereignty. NATO increased Iran surveillance from Konya's air base, shifting from Russia, as Ankara prepared for refugee waves amid rising tensions.

Denying involvement, Turkey rejected claims on February 26 of planning cross-border actions or invasions if US operations target Iran, calling them baseless. Officials emphasized no violations of sovereignty, focusing instead on precautions coordinated with state institutions against spillover risks.

Heightening alerts, defense authorities announced on February 26 necessary precautions amid Iran-US tensions, coordinating with institutions to mitigate risks. This followed reports of NATO's intensified surveillance from Turkey, underscoring Ankara's balanced approach to its neighbor.

As buildup intensified, Istanbul-Tehran flights were canceled on February 27 night amid US military presence, affecting Turkish Airlines and Iranian carriers. While some Saturday flights remained, the disruptions reflected escalating regional instability.

The conflict erupted on February 28 when US-Israeli airstrikes targeted Iranian leadership and sites, killing Ayatollah Khamenei and officials in Tehran, alongside military facilities nationwide. Trump framed it as regime change, with ongoing bombings dismantling defenses.

Iran retaliated immediately on February 28 with missiles and drones striking Israel and US bases in Gulf states, killing civilians in Beit Shemesh and US soldiers. Attacks disrupted airports and shipping, prompting Tehran to declare mourning and vow further responses. Responding swiftly, Turkey urged citizens in Iran on February 28 to stay in safe areas, avoid military sites, and postpone travel amid the sensitive security situation following the strikes.

Intensifying diplomacy, Fidan held calls on February 28 with counterparts from Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia, UAE, Spain, and Hungary, plus EU's foreign policy chief, to address the crisis and promote de-escalation.

Denying facilitation, Turkey rejected reports on February 28 of providing airspace, territory, or bases for US-Israeli strikes on Iran, labeling them disinformation aimed at misleading the public. Calling for halt, Turkey urged US, Israel, and Iran on February 28 to cease attacks immediately, condemning violations of international law and warning of threats to regional and global stability.

Erdogan warned on February 28 that the Middle East faces a 'ring of fire' without restraint, condemning US-Israeli strikes violating Iran's sovereignty and Iran's Gulf retaliations, urging Islamic world action to prevent bloodshed.

Escalation persisted into March 1 with fresh strikes on Tehran and US actions in the Gulf, as Iran confirmed Khamenei's death and closed the Strait of Hormuz. Turkey offered mediation support amid international de-escalation calls.

Seeking resolution, Erdogan discussed Iran and Gulf tensions with Trump on March 1, part of Ankara's efforts to contain fallout and accelerate cease-fire diplomacy amid fears of prolonged conflict impacting trade and security.

Iran

Deal with Iran and the United States entered a delicate diplomatic phase when Tehran's foreign minister said a deal was "within reach" provided diplomacy was prioritized ahead of fresh Geneva talks. The comments underscored Tehran's openness to concessions including regional arrangements on enrichment while stressing reciprocity and sanctions relief as central bargaining chips.

In parallel, Washington tightened pressure: the U.S. Treasury rolled out new sanctions targeting Iranian oil sales and weapons networks, signaling that economic coercion remains a core lever alongside diplomacy. The move complicated negotiators' room for maneuver by hardening incentives for reciprocity and offering a public reminder that concessions from Tehran would need to track real, verifiable nuclear constraints.

Diplomatic engagements produced cautious signals but no immediate breakthrough: a round of talks in Geneva concluded with no deal, though officials described tentative progress on technical trade-offs. Negotiators appeared to thread a familiar needle balancing U.S. demands over enrichment and missile activities with Iranian seeks for sanctions relief leaving the window open for further discussion even as military tensions mounted.

The crisis escalated into open military confrontation when joint U.S.-Israeli strikes hit Iranian targets; state and international reporting later identified the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei among the operation's outcomes. The attack marked a strategic inflection point, triggering immediate Iranian retaliatory launches and raising questions about succession, escalation management, and the durability of regional deterrence.

