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The Horn in April: Strategic Repositioning Amid Fragmentation, Externalization, and Shifting Power

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Foreword

“**The Greater Horn**” Strategic Brief offers a monthly synthesis of key diplomatic and security trends in one of the world’s most volatile yet consequential geopolitical theatres. This edition, covering developments from April 2026, draws on open-source intelligence, strategic assessments, policy briefings, and regional commentary to deliver nuanced, non-partisan, and research-driven insights into strategic complexities, internal vulnerabilities, emerging partnerships, and geopolitical recalibrations shaping the region’s trajectory. Intended to inform regional policymakers, analysts, and stakeholders, the briefing is produced by independent experts committed to regional stability, cooperative security, and evidence-based Policymaking.

**Blen Mamo, Executive
Director & Editor-in-Chief,
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The Horn in April: Strategic Repositioning Amid Fragmentation, Externalization, and Shifting Power

Executive Summary

April 2026 marked a pivotal period in the Greater Horn of Africa, defined by the coexistence of internal consolidation efforts, deepening fragmentation, and intensifying geopolitical competition. Across the region, states navigated complex transitions shaped by domestic pressures and evolving external alignments, reinforcing both resilience and volatility within the regional order.

Ethiopia emerged as a central stabilizing and agenda-setting actor, advancing its national dialogue process while consolidating post-conflict governance arrangements, particularly in Tigray. These internal efforts were closely linked to an increasingly assertive regional and global posture, reflected in its leadership of the African Union Peace and Security Council. Progress in debt restructuring, investment mobilization, and green development initiatives underscored a broader strategy of aligning domestic stabilization with international repositioning.

Elsewhere, the region exhibited pronounced signs of fragmentation and governance stress. Sudan's conflict further entrenched into a protracted and externally entangled war, characterized by battlefield stalemate, systemic civilian targeting, and institutional collapse. Similarly, South Sudan faced escalating instability linked to political fragmentation and electoral uncertainty, raising concerns over renewed large-scale conflict.

In the eastern Horn, Eritrea experienced heightened diplomatic activity amid reports of potential normalization with the United States, reflecting its renewed strategic relevance in Red Sea geopolitics. Yet, this external engagement contrasted sharply with persistent internal structural pressures, including human rights concerns and continued outward migration.

Djibouti reinforced its role as a strategic anchor state, maintaining internal stability while leveraging its geopolitical position amid increased regional militarization and maritime security concerns.

Across the region, a broader pattern is evident: internal governance trajectories are increasingly intertwined with external strategic competition. Gulf states, global powers, and regional actors are deepening their engagement in the Horn, driven by maritime security, economic interests, and geopolitical positioning. This convergence is reshaping alliance structures while amplifying both opportunities for cooperation and risks of proxy dynamics.

Overall, April 2026 reflects a region in transition, where efforts toward stabilization and reform coexist with deep structural vulnerabilities and intensifying geopolitical contestation. The trajectory of the Greater Horn will depend on the ability of states to manage internal pressures while navigating an increasingly complex and competitive external environment.

Section One: Internal Consolidation, Fragmentation, and the Evolving Security Landscape

1.1 Ethiopia: Reform Momentum, Regional Leadership, and Global Repositioning

Ethiopia entered April 2026 with notable momentum in national reconciliation and regional leadership. The Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission advanced its bottom-up consultation process across more than 1,200 woredas, incorporating historically marginalized voices.¹ A pivotal development occurred with Tigray representatives, who, following broad stakeholder consultations involving over 700 participants, submitted consolidated agenda items during a three-day forum held in Addis Ababa from April 1 to 3. Chief Commissioner Mesfin Araya described this engagement as laying the groundwork for a national culture of consultation rather than coercion.² By prioritizing inclusive dialogue, Ethiopia aims to transform past divisions into durable political trust, which in turn bolsters its credibility as a reliable partner in the Horn of Africa's fragile security landscape.

This internal stabilization effort directly supported Ethiopia's assumption of the chairmanship of the African Union Peace and Security Council for April 2026, marked by a flag-hoisting ceremony on April 7.³ With its geographic centrality and institutional experience, Ethiopia is well positioned to address regional challenges ranging from Sudan's instability to Red Sea tensions. The timing underscores a strategic pattern: enhanced domestic cohesion enables more assertive continental leadership. Ethiopia is leveraging this role not merely as a rotating seat, but as a platform to project stability, mediate conflicts, and advance African-led solutions, reinforcing Addis Ababa's emergence as an anchor state in Horn geopolitics.

Parallel to these political gains, Ethiopia continued reaping rewards from nearly a decade of structural economic reforms under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Agricultural productivity has risen markedly, achieving wheat self-sufficiency and expanding exports, while gold production and digital financial inclusion through mobile technologies have diversified foreign exchange earnings and broadened economic participation.⁴ Environmental programs such as the Green Legacy initiative have further embedded sustainability. These cumulative shifts provide a resilient foundation for both internal stability and external engagement. On April 3, Ethiopia reached a significant debt treatment resolution with China under the G20 Common Framework, easing servicing burdens and opening pathways for future financing,

¹ Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia Dispatches Over 500,000 Workers Abroad Over Nine Months: MoLS." *ENA English*, April 25, 2026.

² Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia Unveils Integrated Sustainable Financing Framework to Boost Long-Term Dev't." *ENA English*, April 24, 2026.

³ Ethiopian News Agency. "Finland Emphasizes Investment, Digitalization as EU-Ethiopia Ties Evolve." *ENA English*, April 24, 2026.

⁴ Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia's Green Legacy Sets Continental Benchmark for Climate-Resilient Growth: AGRA Board Chair." *ENA English*, April 22, 2026.

including projects like the Bishoftu International Airport.⁵ This agreement advances macroeconomic stabilization and signals growing creditor confidence in Ethiopia's reform trajectory.

Investor sentiment strengthened further with the conclusion of the "Invest in Ethiopia 2026" Forum around late March, which secured approximately \$13 billion in commitments across manufacturing, agriculture, energy, and infrastructure.⁶ This milestone validates the shift toward investment-led growth. Complementing immediate capital inflows,⁷ Prime Minister Abiy inaugurated a state-of-the-art national research complex at the Armauer Hansen Research Institute on April 4, hailing it as the dawn of a "new scientific age." The facility, featuring advanced laboratories and genomics capabilities, targets self-sufficiency in pharmaceuticals, health security, and technology. It aligns short-term investment gains with long-term innovation capacity while enhancing Ethiopia's competitiveness.⁸

At the 61st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, concluding in April, Ethiopia demonstrated a calibrated foreign policy. It voted against a resolution on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, but supported a separate measure reaffirming the Palestinian right to self-determination. This nuanced approach reflects an emphasis on sovereignty, balanced engagement, and case-by-case assessment amid complex global dynamics, rather than blanket alignment. Concurrently, China reaffirmed its support for Ethiopia's WTO accession on April 3, deepening strategic economic ties and facilitating greater integration into global trade rules.

Building on these foundations, the second week highlighted effective management of Tigray's transitional governance. On April 8, the federal government extended Lieutenant General Tadesse Worede's mandate as Chief Administrator of the Tigray Interim Administration by one year, citing constitutional provisions and the need to avoid a governance vacuum.⁹ This decision, following a performance review, aims to sustain post-conflict normalization, advance disarmament, and facilitate the return of displaced persons under the Pretoria Agreement framework. It provides breathing room for stabilization ahead of the 2026 national elections while mitigating immediate risks of renewed tensions. The move aligns with ongoing National Dialogue efforts and expert calls for pragmatic trust-building in regions including Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia.¹⁰

Regional diplomacy gained depth through high-level engagements with Burundi. Prime

⁵ Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia Advances Bold Path Toward Climate-Compatible Development." April 22, 2026.

⁶ Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia, China Agree to Elevate All-Weather Strategic Cooperation to New Heights." *ENA English*, April 29, 2026.

⁷ Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia's Macroeconomic Reform Yielding Tangible Results: National Bank Governor." *ENA English*, April 29, 2026.

⁸ Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia Expands Efforts to Accelerate Industrial Development, Job Creation." April 27, 2026.

⁹ Critical Threats Project. "Ethiopia Averts Tigray War—For Now; Ethiopia Announces New Dams on Nile; Russia Establishing New Foothold in Madagascar: Africa File, April 9, 2026." *Critical Threats*, April 9, 2026.

¹⁰ Clingendael Institute. *Rethinking Ethiopia's National Dialogue*. The Hague: Clingendael Institute, August 2025.

Minister Abiy hosted President Évariste Ndayishimiye on April 9,¹¹ overseeing the signing of multiple Memoranda of Understanding covering defense, health, education, water and energy, agriculture, trade, digital identity, and tourism. These agreements, building on a joint ministerial commission, emphasize moving from diplomatic goodwill to tangible implementation with clear timelines, reinforcing Ethiopia's proactive role in African integration and shared development priorities.

Ethiopia also projected its development vision internationally. Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos advocated at the International Vienna Energy and Climate Forum on April 10 for Africa's low-carbon industrial growth through renewable energy and critical minerals value addition, calling for increased concessional finance.¹² He spotlighted Ethiopia's achievement of roughly 95 percent clean energy and progress in green industrialization. Side meetings with officials from Austria and South Sudan explored opportunities in trade, investment and renewables, complementing broader diplomatic gains.

In mid-April, sustainable infrastructure and economic diplomacy took center stage. Prime Minister Abiy inaugurated the 100 MW Assela Wind Farm in Oromia's Arsi highlands on April 16,¹³ developed in partnership with Denmark, adding significant clean capacity through 29 turbines while supporting energy security and job creation. This was paired with the opening of the Haroo Dendi Lodge, advancing eco-tourism under the "Dine for Generation" initiative. Together, these projects illustrate a coherent strategy linking natural resources to environmentally sustainable growth in both energy and high-value tourism.

During the IMF–World Bank Spring Meetings, Finance Minister Ahmed Shide engaged U.S. Treasury officials to expand trade, investment, and private-sector collaboration, including on the Bishoftu Airport as a regional hub. National Bank Governor Eyob Tekalign, alongside subsequent discussions with IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva, highlighted measurable progress under the Homegrown Economic Reform Agenda rising exports, easing inflation, and stronger fiscal balances, earning praise for reform ownership amid global headwinds. These interactions reinforce a virtuous cycle in which domestic policy credibility attracts international partnership.

Ethiopia further positioned itself in global climate leadership by convening the COP32 National Steering Committee on April 17 to align preparations for hosting the conference in 2027, focusing on green finance, technology transfer, and domestic resilience. At the same time, engagement with China continued through Special Envoy Hu Changchun, reaffirming strategic partnership and implementation of the Horn of Africa peace and development outlook.¹⁴ The African Union recognized Ethiopia's agricultural gains in wheat, coffee, and

¹¹ PM Abiy Hosts Burundi's President Ndayishimiye for High-Level Talks in Addis Ababa," Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), April 9, 2026

¹² Ethiopia's FM Gedion Champions Africa's Renewable Energy and Green Industrialization at Vienna Forum," Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), April 10, 2026

¹³ Ethiopian News Agency (ENA). "PM Abiy Inaugurates 100 MW Assela Wind Farm." April 16, 2026.

¹⁴ African Union Peace and Security Council, "Communiqué of the 1339th Meeting of the PSC on 'Artificial Intelligence:

livestock, citing policy reforms that have shifted the country from importer to exporter and strengthened continental food security. Foreign Minister Timothewos also led discussions on artificial intelligence's role in African peace and security governance, stressing early-warning benefits alongside risks such as disinformation and the need for regulatory frameworks.

April emphasized diversified bilateral and multilateral ties. Foreign Minister Gedion held talks in Europe with counterparts from Austria, marking 120 years of relations, as well as Norway and Sweden, discussing trade, investment in renewables and tourism, climate action, and support for COP32 preparations.¹⁵ In Addis Ababa, agreements with Bangladesh prioritized economic cooperation in agro-processing, pharmaceuticals, and industry. Prime Minister Abiy hosted South Sudanese President Salva Kiir for discussions on trade, investment, and regional stability, while also receiving Djibouti's Foreign Minister on bilateral collaboration. On April 23, the African Union appointed Abiy as Champion for Artificial Intelligence and Digital Health, recognizing initiatives such as Africa's first AI Institute under the Digital Ethiopia 2030 strategy.¹⁶ The inaugural Africa-China Entrepreneurs Summit yielded 12 agreements in infrastructure, renewables, and digital trade, promoting innovation-driven South-South cooperation. Ethiopia's AU PSC chairmanship also included thematic sessions on AI in conflict prevention.

The final days of April added further momentum to Ethiopia's diplomatic and economic outreach. Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos held talks with his Mozambican counterpart to strengthen bilateral ties. Ethiopia announced that its WTO accession negotiations had reached a decisive and final phase following the 7th Working Party Meeting in Geneva, with officials expressing confidence that the process could be completed by the end of 2026.¹⁷ Additionally, the economy, marking the Union formally resumed direct budget support to Ethiopia after a five-year suspension, unlocking over €140 million for priority sectors including energy, connectivity, healthcare, business climate reforms, and the digital economy, marking a significant normalization of relations with a major Western partner.¹⁸

Underlying these developments is Ethiopia's continued hosting of over one million refugees, earning international humanitarian recognition, alongside preparations for the 2026 elections through party registration and media guidelines. However, challenges persist. The TPLF's announcement around April 20 regarding restoration of pre-war regional structures raised concerns over the Pretoria Agreement's implementation and the potential for renewed

Governance, Peace and Security',” April 16, 2026

¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, “Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos Holds Bilateral Talks in Europe,” April 2026; Fana Media Corporation, “Ethiopia and Sweden Seek to Deepen Bilateral Cooperation,” April 24, 2026.

¹⁶ Xinhua, “Ethiopian PM's Advocacy for AI Recognized by AU,” April 23, 2026; Fana Media Corporation, “African Union Appoints Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed as Champion for Artificial Intelligence and Digital Health,” April 23, 2026.

¹⁷ Ethiopia and Mozambique Foreign Ministers Discuss Strengthening Bilateral Cooperation,” Fana Media Corporation, April 27, 2026

¹⁸ World Trade Organization, “Ethiopia Steps Up Domestic Reforms to Advance WTO Accession,” April 24, 2026

tensions in Tigray, though no immediate large-scale conflict erupted. The National Intelligence and Security Service also called for enhanced cooperation against transnational threats.

Collectively, April 2026 reveals Ethiopia repositioning itself through interconnected strands of inclusive national dialogue, continental security leadership, sustained economic and green reforms, targeted debt resolution, investor inflows, scientific capacity-building, and multidirectional diplomacy. The late-April resumption of substantial EU budget support and the advancement of WTO accession talks further strengthen this positive trajectory. Internal trust-building and governance stabilization are enabling an outward projection of stability and ambition, while economic resilience underwrites diplomatic assertiveness. If momentum is maintained amid lingering regional and domestic sensitivities, Ethiopia stands to consolidate its role as a cornerstone of Horn of Africa stability and African integration in an increasingly multipolar environment.

1.2 Eritrea: Washington's Overture, Diplomatic Recalibration, and Persistent Structural Pressures

April was defined by a single headline development with potentially significant consequences for Eritrea's international standing: reports that the Trump administration is exploring the lifting of sanctions on Asmara and a broader normalisation of bilateral relations. The initiative, tied to Washington's reassessment of Red Sea strategic priorities in the context of the Iran conflict, would mark the most substantial shift in U.S.-Eritrea relations in decades. Asmara responded with visible energy, defending the prospect of engagement against sceptics in Washington's policy community. The month also brought a notable acceleration in Eritrea's diplomatic activity more broadly, with high-level visits from Chinese and Egyptian delegations, the simultaneous accreditation of seven ambassadors, and continued outreach through multilateral forums.

Running beneath this diplomatic activity, the structural pressures on the regime remained fully intact. The UNHCR updated its guidance on Eritrean asylum seekers, reaffirming that the conditions driving mass displacement have not materially changed. Finland upgraded its travel advisory citing fresh military activity along Eritrea's border zones. The Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization escalated its international messaging, and the recurring spectacle of Eritrean athletes seeking asylum abroad repeated itself with seven footballers disappearing during a transit stop in South Africa. The Ethiopia-Eritrea rivalry remained active in the background, with Deutsche Welle (DW) assessing that regional disruption linked to the Iran crisis had deferred rather than resolved the bilateral tensions that have accumulated since the end of the Tigray conflict.

The Washington Opening

The most consequential development of the month came on April 22, when reports emerged that the Trump administration is exploring the removal of sanctions on Eritrea and a reset in the bilateral relationship.¹⁹ The reported rationale is strategic: with Houthi threats to Red Sea shipping intensifying and the Iran conflict reshaping the maritime security calculus, Eritrea's coastline and the access it offers to the southern Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb have acquired renewed operational relevance for U.S. planners. If realised, the policy shift would represent a significant departure from Washington's sustained posture of pressure and distance toward one of Africa's most closed political systems, undertaken without any evident change in Asmara's domestic governance or human rights practices.

The prospect drew immediate criticism from former U.S. official Cameron Hudson²⁰, who characterised it as a transactional and underdeveloped approach that risks generating destabilising ripple effects across Ethiopia, Sudan, and the wider Horn. The concern is that a sanctions-for-access arrangement, pursued without conditionality or regional coordination, could alter the incentive structures of multiple actors simultaneously at a moment of elevated fragility.

On April 29, Eritrea's embassy in Washington issued a public statement responding to the criticism circulating among U.S. analysts and policy commentators.²¹ The statement dismissed the scepticism as mischaracterisation and framed engagement as a necessary correction to ineffective past policies. The response signals that Asmara is actively tracking the Washington discourse and is prepared to contest the narrative around normalisation as the process develops.

Diplomatic Recalibration

The sanctions story sat atop a broader month of diplomatic activity that reflected growing external interest in Eritrea's strategic position, as well as Asmara's own effort to widen its network of formal relationships.

On April 14, President Isaias Afwerki simultaneously received the credentials of seven ambassadors: resident envoys from Japan and India and non-resident envoys from Brazil, Canada, Thailand, Slovakia, and Armenia.²² Canada's ambassador used the occasion to signal a shift toward what he described as "mutually beneficial partnerships" despite acknowledged political differences, and referenced shared commitments on sovereignty and regional

¹⁹ Robbie Gramer and Summer Said, "U.S. Seeks to Reset Ties With Reclusive but Strategically Vital African State," *Wall Street Journal*, April 23, 2026.

²⁰ Cameron Hudson, "Washington's One-Dimensional Chess in the Horn of Africa," *Foreign Policy*, April 23, 2026.

²¹ Ministry of Information, State of Eritrea, "Mischaracterizations Surrounding Prospects for Eritrea–United States Rapprochement," press release, April 29, 2026.

²² Yemane G. Meskel [@hawelti], "President Isaias Afwerki Received, at the Denden Guest House in the Early Evening Hours Today, Credentials of the Ambassadors of Japan and India..." X, April 17, 2026.

stability.²³ The framing is notable. It suggests that at least parts of the Western diplomatic community are moving toward a posture shaped less by governance conditionality and more by geopolitical and regional calculations, a recalibration that has accelerated as Eritrea's Red Sea position has grown in salience.