Iran's missile counter-strikes pushed the conflict toward the Gulf littoral, prompting concerns that the fight would draw in regional actors and disrupt key shipping lanes. The barrage hardened domestic and external narratives that military pressure must be matched

by decisive political responses, while also producing localized damage and civilian casualties in multiple states that amplified diplomatic urgency.

World capitals issued rapid reactions to the strikes and ensuing reprisals, with governments ranging from urgent calls for de-escalation to outright condemnation of the offensive. That patchwork of responses illustrated deep geopolitical divides over the legitimacy of using force against Iran and underscored how third-party diplomatic channels and multilateral institutions were immediately tested.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported no detectable radiological impact from the strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, a finding that briefly eased fears of a nuclear contamination event even as strategic and political fallout continued to mount. The technical assessment focused attention back on inspections and safeguards as stabilizing elements amid kinetic escalation.

Moscow framed the strikes as reckless, with senior Russian voices warning that U.S. and Israeli actions risked plunging the region “into the abyss.” That rhetoric reflected a wider diplomatic schism Russia positioned itself as a critic of the attacks while urging restraint, signaling Beijing and Moscow’s readiness to counterbalance Western policy through public diplomacy and possible security cooperation.

European capitals particularly Germany, France and the United Kingdom urged Iran to cease its regional strikes and called for immediate diplomatic engagement to contain the violence. Their statements attempted to thread a narrow path: condemn attacks on civilian targets, insist on de-escalation, and push for renewed negotiation even as they registered deep concern about the rapid deterioration in regional security.

Beijing publicly denounced the strikes as “unacceptable,” urging an immediate ceasefire and the resumption of talks to prevent a wider war. China’s diplomatic posture highlighted its interest in regional stability, civilian protection and the protection of its nationals and trade links, and it amplified calls for multilateral crisis management alongside Russia’s criticisms.

U.S. Central Command acknowledged casualties during operations against Iranian forces, confirming that three U.S. service members were killed and several more wounded information that underlined how fast a primarily aerial campaign had produced ground-level human costs and created immediate pressures on Washington’s domestic and coalition messaging.

In tandem with battlefield developments, U.S. forces reported sinking an Iranian warship in the Gulf of Oman, an action framed by Washington as neutralizing a direct maritime threat. The strike on an Iranian Jamaran-class corvette signaled a willingness to target Iranian naval assets and had immediate implications for Gulf security, shipping insurance, and naval posturing by regional partners.

Israel announced fresh air strikes on Tehran following the killing of the supreme leader, saying its warplanes struck additional targets as Iran's top leadership fell into a temporary council of succession. The strikes and Iran's leadership gap together complicated calculations about proportionality, endgames and how successor arrangements might shape Tehran's strategic posture.

Live, real-time coverage documented both the strikes and Iran's retaliatory posture, including mapping where facilities and leadership sites were hit; the granular reporting fed international diplomacy by clarifying targets, alleged objectives and the immediate operational rhythm of the conflict, even as attribution and full casualty counts remained contested.

The U.S. decision to pull non-essential staff and eligible family from its embassy in Beirut reflected an immediate precautionary posture tied to the Iran crisis, showing how diplomatic missions across the region rapidly reassessed their risk calculus and continuity plans as strikes and counter-strikes unfolded. The embassy moves also illustrated the political messaging implicit in evacuations.

Before the strikes, senior U.S. officials publicly warned that Iran posed an escalating threat to U.S. interests comments deployed to justify heightened military posture and to shape international opinion ahead of Geneva talks. Those warnings framed subsequent U.S. actions as part of a continuum from deterrence to kinetic response in the face of perceived Iranian escalation.

The coordinated U.S.-Israeli operation, described in press coverage as pre-emptive by some officials, blended strategic intelligence, long-range strike capability and allied coordination. Analysts noted the operation's intent to degrade Iran's command and control while simultaneously reshaping the diplomatic bargaining table, though it also injected profound uncertainty into any near-term deal making.