On April 10, President Isaias received China's Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, with discussions reportedly focused on regional developments and bilateral cooperation.²⁴ Beijing remains one of the few major powers with consistently maintained ties to Asmara, anchored in part by interests in the mining sector. The envoy's visit also reflects Chinese interest in assessing the trajectory of the Ethiopia-Eritrea tension, which carries direct implications for Beijing's broader Horn of Africa footprint.

The Egypt file deepened further. On April 14, a delegation led by presidential advisor Hagos Gebrehiwet and Trade and Industry Minister Nesredin Salah travelled to Cairo for high-level meetings with Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty and multiple sectoral ministers.²⁵ The talks covered industrial cooperation, transport, maritime links, renewable energy, agriculture, and pharmaceutical regulation, indicating that the Eritrea-Egypt relationship may be moving well beyond its earlier political and security framing into a substantive economic and infrastructural engagement. As noted in previous briefs, Cairo's deepening ties with Asmara sit within a broader Egyptian regional strategy shaped in part by its Nile dispute with Addis Ababa, with Eritrea forming part of an architecture of indirect leverage against Ethiopia.

Eritrea's ambassador to Qatar met the Qatari Education Minister in Doha on April 15 to discuss expanding educational opportunities for Eritrean diaspora students in Qatar.²⁶ The meeting revealed the durability of the Asmara-Doha relationship, which has historically carried periodic political and regional significance beyond its immediate sectoral expression. Eritrea also participated in the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States summit²⁷ and sent Foreign Minister Osman Saleh to a Geneva conference on unilateral sanctions, where he framed Eritrea's economic and humanitarian difficulties as the product of external coercive measures and financial system over-compliance.²⁸ The performance was consistent with the regime's established practice of using multilateral platforms to shift its international positioning from subject of scrutiny to victim of systemic pressure.

The African Development Bank's regional director also outlined follow-up areas from a recent mission to Eritrea, including solar energy projects in Tesseney, Kerkebet, and Barentu,

²³ Joshua Tabah [@JoshuaTabah], "My Thanks to President Isaias Afwerki for Accepting My Letter of Credence....," X, April 18, 2026, 4:31 PM.

²⁴ Ministry of Information, State of Eritrea, "President Isaias Afwerki Meets China's Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa," press release, April 10, 2026.

²⁵ Ministry of Information, State of Eritrea, "Eritrean Delegation on Official Visit to Egypt," press release, April 14, 2026.

²⁶ Eritrean Embassy in Doha [@EritreaInfo2020], "H.E. Ali Ibrahim Ahmed, Eritrea's Ambassador to Qatar, Met with Minister Lolwah Al Khater....," X, April 15, 2026.

²⁷ Ministry of Information, State of Eritrea, "Eritrea Participates at Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States Summit," press release, April 9, 2026.

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Eritrea, "Statement by Minister Osman Saleh at the Geneva Conference on Unilateral Sanctions," press release, April 9, 2026.

and financial sector reforms, building on the \$58 million grant approved in February for the Gash Barka energy project.²⁹

Human Rights and Structural Pressures

The diplomatic acceleration of April occurred against a backdrop of assessments confirming that the conditions underpinning Eritrea's reputation as one of the world's most repressive systems remain unchanged.

In late April, UNHCR released updated guidance on Eritrean asylum seekers, reaffirming continued international protection needs for Eritrean refugees globally.³⁰ The report documented persistent arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, indefinite national service, severe restrictions on movement, and the absence of basic political and civic freedoms under the PFDJ system. The global Eritrean refugee and asylum-seeker population stood at over 679,000 by end-2025. The update is significant in the present context: it directly contradicts the implicit premise of diplomatic normalisation, which requires at minimum that conditions have meaningfully improved or that improvement is credibly underway.

On April 19, Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs upgraded its travel advisory for Eritrea to "exercise special caution," citing renewed military activity along Eritrea's borders with Ethiopia, Sudan, and Djibouti, intermittent disruptions along the Eritrea-Ethiopia corridor, and landmine risks.³¹ The advisory's timing is consistent with the pattern of border zone sensitivity documented across previous months.

The Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization issued statements on April 10 accusing the regime of systematic persecution of the Red Sea Afar population, alleging long-term economic exclusion, forced displacement, arbitrary detention, and extrajudicial violence. The RSADO directly rejected Foreign Minister Saleh's Geneva framing, dismissing the attribution of human rights concerns to external sanctions as deflection from internal practice. The release reflects a growing assertiveness among Eritrean opposition actors in internationalising ethnically grounded grievances, and signals that the diplomatic space Asmara is attempting to build will be contested from multiple directions.

The historical pattern of Eritrean athletes seeking asylum abroad continued. On April 9, seven members of the national football team disappeared during a transit stop in South Africa following a victory over Eswatini, casting Eritrea's participation in upcoming AFCON qualifiers into doubt.³² The recurring nature of these incidents points to structural pressures that extend to state-affiliated representatives.

²⁹ Ghideon Musa [@GhideonMusa], "Some countries are known more by what is said about them than by what is experienced within them...", X, April 26, 2026.

³⁰ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Guidance Note on Eritrea*, April 2026.

³¹ VisaHQ News, "Finland Raises Eritrea Advisory to 'Exercise Special Caution' Amid Border Tensions," *VisaHQ*, April 20.

³² "Eritrea's AFCON Place in Doubt after Players Disappear in South Africa," *Al Jazeera*, April 9, 2026.

The Narrative Contest and Diaspora Politics

The regime prosecuted its narrative operations through multiple channels in April. The Ministry of Information reported extensively on the twentieth YPFDJ conference in Europe, a gathering of diaspora youth framed as a celebration of continued national engagement.³³ The scale and visibility of the event is an indicator of the PFDJ's sustained capacity to mobilise and retain loyalty in European diaspora communities, a capacity that creates structural headwinds for opposition movements working in the same spaces.

Asmara also released a formal article outlining its vision for Eritrea-EU ties, portraying ongoing diplomatic outreach as an effort to expand political and economic cooperation.³⁴ The framing is aspirational: European capitals have conditioned deeper engagement on human rights and governance benchmarks that the regime has consistently declined to meet, and substantive rapprochement remains elusive. The article's release nonetheless reflects the regime's awareness that a shifting international environment may offer new openings, and its interest in shaping the terms on which that environment is discussed.

An Agence France-Presse fact-check investigation published in the first week of April documented the growing use of AI-generated images and videos to circulate false narratives around a potential Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict.³⁵ Social media networks aligned with both sides have shared fabricated visuals depicting military advances and leadership captures. The investigation is a reminder that the information environment around the Horn of Africa's sharpest bilateral rivalry remains actively contested and technically sophisticated in its manipulation.

A debate article in the Swedish outlet *Expressen*, written by representatives of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, criticised EU engagement policy toward Eritrea, arguing that the European posture of maintained dialogue has effectively reduced pressure on the regime regarding long-held political detainees, including Swedish-Eritrean journalist Dawit Isaak.³⁶ The piece frames continued EU engagement as structural cover for Asmara's repressive practices, rather than leverage toward reform.

Conclusion

April may prove a hinge point in Eritrea's international trajectory, though the outcome of the Washington opening remains contingent and contested. The Trump administration's reported interest in sanctions relief and normalisation reflects a logic rooted in Red Sea access and maritime security rather than governance improvement, and the criticism from within the U.S. policy community signals that the initiative will face significant domestic resistance.

³³ Ministry of Information, State of Eritrea, "20th Conference of YPFDJ Organization in Europe," press release, April 4, 2026.

³⁴ Tolera Fikru Gemta, "AI Warfare: How Digital Battle Is Shaping Ethiopia-Eritrea War Narratives," *AFP Fact Check*, April 2, 2026.

Asmara's responsive public diplomacy, visible through the embassy statement and a sustained month of multilateral engagement, suggests the regime intends to press the opportunity while it exists.

The broader diplomatic picture is one of gradual but real recalibration. Canada's posture shift, China's sustained engagement, Egypt's deepening economic ties, and the simultaneous accreditation of seven ambassadors all point to widening external interest in Eritrea's strategic location. That interest is driven by geography and the shifting weight of the Red Sea in global security calculations, not by changed conditions inside the country.

Those conditions remain intact. The UNHCR assessment, Finland's advisory, the RSADO's international campaign, and the continued flight of Eritrean citizens, including national team footballers, confirm that the structural drivers of displacement and dissent have not shifted. The diplomatic openings of April exist in direct tension with the human rights realities they largely ignore.

1.3 Djibouti: Strategic Centrality Amid Regional Militarization

Political Developments and Electoral Process

Preparations for the April 10 presidential election proceeded through early April with the Interior Ministry reporting that voter card distribution and logistical activities were advancing on schedule nationwide without disruptions. On April 2 the Interior Minister conducted a high level review of electoral logistics in Djibouti City confirming preparations had reached their final phase. Key focus areas included the training of polling station staff, finalization of electoral materials, voter card distribution and overall readiness. The minister expressed confidence that operations remained on schedule.³⁷

President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh in power since 1999 sought a sixth term following the 2025 removal of the presidential age limit. He faced one challenger Mohamed Farah Samatar of the Unified Democratic Centre. The electoral process remained tightly managed with limited opposition visibility and strong dominance by the ruling coalition.³⁸

On April 8 supporters of President Guelleh gathered for a campaign rally in Djibouti City featuring flags and displays of support for the Union for the Presidential Majority candidate. The rally represented one of the final major campaign activities before polling day and was conducted without reported disruptions or tensions.³⁹

On April 10 President Guelleh voted before noon at the City Hall polling station in Djibouti City alongside his wife telling reporters "By the grace of God, we have arrived here, and we hope that this will end in victory. Challenger Mohamed Farah Samatar voted earlier in the

³⁷ Dawan Africa. 2026. "Djibouti Government Finalizes Poll Preparations For April 10 Vote." April 2.

³⁸ Al Jazeera. 2026. "Djibouti Elections: Who's Running Against Guelleh and What's at Stake." April 9.

³⁹ Xinhua. 2026. "Presidential Campaign Rally Held in Djibouti City." April 9.

day. Voter interviews reflected strong support for Guelleh and limited name recognition for Samatar. An early AFP tally of partial results from six percent of votes across 38 polling stations in Djibouti City showed Guelleh leading with 96.47 percent to Samatar's 3.52 percent.⁴⁰

On April 11 the Ministry of Interior released provisional results showing President Guelleh winning with 97.81 percent of the vote while Samatar received 2.19 percent. Turnout was reported at approximately 80.33 percent among roughly 256,000 registered voters. President Guelleh had declared victory earlier that morning via a social media post stating "Re-elected" after early tallies showed a landslide lead. The results require validation by the Constitutional Council before final certification and swearing in.⁴¹

International Engagements and Diplomacy

Djibouti's diplomatic engagement during April was extensive reflecting its geopolitical role in the Horn of Africa. The African Union deployed a short term Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) led by Bernard Makuza comprising 26 observers from 16 member states.⁴² The mission engaged with a wide range of stakeholders and operated from April 3 to April 14 with a preliminary statement delivered on April 12 at the Djibouti Palace Kempinski Hotel.⁴³

In parallel Djibouti's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed the deployment of 67 international observers including representatives from the African Union, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. IGAD observers were led by former Ethiopian President Mulatu Teshome.⁴⁴ Observer missions from both the African Union and IGAD later assessed the election as calm, peaceful, orderly and broadly credible noting adherence to national and international standards despite the limited opposition participation.

International recognition of the election results followed swiftly. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Chairperson of the African Union Commission issued a formal congratulatory statement acknowledging the outcome and commending the peaceful conduct of voters.⁴⁵ Additional congratulations were extended by Xi Jinping who reaffirmed strong bilateral ties and commitment to cooperation under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation framework and by Japan through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴⁶

Diplomatic activity also included high level regional engagement. Djibouti's Foreign

⁴⁰ Al Jazeera. 2026. "Djibouti's President Guelleh Wins Sixth Straight Term in Office." April 11.

⁴¹ BBC. 2026. "Djibouti Elections: Ismail Omar Guelleh Wins with 97.8% of the Vote." April 11.

⁴² African Union. 2026. "Announcement of The Arrival of The African Union Election Observation Mission." April.

⁴³ African Union. 2026. "The Preliminary Statement: The African Union Election Observation Mission to the Republic of Djibouti, 10 April 2026 Presidential Election." April 12.

⁴⁴ GAD. 2026. "IGAD Election Observation Mission For the 10 April 2026 Presidential Election in the Republic of Djibouti Preliminary Report." April 13.

⁴⁵ African Union. 2026. "Statement of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the Re-Election of H.E. Ismail Omar Guelleh." April 11.

⁴⁶ Xinhua. 2026. "Xi Congratulates Guelleh on Re-Election as President of Djibouti." April 17.

Minister, Abdoukader Houssain Omar visited Addis Ababa to deliver a message from President Guelleh to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Discussions emphasized strengthening bilateral economic and security ties, maritime logistics, and the centrality of the Ethio-Djibouti Railway in regional integration.⁴⁷

Further diplomatic engagements included a phone call between President Guelleh and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi focusing on bilateral cooperation and shared interests. Djibouti also participated in the Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly (April 15–19) represented by National Assembly Speaker Dileita Mohamed Dileita advocating enhanced parliamentary cooperation.⁴⁸ Djibouti additionally joined the Agreement establishing the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA) as its 83rd member on April 18 reinforcing its international governance commitments.⁴⁹

Regional Cooperation and Economic Engagement

Regional cooperation remained a central pillar of Djibouti's external engagement. IGAD convened multiple consultative meetings including a three day session in Djibouti City advancing the RECOVER-HORN Regional Climate Resilience Programme with a focus on food security and disaster risk reduction.⁵⁰ Another IGAD-led consultation held in Addis Ababa from April 14 to April 16 advanced implementation of the Djibouti Declaration among Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia, emphasizing education, science, technology, and innovation collaboration.⁵¹

Security and Counterterrorism

Security conditions in Djibouti during April were characterized by heightened vigilance amid regional geopolitical tensions. The Bab el-Mandeb Strait remained a focal point of concern due to Red Sea instability and potential spill over risks linked to broader regional dynamics.

The U.S. Embassy in Djibouti issued a security alert on April 2 confirming the resumption of normal operations but advising personnel to avoid areas surrounding Camp Lemonnier a key U.S. military installation and headquarters for the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa. On going threat assessments continued in coordination with Djiboutian authorities.⁵² Domestically, security forces conducted an operation in District 7 of Djibouti City resulting in the detention of over 330 individuals including persons already wanted by authorities.⁵³ The operation also included the repatriation of undocumented migrants as part of an intensified anti-crime campaign.

⁴⁷ AllAfrica / Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Ethiopia: Prime Minister Abiy Receives Djibouti Foreign Minister." April 23.

⁴⁸ Egyptian Presidency / SIS. 2026. "El-Sisi Congratulates Djiboutian President for New Presidential Term." April 19.

⁴⁹ International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA). 2026. "IACA Welcomes Djibouti as its 83rd Party." April 18.

⁵⁰ IGAD. 2026. "IGAD Convenes Regional Experts' Consultation to Advance Climate Resilience and Adaption Agenda in the Horn." April 23.

⁵¹ IGAD. 2026. "IGAD Commences the 2nd Cluster of the National Consultation on the Implementation of the Djibouti Declaration between Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia." April 16.

⁵² U.S. Embassy in Djibouti. 2026. "Security Alert: Djibouti – April 2, 2026." April 2.

⁵³ Dawan Africa. 2026. "Djibouti Deports Illegal Migrants After Security Sweep." April 25.

1.4 Somalia and Somaliland

Somalia: Political Transition, Diplomatic Crisis, and the Resurgence of Piracy

Domestic Politics and Federal-State Relations

The month of April saw an escalation in internal political tensions driven by the expiration of the federal parliament's mandate contested constitutional reforms and realignments within federal member states. On April 14 the term of Somalia's federal parliament officially expired without scheduled elections prompting fears of a constitutional vacuum.⁵⁴ Former Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid warned on April 15 that the country had entered a difficult phase of institutional uncertainty.⁵⁵ In response the federal government informed foreign ambassadors in Mogadishu of a one year mandate extension under the new constitution seeking to reassure international partners of its legal continuity.⁵⁶ Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre publicly defended on April 21 the revised constitution's extension to five year presidential and parliamentary terms, a move rejected by opposition groups and some federal member states.⁵⁷

Opposition leaders including members of the Somali Future Council and former Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble formally announced that President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud would no longer be recognized as head of state after his term expires on May 15.⁵⁸ This declaration followed meetings with influential Hawiye traditional elders at the residence of former President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed in Mogadishu. The opposition formed a National Salvation bloc warning of an impending constitutional vacuum and accusing the government of prolonging power via constitutional changes and delayed elections. On April 20 opposition leaders and Hawiye clan elders convened to discuss a national salvation plan centred on political transition, electoral processes, and consensus-building ahead of the May deadlines.⁵⁹

Puntland President Saeed Abdullahi Deni issued a warning on April 28 that Somalia's federal government would no longer be considered in existence after May 15 if a legitimate political transition does not occur.⁶⁰ Earlier in the month speaking in Qardho district on April 7 President Deni accused the federal government of pursuing a political strategy aimed at weakening Somalia's federal system citing remarks attributed to presidential adviser Sheikh Ali Wajiis suggesting that the federal government should directly administer regional

⁵⁴ Bloomberg. 2026. "Somalia Parliament's Mandate Expires Without Elections in Sight." April 14..

⁵⁵FTL Somalia. 2026. "Somalia Enters 'Constitutional Vacuum' as Parliament Term Ends; Ex-PM Warns." April 15.

⁵⁶ Addis Standard. 2026. "Somalia's Risky Power Extension Amid Emerging Rivalries." April 15.

⁵⁷ Dawan Africa. 2026. "Somalia's PM Defends Five-Year Term in New Constitution." April 21.

⁵⁸ Somali Guardian. 2026. "Somalia's Opposition Says President Loses Legitimacy After May 15." April 22.

⁵⁹ Somalia Today. 2026. "Somali Opposition Forms 'Salvation' Bloc Amid Election Crisis." April 20.