Global financial markets and investors reacted immediately: asset-price volatility spiked and commodity markets jittered as traders priced in supply risks tied to Gulf insecurity. Market commentary emphasized how even a short-lived escalation could reshape energy flows, insurance costs, and investment sentiment, prompting urgent portfolio-risk recalibrations.

Market analysts tied the strikes and regional tension directly to risk sentiment shifts, noting currency swings, commodity repricing and safe-haven flows. Their assessments framed the military events as an economic shock with potential long-term implications for trade routes, energy security, and multinational companies operating in or near the region.

Commentary pieces and Breakingviews analysis framed the strikes as opening significant global risks: beyond immediate humanitarian and security costs, they argued the operation could accelerate fragmentation in supply-chains, sharpen great-power competition, and

force regional actors to recalibrate alignments heightening the premium on diplomatic damage control.

Independent media and regional outlets reported Iran's official confirmation of the supreme leader's death after the strikes, which crystallized the political shock and precipitated both domestic mourning and pockets of celebration. That official confirmation transformed a high-intensity military event into a full political transition moment with implications for continuity and succession.

Within Iran, the killing produced a sharply polarized domestic reaction grief among loyalists and celebrations among opponents that exposed internal divisions while complicating the new leadership's ability to project unity. The political fragmentation made diplomatic back-channels and mediation more urgent for outside states seeking to stabilize the situation.

Israel's public comments that "many targets remain" but that ground forces were not currently being considered signaled a calibrated posture: sustain maximum pressure through strikes while avoiding immediate large-scale occupation, thereby keeping options open and attempting to manage escalation thresholds for both domestic and allied audiences.

Beyond the Iran theatre, Washington's announced partial withdrawal from a major Syrian base earlier in the month underlined how U.S. force posture in the Levant remained sensitive to Iranian escalation dynamics; the move reflected a strategic reassessment of forward basing in a deteriorating regional security environment.

Parallel diplomatic shifts in neighboring states were notable: Canada eased certain Syria-related sanctions days earlier, while Ankara publicly signaled cautious approval of steps taken by Damascus and local Kurdish players moves that, while separate from the Iran strikes, reflected a broader regional re-ordering of diplomatic ties and pragmatic engagement.

Reports of drone and missile interceptions over the Golan Heights after strikes on Iranian targets highlighted how the conflict's kinetic effects spilled across borders, testing air-defense systems and restraining movement in contested airspaces; these incidents reinforced the urgency of diplomatic channels aimed at preventing miscalculation.

The United Arab Emirates called for an urgent United Nations Security Council meeting as the strikes and counter-strikes intensified, pushing crisis diplomacy onto the multilateral stage and aiming to secure a forum for collective de-escalatory measures and humanitarian considerations. The UAE move illustrated how Gulf states sought to internationalize containment efforts.

Iraqi political leaders urged calm and restraint after Iranian strikes, reflecting Baghdad's acute vulnerability to spillover and its interest in preventing renewed sectarian or militia-driven violence. Iraq's appeals underscored the risk that the conflict could destabilize fragile domestic politics across neighboring states.

Jordan's decision to cancel a major defense drill in response to the attacks signaled how even routine military cooperation was vulnerable to disruption, as regional partners recalibrated training and readiness in response to the elevated threat environment and the need to preserve force readiness.

Finally, a number of Latin American governments publicly expressed concern about the widening conflict and urged restraint, reflecting a global diplomatic ripple effect: although geographically remote, their statements demonstrated how major powers' regional conflicts can provoke worldwide reactions and complicate broader foreign-policy agendas.

Syria

Domestic security and legal policy in Australia shifted as Canberra moved to use rarely invoked counter-terror exclusion powers to restrict returnees from Syrian camps, citing national security and the risks posed by families linked to Islamic State. The measures crystallize political fatigue at repatriation, complicate humanitarian options for children, and signal how external conflict legacies shape domestic legislation.

Ankara and Damascus took a tentative diplomatic step when Turkish officials reported the first direct talks since the conflict, reflecting Ankara's pragmatic approach to border security and Kurdish issues. The meetings were presented as transactional, aimed at managing spill-over risks, coordinating on Kurdish integration, and protecting Turkey's frontier concerns while leaving major political disagreements unresolved.