⁶⁰ Somali Guardian. 2026. "Somalia's Puntland Leader Warns Federal Government 'Will No Longer Be Considered in Existence' After May 15." April 28.

states.⁶¹ On April 8 Deni ordered regional security forces to remain on full alert citing concerns over potential federal government intervention similar to recent military actions in Southwest State.⁶² On April 28 General Mahad Abdirahman former custodial corps chief declared that state authority had effectively collapsed reflecting growing concerns among security sector figures regarding the trajectory of the political crisis.⁶³

In Southwest State federal consolidation efforts continued. On April 7 reports indicated that the federal government was weighing a move to capture the border town of Dolow following the federal military takeover of Baidoa.⁶⁴ President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud concluded a multi day visit to Baidoa on April 8 focused on restoring order and consolidating political alliances after the ousting of Southwest State leader Abdiiaziz Hassan Mohamed Laftagaren.⁶⁵ On April 6 two civilians from Laftagaren's clan were killed and their bodies burned inside the parliament speaker's home in Baidoa, raising concerns among local elders and human rights advocates regarding post conflict accountability and inter clan tensions.⁶⁶ Separately, the president ordered several cabinet ministers competing for the Southwest regional presidency to return to Mogadishu and resume ministerial duties.⁶⁷ On April 26, President Mohamud persuaded a leading contender in the race for Southwest State president to withdraw effectively clearing the field for a presidential ally. On April 27 Somalia's electoral commission postponed South West State elections to May 10 citing the need for credible polls with the deadline for submitting candidate lists pushed to May 5.⁶⁸ On April 29 reports emerged that ousted Southwest leader Laftagaren was preparing a comeback as federal forces tightened their grip on Baidoa.⁶⁹

On April 27 President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud addressed political tensions stating that they did not signal state collapse and emphasizing on going state building efforts.⁷⁰ Separately on April 27 Somalia launched the Bulsho Project implemented by the Ministry of Interior in partnership with the World Bank, the Federal Ministry of Finance and federal member states to strengthen local governance and community ties. Interior Minister Ali Yusuf Ali 'Hoosh' stated that the project would serve as a foundation for building trust between citizens and the government focusing on delivering basic services to rural areas through a community-driven approach.⁷¹

On April 12 President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud addressed a commemorative ceremony in

⁶¹ Hiiraan Online. 2026. "Puntland President Accuses Federal Government of Undermining Federal System." April 8

⁶² Somali Guardian. 2026. "Somalia's Puntland Leader Puts Forces on Alert over Fears of Federal Intervention." April 8.

⁶³ Somali Guardian. 2026. "No Government in Somalia, Former Custodial Corps Chief Says." April 25.

⁶⁴ Africa Intelligence. 2026. "Fallout of Capture of Baidoa Spreads Through the Region." April 7..

⁶⁵ Dawan Africa. 2026. "President Hassan Sheikh Chairs High-Level Security Meeting in Baidoa." April 7.

⁶⁶ Somali Guardian. 2026. "Somalia: Two Civilians Killed, Burned in Parliament Speaker's Home After Baidoa Takeover."

⁶⁷ Somali Guardian. 2026. "Somalia's President Clears Field for Ally in Southwest Leadership Race." April 26.

⁶⁸ FTL Somalia. 2026. "Electoral Commission Postpones Deadline, Announces Southwest State Polling Date." April 27.

⁶⁹ Somali Guardian. 2026. "Somalia's Ousted Southwest Leader Laftagaren Plans Comeback as Federal Forces Tighten Grip on Baidoa." April 28

⁷⁰ Dawan Africa. 2026. "Somalia's President Says Political Tensions Do Not Signal State Collapse." April 28

⁷¹ Somali National News Agency (SONNA). 2026. "Somalia Launches Bulsho Project to Strengthen Governance and Peacebuilding." April 27.

Mogadishu marking the 66th anniversary of the Somali National Army praising the army's role in defending national sovereignty and protecting civilians describing the forces as central to state building and national stability. He also laid the foundation stone for the Somali National Army Orphans Care Agency to honor fallen soldiers and support their families.⁷²

Commercial flights to Baidoa Airport resumed on April 1 and the Mogadishu–Baidoa road was fully reopened. Defense Minister Ahmed Moalim Fiqi characterized the road's reopening as a breakthrough for stabilization operations. Nevertheless humanitarian concerns persisted with individuals displaced by recent escalations.⁷³ On April 3 President Mohamud arrived in Baidoa for reconciliation and security talks. While received by local stakeholders and the parliament speaker, the visit drew criticism from the Somali Future Council and former officials who condemned the interim appointment process as undermining federalism and risking instability.⁷⁴

Counterterrorism and Security Operations

Counterterrorism operations continued throughout April with Somali forces and international partners conducting targeted strikes against Al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia. On April 6 Somali government forces supported by international partners conducted a targeted military operation near Baidoa and Daynuunay in the Bay region striking Al-Shabaab positions along a key corridor linking Mogadishu and Baidoa resulting in 12 militants killed.⁷⁵ Between April 6 and 7, U.S. Africa Command in coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia conducted airstrikes against ISIS-Somalia militants in the Golis Mountains area approximately 55–75 kilo meters southeast of Bossaso in Puntland aimed at degrading the group's ability to plan and conduct attacks.⁷⁶ On April 11 Somali security forces conducted an operation in and around the Dayniile district of Mogadishu intercepting a motorcycle concealed with at least five mortar shells and other explosive devices hidden in sacks of vegetables preventing a planned attack by suspected Al-Shabaab militants.⁷⁷ On April 13, President Mohamud extended special gratitude to Turkey for its sustained military support in the ongoing campaign against Al-Shabaab.⁷⁸

On April 17 U.S. Africa Command conducted a precision airstrike targeting ISIS-Somalia militants in the vicinity of the Golis Mountains approximately 50 kilometers southeast of Bossaso in the Puntland region designed to degrade the group's capacity to threaten U.S. Somali and regional interests with initial assessments reporting no civilian casualties.⁷⁹ On

⁷² Hiiraan Online. 2026. "Somali President Marks 66th Anniversary of National Army." April 12.

⁷³ Hiiraan Online. 2026. "Commercial Flights Resume to Baidoa after Federal Forces Seize Control." April 1.

⁷⁴ Somalia Today. 2026. "Somali President Visits Baidoa after Regional Power Shift." April 3.

⁷⁵ Hiiraan Online. 2026. "Somali Forces Kill 12 Al-Shabab Fighters in Bay Region, Defense Ministry Says." April 6.

⁷⁶ U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM). 2026. "U.S. Forces Conduct Strikes Targeting ISIS-Somalia."

⁷⁷ Dawan Africa. 2026. "Somali Security Forces Seize Explosives-Laden Motorcycle in Mogadishu." April 11.

⁷⁸ Somali Guardian. 2026. "Somalia's President Gives Special Thanks to Turkey for Military Support." April 13.

⁷⁹ U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM). 2026. "U.S. Forces Conduct Strikes Targeting ISIS-Somalia." April 17

April 18 the federal government deployed heavily armed Turkish trained Gorgor special forces around a military camp on the outskirts of Mogadishu following concerns over a possible rebellion led by an army officer commanding the camp reflecting persistent internal security challenges as political transitions loom.⁸⁰

On April 21, AFRICOM conducted an airstrike against Al-Shabaab in the vicinity of Wadajir approximately 90 kilometers southwest of Kismayo conducted in coordination with Somali forces, seeking to degrade the group's capacity to threaten Somali security and regional stability. Casualty figures were not disclosed. Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) reported coordinated operations supported by international partners that killed at least 33 Al-Shabaab fighters in the village of Guulane, Middle Shabelle region after intelligence indicated the militants had gathered to plan a new wave of attacks near Mogadishu with nearly 90 fighters assembled prior to the intervention.⁸¹

On April 27 Somali military forces in coordination with foreign and international troops conducted an operation in the Lower Shabelle region reporting the killing of 22 Al-Shabaab militants including a commander with the Defence Ministry highlighting the success in disrupting militant activities. An Al-Shabaab attempt to assassinate government official Mohamed Musa was reported in the Dharkeynley District of Mogadishu involving an improvised explosive device, underscoring the group's continued targeting of officials in the capital area.⁸²

Following that On April 11 the federal government airlifted dozens of Turkish-trained special police officers to Baidoa expanding its security presence in the recently contested Southwest State capital to stabilize the city and reinforce federal security architecture following the military takeover of the region.⁸³

Shortly after President Mohamud's arrival in Baidoa on April 3 Al-Shabaab militants launched a mortar attack targeting the airport. The group claimed responsibility stating the shells were aimed at the president and his delegation. Explosions occurred near the airstrip and security forces swiftly moved the president to safety in a bulletproof vehicle. No casualties were reported among the presidential party, though the incident underscored persistent militant threats during high-level visits despite stabilization efforts.⁸⁴

International Engagements and Diplomacy

April witnessed diplomatic activity including bilateral engagements, high level visits and a major diplomatic crisis following Israel's appointment of a representative to Somaliland. On April 2, Mogadishu hosted the second session of the bilateral Political Consultation

⁸⁰ Somali Guardian. 2026. "Somalia Deploys Turkish-Trained Police to Baidoa amid Security Fears." April 11.

⁸¹ Anadolu Agency. 2026. "Somali Intelligence Says Over 33 al-Shabaab Terrorists Killed in Middle Shabelle." April 21.

⁸² Reuters. 2026. "Somalia Says It Kills 22 al Shabaab Militants in Operation with Foreign Troops." April 29.

⁸³ Somali Guardian. 2026. "Somalia Deploys Turkish-Trained Police to Baidoa Amid Security Fears." April 11.

⁸⁴ Bloomberg. 2026. "Somalian President Mohamud Unharmed in Mortar Attack." April 4.

Committee between Somalia and Sudan co-chaired by senior foreign ministry officials from both nations. The two sides signed a mutual visa exemption agreement for diplomatic passport holders and discussed enhanced cooperation in political, economic, educational, and capacity-building sectors, alongside coordination on regional and international issues. On April 5, Somalia's newly appointed ambassador to Sudan formally presented credentials in Khartoum, reaffirming strong bilateral ties.⁸⁵

On April 8, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Ali Mohamed Omar received Swiss Ambassador Mirko Giulietti in Mogadishu with discussions focused on strengthening bilateral ties with emphasis on development, governance, humanitarian support, and resilience. Both sides agreed to advance a more structured framework to deepen cooperation in support of Somalia's state building efforts.⁸⁶ On April 8, Somalia officially assumed its seat on the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) for the 2026–2028 term, a historic first. Ambassador Abdullahi Warfaa raised the Somali flag at the council's headquarters in Addis Ababa marking enhanced regional diplomatic engagement on peace and security architecture.⁸⁷

On April 10, Somalia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdisalam Abdi Ali held high level consultations in Tripoli with Libya's Acting Foreign Minister Taher Al-Baour focusing on strengthening bilateral relations curbing irregular migration and human trafficking and dismantling transnational criminal networks. The meeting culminated in an agreement on April 12 to repatriate approximately 400 Somali nationals held in Libyan prisons. Minister Abdi Ali also paid a working visit to the Somali Embassy in Tripoli to enhance consular services following Somalia's participation in the reopening of the CEN-SAD headquarters in Libya.⁸⁸

On April 10, the Turkish deep sea drilling vessel Çağrı Bey arrived in Mogadishu marking Türkiye's first overseas deep sea hydrocarbon exploration mission with a high level Turkish energy delegation supporting the launch and operations expected to last nearly 10 months. President Mohamud met with Türkiye's Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Alparslan Bayraktar to discuss strategic cooperation in energy, natural resources, and the blue economy with the president formally welcoming the vessel and scoring the operation as a step for Somalia's energy sector development.⁸⁹

Somalia and India reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties following the formal presentation of credentials by India's newly appointed Ambassador to Somalia resident in Nairobi, Adarsh Swaika. Foreign Minister Abdisalam Abdi Ali hosted the meeting in Mogadishu with both sides emphasizing concrete results oriented cooperation in

⁸⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Somalia. 2026. "Somalia Hosts the Second Session of the Somalia-Sudan Political Consultation Committee." April 4.

⁸⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Somalia. 2026. "Strengthening Somalia-Switzerland Relations." April 8.

⁸⁷ African Union. 2026. "AUC Chairperson Graces AU Peace and Security Council's Flag Installation Ceremony." April 7.

⁸⁸ Hiiraan Online. 2026. "Somalia, Libya Agree to Repatriate 400 Somali Migrants Held in Libyan Prisons." April 12.

⁸⁹ Reuters. 2026. "Turkey Launches First Overseas Deep-Sea Drilling Mission in Somalia." April 10.

economic projects, technical assistance, and development.⁹⁰ Somali officials including State Minister for Foreign Affairs Ali Mohammad Omar actively participated in panels and bilateral meetings at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Türkiye from April 17 to 19, with discussions focusing on regional ownership in Horn of Africa mediation, Somalia-Türkiye cooperation, and broader diplomatic issues, using the platform to reaffirm Somalia's positions on sovereignty and international partnerships.⁹¹

On April 16, Somalia formally rejected Israel's appointment of a diplomatic representative to Somaliland condemning the move as a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity with Minister of Information Daud Aweis characterizing it as an aggressive act.⁹² On April 18 a joint statement issued in Islamabad by foreign ministers from 12 Muslim majority nation including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Türkiye, Pakistan, and Indonesia, strongly condemned the Israeli decision as a flagrant violation of Somalia's sovereignty and a threat to Horn of Africa stability. The Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation issued parallel condemnations.⁹³ On April 19 the African Union Commission formally expressed deep concern and condemned the appointment of an envoy to Somaliland reaffirming the AU's support for Somalia's unity and territorial integrity and stressing that the AU does not recognize Somaliland as an independent state.⁹⁴ In direct response, Somalia's Ambassador to Ethiopia and the African Union Abdullahi Warfaa issued a warning on April 18 that any country interfering in Somalia's internal affairs could face repercussions including potential restrictions on access to the strategic Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.⁹⁵

On April 27, Somali Foreign Minister Abdisalam Ali visited Muscat, Oman, where he inspected the Somali Embassy pushed reforms for better consular services and efficiency and engaged with ASYAD Group on ports and logistics cooperation. High level discussions were held in Muscat between Somali and Omani officials focused on enhancing cooperation across multiple sectors representing Mogadishu's on-going diplomatic outreach to regional partners amid the current political transition period.⁹⁶

The Political and Security Committee of the EU Council approved an additional €75 million under the European Peace Facility for the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). The funding which brings total EU support to successive AU-led missions in Somalia to nearly €2.8 billion since 2007 will cover troop allowances, non-lethal equipment and related services to strengthen operational readiness and support the handover

⁹⁰ Hiiraan Online. 2026. "Somalia, India Reaffirm Commitment to Strengthen Bilateral Ties." April 17.

⁹¹ Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2026. "V. Antalya Diplomacy Forum, 17-19 April 2026."

⁹² Anadolu Agency. 2026. "Somalia Condemns Israeli Ambassador's Appointment to Somaliland." April 16.

⁹³ Pakistan Today. "Pakistan, 11 Other Muslim Nations Reject Israel's Diplomatic Appointment." April 20, 2026.

⁹⁴ African Union. "Statement on Israel's Decision Regarding 'Somaliland.'" April 19, 2026.

⁹⁵ APAnews. "Mogadishu Bans Israeli Ships as Retaliation over Somaliland." April 19, 2026.

⁹⁶ allAfrica. "Somalia Seeks Port Investment Partnership With Oman's Asyad Group." April 29, 2026.

of security responsibilities to Somali forces.⁹⁷

Regional Engagements and Maritime Security

Regional dynamics were shaped by federal-state tensions cross border security coordination and a notable resurgence in maritime piracy. On April 22 armed gunmen reportedly six individuals seized the fuel/product tanker Honour 25 approximately 30 nautical miles off the north-eastern coast between Hafun and Bandarbeyla in the Puntland region. The vessel carrying an estimated 18,500 barrels of fuel and 17 crew members including 11 Pakistanis and an Indonesian captain was transiting from Berbera to Mogadishu at the time of the attack and was taken into Somali territorial waters. The UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) and Puntland Maritime Police Force confirmed the boarding, signalling a potential resurgence of Somali piracy amid regional instability. EU Naval Force Atalanta continued to investigate the incident.⁹⁸

Multiple reports highlighted a resurgence in Somali pirate attacks. On or around April 27, monitors, including the EU's naval mission were investigating recent hijackings. A merchant vessel reported as the cement carrying ship Sward, St. Kitts and Nevis-flagged was seized off the coast near Garacad in Puntland described as part of the first notable spike in incidents in months.⁹⁹ The EU Naval Force Operation Atalanta and other maritime agencies noted that the war in Iran and related disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz were fuelling a surge in Somali piracy with at least three confirmed hijackings occurring in the past week and additional hostile incidents, including approaches on tankers and cargo vessels, reported up to April 29.¹⁰⁰

Somaliland: Sovereignty, Deepening International Ties and Managing Domestic Stability

Political and Domestic Developments

The month of April saw a political activity in Somaliland centered on conflict resolution, economic governance and administrative restructuring. President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi (Irro) chaired a high-level national peace summit aimed at resolving ongoing tensions and clashes in the western Awdal and Selel regions. The dialogue brought together national leaders, traditional elders, and key stakeholders to develop a multi-pillar strategy focused on de-escalation, civilian protection, communal harmony, and long term stability. The initiative represented a decisive effort to address threats to regional cohesion through unified state and traditional mediation, reflecting the administration's domestic security and

⁹⁷ Consilium. "European Peace Facility Support for the Military Component of the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM)." April 21, 2026.

⁹⁸ World Ports Organisation. "Report: Pirates Hijacked Small Product Tanker off Somalia." April 23, 2026.

⁹⁹ The Maritime Executive. "Surge in Somali Piracy as EUNAVFOR Confirms Three Ongoing Incidents." April 26, 2026.

¹⁰⁰ World Ports Organisation. "Piracy Threat Surges off Somalia as Vessels Are Attacked and Hijacked." April 28, 2026.

unity priorities.¹⁰¹

On April 5, President Irro carried out a cabinet reshuffle appointing new ministers and reassigning portfolios. The move was framed as part of efforts to strengthen governance, improve service delivery and address economic and administrative priorities.¹⁰² On April 6 the President issued a sweeping presidential decree dismissing, appointing, and reassigning senior officials across several key ministries and advisory positions. Notable among the changes was the appointment of Lawyer Barkhad Jama Hirsi Batoon, a prominent former parliamentarian, to a senior role.¹⁰³

President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi delivered his annual address before a joint session of parliament outlining Somaliland's achievements, key challenges, and future vision. The speech highlighted Somaliland's positioning, stability, and push for broader international engagement, including in security and economic areas. The President specifically hailed Israel as a reliable partner following its recognition of Somaliland and ongoing bilateral cooperation.¹⁰⁴

On April 10, the Somaliland government ordered armed militias to stand down in the western regions of Salal and Awdal warning that those defying the peace process would face legal consequences. The move aimed to halt ongoing clan clashes that have caused instability and displacement. The directive reflected efforts to strengthen internal security and governance amid broader regional challenges, though no further operational details or reported ceasefire compliance were available during the reporting period.¹⁰⁵

International Engagements and Diplomacy

April marked a period of intensified diplomatic activity for Somaliland alongside escalating friction with the Federal Government of Somalia over foreign investment, potential military and security cooperation and management of natural resources. Mogadishu reiterated that only federal authorities hold the legal mandate for international agreements framing Somaliland's de facto partnerships as challenges to Somalia's territorial integrity. The friction reflected tensions amplified by Somaliland's growing international outreach.

On or around April 4, Brigadier General Abdirahman Abdillahi Hassan Commander of the Somaliland Police Force returned to Hargeisa following an official visit to the United Kingdom. He led a delegation that held meetings with British police leaders focused on capacity building, law enforcement cooperation and strengthening institutional ties. The visit was welcomed at Hargeisa International Airport. The talks indirectly support counterterrorism and law enforcement capabilities within the broader regional context

¹⁰¹ Somali Dispatch. "Somaliland President Leads National Talks to Resolve Awdal and Seel Conflict." March 31, 2026.