Washington recalibrated its military footprint when U.S. forces began withdrawing heavy equipment from their principal northeastern base near Qasrak, a move confirmed by multiple observers and reported convoys. The pullback reflects a broader posture adjustment tied to integration talks with Kurdish forces and complicates contingency plans for counter-ISIS operations, local security guarantees, and U.S. leverage in northeast political arrangements.

U.S. diplomatic channels worked quietly to defuse local frictions: Washington mediated talks to arrange a prisoner exchange between Damascus and local Druze leaders, aiming to reduce violence and build confidence in Sweida. The engagement demonstrates a tactical U.S. emphasis on localized confidence-building even as broader strategic competition continues, and it helped set the conditions for a later, formal swap.

The U.N.'s diplomatic architecture engaged with Syrian actors ahead of planned Geneva sessions, with U.N. political offices and envoys re-establishing contacts with opposition delegations to preserve a Geneva track. That preparatory diplomacy emphasized humanitarian access and constitutional sequencing, signaling that multilateral architecture remains central to any durable political settlement despite on-the-ground instability.

A rare, concrete confidence-building step arrived when Damascus and local Druze factions executed a reciprocal prisoner swap in Sweida, with releases facilitated by neutral intermediaries. The exchange eased immediate local tensions and demonstrated that third-party mediation can deliver humanitarian outcomes, even as deeper political grievances and security vacuums remain to be addressed.

Technology and geopolitics intersected as U.S. officials privately urged Damascus to reconsider procurement of Chinese telecommunications equipment, warning of security risks and offering alternatives tied to Western suppliers. That pressure illustrates how reconstruction choices are being securitized and used as leverage in larger diplomatic negotiations over Syria's post-conflict orientation.

Building on earlier ceasefire accords, Syrian and Kurdish representatives signaled readiness for a fresh round of talks in Damascus focused on security integration and the phased absorption of Kurdish units into state structures. Observers treat these talks as central to north-east stabilization: success would reduce armed friction, while failure could leave governance gaps exploitable by spoilers.

Damascus issued statements of support for Lebanon's stability amid regional violence, reflecting a diplomatic posture aimed at reassuring neighbors and forestalling further cross-border destabilization. That outreach is part of a broader Syrian attempt to normalize ties in the Levant and to blunt narratives that the country's territory will be a conduit for renewed militants or external interference.

The southern governorate of Sweida suffered direct spill-over when an Iranian missile struck a building, killing civilians and scattering missile debris across adjacent provinces. State media and on-the-ground witnesses described the incident as emblematic of how regional strikes are producing lethal local consequences, amplifying humanitarian and diplomatic urgency.

Cross-border commerce and mobility showed tentative recovery as Iraqi authorities moved to reopen key crossings with Syria, a step framed as economic normalization and a practical effort to stabilize border economies. Re-opening points both to improving bilateral coordination and to the risk that resumption of trade could become entangled with shifting security dynamics if regional tensions reignite.

As Iran-Gulf hostilities widened, Damascus publicly condemned what it called brutal Iranian strikes on Arab states and reached out to Gulf capitals, including direct calls to

Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. The outreach signals a pragmatic Syrian approach to limit spillover, protect its border security, and re-insert Damascus into regional diplomatic circuits after prolonged isolation.

Finally, Syria turned to multilateral forums by appealing for urgent consideration at the U.N. Security Council as regional strikes and reprisals intensified, seeking both protection of sovereignty and humanitarian guarantees. The appeal internationalized Damascus's crisis management strategy and underscored that, amid kinetic escalation, Syria seeks multilateral cover to manage cross-border impacts and aid access.

14. Europe

British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has agreed to let the United States use UK military bases for limited defensive operations targeting Iranian missile depots and launchers. This is framed as a collective self-defence measure after Iranian retaliatory missile and drone attacks across the Middle East, including against facilities housing British citizens. The UK's official position remains that British forces are not conducting offensive operations in the ongoing U.S.–Israel military campaign, and Westminster stresses the decision is consistent with international law. The measure reflects rising pressure from Gulf partners and domestic concerns about civilian and service member safety. This marks a notable shift from UK neutrality toward more explicit support for allied defensive operations in the Middle East theatre.