¹⁰² allAfrica. "Abdullahi Names New Ministers in Somaliland Cabinet Shake-up." April 5, 2026.

¹⁰³ allAfrica. "Somalia: Somaliland President Names New Ministers, Reshuffles Deputies." April 6, 2026.

¹⁰⁴ allAfrica. "Abdullahi Names New Ministers in Somaliland Cabinet Shake-up." April 5, 2026.

¹⁰⁵ Hiiraan Online. "Somaliland Moves to End Clan Violence in Salal and Awdal Regions." April 10, 2026.

including Al-Shabaab threats and Houthi activities in the Red Sea. Somaliland continues to position itself as a stable partner for maritime security and anti-piracy efforts along the Gulf of Aden.¹⁰⁶

On April 10, Bashir Goth Somaliland's representative to the United States addressed a Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) Africa Program event. He emphasized Somaliland's stability, democratic credentials and value stating that U.S. recognition would lead Somaliland to join the Abraham Accords. Discussions covered security cooperation, economic opportunities including mineral resources and the port of Berbera and Somaliland's pro-Western stance while explicitly rejecting ties with adversarial powers including China. The event explored potential U.S. policy shifts following Israel's earlier recognition of Somaliland.¹⁰⁷ Also on April 10 Somaliland's Minister of Livestock held talks with the World Food Programme (WFP) to enhance collaboration on livestock sector initiatives, focusing on economic development, food security, and resilience in rural areas. The engagement represented on going practical international cooperation in technical and humanitarian fields notwithstanding Somaliland's limited formal diplomatic recognition.¹⁰⁸

In a diplomatic development, Israel officially appointed Michael Lotem, formerly Ambassador to Kenya, as its first non-resident Ambassador to Somaliland. The announcement reported prominently on April 15 followed Israel's earlier recognition of Somaliland. Concurrently, Somaliland's Presidential Adviser Mohamed Hagi received diplomatic approval to serve as Somaliland's first Ambassador to Israel. Somaliland officials and media welcomed the move as a step in bilateral ties, emphasizing cooperation in security, trade, and regional stability. President Irro in his annual address subsequently hailed Israel as a reliable partner.¹⁰⁹

Following widespread regional and international backlash against the Israel diplomatic move, the Government of Somaliland issued multiple formal responses defending its independent foreign policy. Somaliland rejected Somalia's strong condemnation describing Mogadishu's objections as misleading and asserting its sovereign right to conduct foreign relations. Officials highlighted Somaliland's effective governance, democratic credentials and practical contributions to counterterrorism and maritime security as justification for deepening international partnerships.¹¹⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs released an official statement responding to growing international criticism reaffirming Somaliland's sovereign right to independent foreign policy and rejecting external interference. Somaliland issued a response rejecting the joint statement by foreign ministers from multiple Arab and Muslim

¹⁰⁶ The Horn Tribune. "Somaliland Police Chief Returns Home After High-Level Security Talks in UK." April 3, 2026.

¹⁰⁷ Somaliland Standard. "Somaliland's Representative to the US Has Stated That If the US Recognizes Somaliland, the Country Will Join the Abraham Accords." April 10, 2026.

¹⁰⁸ somaliland Standard. "Somaliland Livestock Minister Meets WFP to Strengthen Cooperation on Livestock Projects." April 10, 2026.

¹⁰⁹ Hiiraan Online. "Israel Appoints First Ambassador to Somaliland after Recognition." April 27, 2026.

¹¹⁰ Kurdistan24. "Somaliland Defends Sovereignty Claim after Arab-Islamic Bloc Condemns Israeli Envoy Move." April 19, 2026.

majority countries as well as the African Union Commission's formal condemnation describing the criticisms as politically motivated and asserting that its status is grounded in historical facts, effective governance, and international law. Officials stressed that such engagements enhance regional stability rather than undermine it.¹¹¹

On April 23 coinciding with Israel's Independence Day, the Somaliland Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a public statement extending sincere congratulations to the State of Israel and explicitly reaffirming Somaliland's commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation and advancing shared interests.¹¹² Reports around April 27 and 28 indicated that two countries, one identified as Greece and the other an unnamed African nation were reportedly preparing to recognize Somaliland in May 2026.¹¹³

1.5 Sudan: Entrenched Stalemate, Expanding Externalization, and Systemic Collapse

April 2026 confirmed Sudan's transition into a deeply entrenched and externally entangled conflict, characterized by battlefield stalemate, intensified civilian-targeted violence, and accelerating institutional and economic collapse. Developments across Khartoum, Blue Nile, Kordofan, and Darfur indicate a war that is no longer defined solely by territorial contestation, but by the convergence of military attrition, humanitarian breakdown, and the consolidation of transnational conflict networks.

Battlefield dynamics throughout the month reflected a persistent strategic impasse. Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces continued across multiple fronts without decisive territorial shifts, reinforcing a war of attrition centered on sustained offensives rather than breakthrough operations. Both sides reported localized gains in regions such as Blue Nile¹¹⁴ and Kordofan, though these claims remain contested and indicative of continued battlefield fluidity rather than structural change. By the end of the month, Sudanese military leadership reaffirmed this trajectory, with General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan explicitly rejecting negotiations with the RSF and pledging to continue military operations until full territorial control is achieved.¹¹⁵ This position underscores the continued absence of political willingness for compromise and reinforces the conflict's long-term militarization.

At the same time, internal dynamics within armed actors showed early signs of strain. The defection of a senior Rapid Support Forces commander, Al-Nour Ahmed Adam, to the Sudanese Armed Forces marked one of the most significant fractures within RSF ranks in recent months.¹¹⁶ His statements pointed to internal grievances, declining morale, and uneven

¹¹¹ Addis Standard. "Joint Statement Condemns Israel's Somaliland Envoy; Somaliland Rejects Violation Claims, Defends Sovereign Diplomacy." April 18, 2026.

¹¹² allAfrica. "Somalia: Somaliland Congratulates Israel on Independence Day, Reaffirms Cooperation." April 23, 2026.

¹¹³ Qaran News. "Two Countries Set to Recognize Republic of Somaliland in May." April 28, 2026.

¹¹⁴ "Clashes intensify in Sudan's Blue Nile as army and RSF alliance trade blows," Sudan Tribune, April 25, 2026

¹¹⁵ "Sudan's Burhan reaffirms rejection of RSF talks, vows to continue war," Sudan Tribune, April 29,

¹¹⁶ "Senior RSF Commander Defects to Sudan Army in Major Blow to Paramilitaries," Africanews, April 21, 2026.

command structures within the paramilitary organization. Subsequent retaliatory measures and internal disciplinary actions¹¹⁷ highlight the risk of further fragmentation, even as the RSF continues to maintain operational capacity across multiple regions.

Drone warfare and long-range strike capabilities continued to redefine the operational environment. Repeated attacks on urban centers, including strikes in El Obeid and other regions, resulted in civilian casualties and reinforced the normalization of aerial warfare in populated areas.¹¹⁸ The targeting of critical infrastructure, particularly health facilities, remained a defining feature of the conflict. Drone strikes on hospitals and civilian gatherings throughout the month illustrate a pattern in which protected spaces are increasingly exposed to violence, contributing to the erosion of humanitarian norms.¹¹⁹

Civilian exposure to violence extended beyond direct attacks. Reports of widespread sexual violence, arbitrary detention, extortion, and enforced disappearances, particularly in RSF-controlled areas, point to the expansion of coercive practices as central tools of war.¹²⁰ Reports from El Fasher indicate that large numbers of civilians are being held in detention under paramilitary control,¹²¹ further highlighting the deterioration of protection conditions. These dynamics suggest a conflict increasingly characterized by systemic violence embedded within governance structures in contested areas.

The humanitarian situation deteriorated further across multiple dimensions. Displacement remains widespread, with continued cross-border flows into neighboring countries, particularly Chad, where humanitarian systems are under growing strain.¹²² Within Sudan, millions face acute food insecurity, with reports indicating that many households are surviving on severely reduced food intake. Aid delivery remains constrained by insecurity, funding shortfalls, and logistical disruptions, while attacks on humanitarian convoys and restricted access continue to limit operational reach.¹²³

Health systems have reached critical levels of collapse. Hundreds of attacks on medical facilities since the start of the conflict, combined with shortages of supplies and personnel, have severely reduced access to care. Disease outbreaks, including dengue fever in northern regions,¹²⁴ further illustrate the compounded risks facing civilian populations in the absence of functioning health infrastructure.

Explosive remnants of war have emerged as a significant and growing threat. Incidents involving buried ordinance in Khartoum and other urban areas highlight the long-term risks

¹¹⁷ "Sudan paramilitary leader sentences defected general to death" Sudan Tribune, April 23, 2026.

¹¹⁸ "Seven Dead, Dozens Injured in Drone Strike on Sudan's El Obeid," ILKHA News Agency, April 26, 2026.

¹¹⁹ "Stop Attacks on Civilians, Prevent War Crimes in Sudan," International Service for Human Rights, April 15, 2026.

¹²⁰ "Sudan's Catastrophic Civil War Enters Fourth Year," Health Policy Watch, April 15, 2026.

¹²¹ "Thousands Reportedly Held by Paramilitary RSF in Sudan's El Fasher," Al Jazeera, April 27, 2026.

¹²² "Sudan Situation," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Operational Data Portal, April 27, 2026.

¹²³ "What It Takes to Eat: Conflict and Sudan's Fragile Food System," ReliefWeb, April 2026.