Chancellor Merz conducted his first official visit to the People's Republic of China since taking office, engaging with top Chinese leadership including President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang. The two-day visit was explicitly aimed at deepening bilateral economic cooperation, addressing structural trade imbalances, and exploring how Berlin and Beijing can manage strategic competition within a broader multilateral framework

Belgian special forces have boarded and seized a Russian-linked oil tanker known as the *Ethera* in the North Sea. The vessel, suspected of sailing under a false flag as part of Russia's so-called "shadow fleet" used to evade Western sanctions on Moscow's oil exports, was escorted to the port of Zeebrugge and is now subject to EU sanctions enforcement and a criminal investigation. French naval assets assisted in the operation. Officials characterised the seizure as a concrete escalation in maritime enforcement of sanctions linked to Russia's war in Ukraine, with EU partners urging more robust action against vessels that facilitate sanctioned oil exports.

The European Union is grappling with internal differences in response to the unfolding Middle East conflict sparked by U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran and subsequent Iranian reprisals. While member states broadly condemn Iran's missile and drone attacks and underscore the need to protect European interests and citizens, divisions are emerging over alignment with U.S. military tactics versus diplomatic avenues. Some capitals

emphasise de-escalation and multilateral crisis management rather than endorsing broader direct involvement in the conflict. These tensions underscore strains within the transatlantic partnership on crisis response and strategic priorities.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has once again wielded his veto to block a new EU sanctions package targeting Russia and a major €90 billion support loan for Ukraine. Budapest's objection is tied to broader disputes with Kyiv over energy transit via the Druzhba pipeline and has delayed coordinated European punitive measures against Moscow. This move has provoked criticism from several EU capitals and highlighted persistent fractures within the EU over unified responses to the Ukraine war, especially when a single member state can hold up consensus on key policy instruments.

In related strategic commentary from Berlin, German political leadership (notably Senior figures of the CDU/CSU alliance under the new Chancellery) is advocating for a rebalancing of the EU's economic relationship with the People's Republic of China, describing aspects of the current trade arrangement as "unhealthy." This reflects ongoing debate in European capitals about dependency on Chinese markets and supply chains, particularly for strategic industries and critical technologies. Berlin's stance underscores broader EU deliberations on economic diversification and strategic autonomy amid geopolitical competition.

15. Global Superpowers

The defining event was the initiation of large-scale joint military operations against Iran on February 28, codenamed "Epic Fury" by the U.S. Department of Defense and "Operation Roaring Lion" by Israel. President Trump announced the strikes via video, framing them as necessary to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, dismantle its missile and naval capabilities, neutralize proxy threats to U.S. forces, and ultimately support regime changes. Strikes targeted military sites, leadership compounds, nuclear-related facilities, ballistic missile launchers, and warships across Iran.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in the initial wave, confirmed by Iranian officials and Israeli sources. Iran retaliated with missile and drone attacks on Israel, U.S. bases, and allies in the Gulf (including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, and Jordan), causing damage to infrastructure and civilian areas.

Putin sent condolences to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, calling Khamenei's killing a "cynical murder" and "violation of human morality and international law." He praised Khamenei for elevating Russia-Iran ties to strategic partnership but avoided naming the U.S./Israel directly.

China strongly condemned the U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iran, which killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other officials over the weekend (February 28–March 1). Foreign Ministry Statements: Spokesperson Mao Ning stated the U.S. provided

no advance notice to China before the strikes. Beijing described the killing of Iran's leader as a "grave violation of Iran's sovereignty and security" and an "unacceptable" act inciting regime change. Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in a call with Russia's Sergei Lavrov, urged an immediate ceasefire, resumption of dialogue, and prevention of wider conflict. China coordinated with Russia on potential UNSC/IAEA actions to stabilize the region. China urged its citizens to leave Iran "as soon as possible" due to security risks. One Chinese national was reported killed in Tehran amid retaliatory strikes. Analysts note China's ties with Iran will endure despite leadership changes, as Beijing benefits from sustained U.S.-Iran tensions.

The Ministry of External Affairs expressed deep concern over developments in Iran and the Gulf, urging all parties to exercise maximum restraint, avoid escalation, prioritize civilian safety, and return to dialogue while respecting sovereignty. India reiterated calls for de-escalation to protect regional stability and its diaspora in the Gulf.

On March 2, Modi spoke with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, conveying India's concerns over recent developments, emphasizing civilian protection, and calling for an early cessation of hostilities. Separately, Modi spoke with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, strongly condemning Iranian missile/drone attacks on the UAE, expressing solidarity, and thanking the UAE for safeguarding the Indian community.

Modi's state visit to Israel elevated ties to a "Special Strategic Partnership for Peace, Innovation, and Prosperity." Leaders signed 17 pacts, including an MoU on AI cooperation and a Letter of Intent for an innovation hub. Discussions covered defense, counter-terrorism, cyber, agriculture, water, health, and emerging technologies. This built on historic 2017 and 2018 visits but drew opposition criticism post-Iran strikes.

Canadian PM Mark Carney's first official visit focused on resetting ties post-Trudeau era frictions. In New Delhi, leaders released a joint statement and five MOUs, announcing a new Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) targeted for conclusion in 2026. They launched a Strategic Energy Partnership (LNG, LPG, uranium, solar, hydrogen) and deepened cooperation in technology, AI, talent, culture, defense, space, and investment. Trade goals aim for US\$50 billion by 2030, signaling a shift prioritizing security and consultation on differences.

16. International and Regional Organizations

United Nation

The United Nations Security Council addressed acute escalation risks and sanctions adjustments during 24–28 February under the presidency of the United Kingdom. On 24 February, the Council convened a high-level meeting marking four years since the

invasion of Ukraine, with briefings calling for renewed diplomatic efforts toward a just peace.

The same day, the 1591 Sanctions Committee added four entries to its Sudan list and issued a press statement condemning atrocities in El Fasher and demanding an immediate ceasefire to avert conflict-induced famine. On 27 February, the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee removed Al-Nusrah Front (Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham) from its sanctions list, lifting associated measures. On 28 February, the Council held an emergency briefing following coordinated U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iranian targets and subsequent retaliatory action by Iran, exposing sharp divisions among permanent members regarding legality and escalation risks. Discussions continued throughout the week regarding operationalization of the Gaza “Board of Peace” reconstruction mechanism. The rotating presidency formally passed to the United States on 1 March 2026.

Africa Union

The African Union shifted from post-Summit institutional consolidation to active diplomatic signaling during 24–28 February. On 24 February, the AU Commission convened a High-Level Partners’ Consultation to accelerate implementation of the Decade of Education and Skills Development (2025–2034), translating Assembly mandates into sectoral programming. The Peace and Security Council, under Egypt’s February chairship, held consultations the same day with FAO, WFP, and IFAD on the conflict–climate–food security nexus, reinforcing the AU’s integrated security paradigm. On 25 February, AUC Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf met the Ambassador of Qatar to discuss bilateral cooperation, while also receiving the credentials of Belarus’ Ambassador on 24 February, signaling continued diplomatic outreach beyond the continent.

Following Cyclone Gezani, the Chairperson expressed formal solidarity with Madagascar on 27 February, underscoring the AU’s climate-security framing. On 28 February, the Commission issued a strong condemnation of coordinated missile and drone attacks against Gulf states, calling for immediate de-escalation and a return to diplomacy. Concurrently, the AU remained actively seized of the crisis in Sudan, reiterating rejection of any parallel governing structure and emphasizing restoration of civilian-led constitutional order. Operationalization of the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) advanced as a 2026 priority, while mediation efforts in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo intensified, focusing on force disengagement and withdrawal of foreign elements.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development concentrated on consolidating Sudan’s reintegration and reinforcing Somalia stabilization coordination during 24–28 February. Diplomatic engagement continued to normalize Sudan’s full participation in the bloc, with IGAD sustaining its leadership role within the Quintet mediation framework alongside the AU, UN, Arab League, and EU to pursue a humanitarian truce.

On 24 February, Executive Secretary Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu publicly encouraged Somali-led political dialogue and national cohesion following federal–regional consultations. IGAD also coordinated closely with troop-contributing countries on the operational transition to AUSSOM to ensure continuity through 2026. On 27 February, the Secretariat concluded participation in AUDA-NEPAD’s African Infrastructure Database training in Addis Ababa, strengthening institutional capacity in regional infrastructure planning. Throughout the week, the IGAD Security Sector Program maintained focus on counter-terrorism, maritime security, and organized crime within the broader African Peace and Security Architecture framework.

European Union (EU)

The European Union concentrated on Ukraine solidarity messaging, Middle East escalation management, and internal security modernization during 24–28 February. On 24 February, Presidents of the European Council, Commission, and Parliament issued a joint declaration marking four years since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, while Commission President Ursula von der Leyen traveled to Kyiv to reaffirm sustained political and military backing. The Foreign Affairs Council the same day examined potential EU contributions to the Gaza “Board of Peace” framework, including possible redeployment of EUBAM Rafah and expanded support to the Palestinian Authority.

On 26 February, the Commission unveiled an Eastern Border Strategy to reinforce regions bordering Russia and Belarus through expanded drone defense, surveillance, and air–space integration systems. Concurrently, new initiatives were proposed under an updated counter-terrorism agenda, a Cybersecurity Blueprint for coordinated large-scale incident response, and tighter firearms trafficking controls.

On 28 February, EU leadership called for maximum restraint following escalating tensions with Iran, emphasizing protection of EU citizens in the region. The Council also extended the mandate of Operation ASPIDES in the Red Sea through February 2027 and confirmed substantial SAFE instrument allocations, including over €43 billion in defense procurement financing for Poland.

ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States prioritized diplomatic cohesion and security coordination amid Sahel fragmentation during 24–28 February. Building on post-Summit engagements, the Commission intensified its “Return to Dialogue” initiative aimed at encouraging Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso to reconsider withdrawal decisions, favoring calibrated engagement over escalation.

On 26 February, technical teams initiated preliminary assessments to support Ghana’s upcoming electoral cycle, emphasizing preventive diplomacy mechanisms through the Council of the Wise. Maritime security cooperation advanced on 25 February through a review of the Integrated Maritime Strategy in Zone F, strengthening joint patrols in the Gulf of Guinea against piracy and illegal fishing. Counter-terrorism coordination remained central, with the Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff refining operationalization parameters for the ECOWAS Standby Force and enhancing intelligence-sharing between coastal and Sahelian states.

On 27 February, a specialized session addressed border governance and Small Arms and Light Weapons trafficking routes destabilizing the Liptako-Gourma corridor. Monitoring of the ECOMIG mission in The Gambia continued, focusing on gradual transfer of security responsibilities to national authorities.

NATO

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization centered its agenda on Ukraine commemoration, deterrence credibility, and capability integration during 24–26 February. On 24 February, Secretary General Mark Rutte marked the fourth anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine with a formal ceremony in Brussels, reaffirming sustained Allied commitment. A NATO-Ukraine Council session followed, during which President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed Allies virtually to request additional air defense systems under the Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List framework. On 25 February, the High Level Group advising the Nuclear Planning Group met in Brussels to review safety, security, and credibility of NATO’s nuclear posture amid evolving threat dynamics.

On 26 February, NATO accelerated development of the Alliance Federated Surveillance and Control capability, integrating Alliance Ground Surveillance assets and space-based persistent surveillance systems with national platforms. Separate consultations the same day examined the role of geospatial intelligence in strengthening deterrence and battlefield awareness. Bilateral consultations with Lithuania underscored burden-sharing dynamics, with recognition of defense expenditure exceeding 5% of GDP.



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REVIEW

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Ideas



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