¹²⁴ "After Three Years of Conflict, Sudan Faces a Deeper Health Crisis," World Health Organization, April 14, 2026.

associated with contamination.¹²⁵ The presence of unexploded landmines and war remnants is increasingly affecting daily civilian life, restricting movement, and complicating humanitarian access even in areas where active combat has subsided.

Economically, Sudan continues to experience systemic collapse under wartime conditions. Rising fuel prices triggered sharp increases in the cost of living, affecting food, transportation, and basic services. Market disruptions forced some businesses to suspend operations, while inflation and currency instability further eroded purchasing power. The Central Bank's efforts to implement currency reforms reflect attempts to stabilize the financial system, though their effectiveness remains limited in a fragmented conflict environment.¹²⁶

The structure of the war economy remains increasingly pronounced. While large segments of the formal economy have contracted, sectors such as gold production continue to operate as critical lifelines. However, persistent discrepancies between production and export figures highlight extensive smuggling and governance failures, limiting state revenue capture.¹²⁷ The industrial sector, operating at severely reduced capacity, further underscores the depth of economic disruption.

Institutionally, the Sudanese Armed Forces undertook significant restructuring during the month. The appointment of new senior leadership and broader command reorganization suggest efforts to consolidate control and enhance operational coordination as the conflict enters a prolonged phase.¹²⁸ At the same time, pro-government armed coalitions appear to be consolidating rather than fragmenting.¹²⁹ Joint forces composed of former rebel movements reaffirmed their coordination with army leadership, with deployments described as part of centrally directed military planning. This suggests ongoing efforts to formalize and integrate allied armed actors into a more unified command structure.

The conflict has been internationalized through the recruitment of foreign fighters and, notably, the involvement of Tigrayan fighters from northern Ethiopia, who are reportedly recruited from refugee populations and former peacekeepers to bolster Sudanese army and paramilitary ranks. These developments highlight the external, transnational nature of the ongoing hostilities.

Regional military and security cooperation also expanded. Engagement between Sudanese and Libyan authorities on intelligence sharing and border security reflects growing concern over cross-border armed networks and logistical corridors. At the same time, continued accusations regarding external support to armed actors underscore the persistence of regional rivalries shaping the conflict.

¹²⁵ "Sudan authorities' close part of Khartoum after shell explosion," Sudan Tribune, April 4, 2026.

¹²⁶ "CBS Sudan Currency Change Starts in Three States Wednesday," Sudan Horizon, April 13, 2026.

¹²⁷ "Sudan mining revenues surge as gold production nears targets," Sudan Tribune, April 23, 2026.

¹²⁸ "Restructuring Sudan's Military Leadership: Reading the Official Statement," Arab Progress, April 4, 2026.

¹²⁹ "Sudan's Democratic Block adopts new statutes, discusses democratic transition," Sudan Tribune, April 27, 2026

Diplomatic dynamics remained active but contested. The planned Berlin conference on Sudan emerged as a focal point of tension, with Sudanese authorities formally rejecting the initiative on the grounds of exclusion and sovereignty concerns¹³⁰. This position reflects broader resistance to externally driven political processes and highlights the widening disconnect between international mediation efforts and domestic political realities.

Despite this, international engagement continued to evolve. The reopening of United Nations operations in Khartoum¹³¹ and exploratory steps by the African Union to re-establish its presence indicate cautious institutional re-engagement following shifts in territorial control. Parallel efforts by international actors to coordinate humanitarian response reflect growing recognition of the conflict's scale and complexity.

Beyond immediate conflict dynamics, the war is generating long-term societal impacts. Disruption of education systems, increasing reliance on negative coping mechanisms such as child labor and early marriage, and the erosion of social structures under prolonged displacement all point to the deep and lasting consequences of the conflict.

Overall, April's developments reinforce the trajectory of Sudan's war as a protracted and increasingly complex conflict defined by military stalemate, humanitarian collapse, economic fragmentation, and expanding external entanglement. The explicit rejection of negotiations by military leadership, combined with continued internationalization and internal fragmentation, suggests limited prospects for near-term de-escalation. Without alignment between internal actors and external initiatives, Sudan is likely to remain a center of regional instability, with risks of further spillover and long-term structural damage continuing to grow.

1.6 South Sudan: Transition at Risk: Conflict, Crisis, and a Strained Peace

April 2026 underscored the deepening fragility of South Sudan's transitional framework, where localized violence, humanitarian deterioration, and political uncertainty continue to converge into a structurally unstable equilibrium. While large-scale civil war has not resumed, the country's trajectory is increasingly defined by the accumulation of subnational crises, institutional weakness, and a stalled political transition. The overall pattern reflects not stabilization, but the containment of instability within a fragmented and highly vulnerable system.

Persistent Localized Conflict and Expanding Risk

Violence in **Jonglei State**, particularly around Akobo, remained the central driver of

¹³⁰ "Sudan Govt Reiterates Rejection of the Berlin Conference, Pro-Army Voices Call Out Selectivity," Dabanga Sudan.

¹³¹ "UN Reopens Office in Khartoum After Nearly 3-Year Closure," Xinhua, April 3, 2026.

instability throughout the month.¹³² Escalating tensions between government forces and opposition elements, including evacuation orders and offensive posturing, triggered repeated waves of displacement under chaotic conditions. Civilians fled without organized protection, often crossing into neighboring regions and countries.

Beyond Jonglei, intercommunal violence continued across multiple regions, reinforcing a broader pattern of fragmented insecurity. These conflicts—often driven by competition over resources, weak governance, and proliferation of arms—persist independently of national-level political arrangements. Reports of mass casualties and newly identified burial sites further highlight the scale and persistence of localized violence.¹³³

At the same time, military dynamics reflected both escalation and containment. Government forces conducted operations to recapture strategic areas from rebel elements, while cross-border insecurity—particularly along the Uganda frontier¹³⁴—required diplomatic engagement to prevent further destabilization. These developments illustrate a security landscape in which conflict remains active but geographically dispersed, preventing full-scale war while sustaining chronic instability.

Humanitarian Crisis Toward Systemic Collapse

The humanitarian situation deteriorated sharply over the course of April, with multiple agencies warning of a potential descent into catastrophic conditions. An estimated **eight million people** are now at risk of acute hunger, reflecting the combined effects of conflict, displacement, economic disruption, and restricted aid access.

Organizations such as UNICEF and Médecins Sans Frontières highlighted severe shortages of food, healthcare, and basic services. In several regions, conditions are approaching famine thresholds, particularly where humanitarian access remains constrained.

Aid delivery faced systematic challenges throughout the month. Insecurity, bureaucratic restrictions, and deliberate obstruction by conflict actors limited the reach of humanitarian operations. Attacks on medical facilities, including looting and bombardment, forced the suspension of essential services, further shrinking humanitarian space. In many cases, displaced populations were left without assistance, sheltering in open areas under precarious conditions.

Protection risks intensified in parallel. Children remain particularly vulnerable to malnutrition, trafficking, and exploitation, while broader patterns of human rights violations persist across multiple regions. The erosion of civilian protection mechanisms, combined with widespread arms availability, continues to expose communities to recurring violence.

¹³² “South Sudan: Global Supply Chain Disruptions, a Collapsed Health System and Conflict Drive Hunger and Malnutrition,” CARE International, April 30, 2026.

¹³³ “South Sudan: Reports of Burial Sites Highlight Hidden Cost of Renewed Violence, UN Commission Calls for Proper Handling and Investigation,” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, April 17, 2026.

¹³⁴ “Eastern Chad: Sudanese Situation Flash Updates #50 (28 April 2026),” ReliefWeb, April 28, 2026.

The crisis is further compounded by regional spillover effects. The influx of refugees from Sudan and continued cross-border displacement have placed additional strain on already overstretched systems, reinforcing the multidirectional nature of the humanitarian emergency.

Stagnation and Personalization of Power

South Sudan's political transition showed limited progress during April, with growing signs of strain within the power-sharing framework established under the 2018 peace agreement. Amendments to the electoral timeline and ongoing delays in implementation have intensified concerns regarding the credibility of the transition process.

The political system remains highly personalized, centered around President Salva Kiir and his relationship with opposition actors. This personalization continues to limit institutional resilience, leaving the broader political framework vulnerable to shifts in elite dynamics.

Tensions surrounding governance and accountability also persisted. Criticism directed at political leadership over perceived inaction on violence and humanitarian conditions reflects declining public confidence in state institutions. At the same time, legal and regulatory concerns, including debates over media restrictions, highlight ongoing tensions between state authority and civic space.

Debates over elections scheduled for the transitional period further exposed structural constraints. Analysts and international actors widely questioned the feasibility of credible elections under current conditions, citing insecurity, weak institutions, and unresolved political rivalries. The risk remains that premature elections could exacerbate tensions rather than consolidate stability.

Active but Constrained

Regional diplomacy intensified during April, reflecting both concern over South Sudan's trajectory and efforts to sustain external support. President Kiir's engagement in Addis Ababa and broader cooperation with Ethiopia highlighted ongoing bilateral coordination, particularly around trade and connectivity.

The African Union increased its involvement through assessment missions, emphasizing the need for clearer implementation of the transitional roadmap. Similarly, engagement with Egypt and other regional actors reflects a broader push to maintain diplomatic alignment and economic cooperation.

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of international engagement remains limited by internal conditions. Resource constraints, institutional weakness, and continued insecurity restrict the translation of diplomatic initiatives into tangible improvements on the ground.

At the same time, South Sudan's crisis is increasingly linked to wider regional dynamics.

The conflict in Sudan continues to generate spillover effects, while cross-border insecurity and displacement highlight the interconnected nature of instability across the Horn of Africa.

Economic Pressures and Structural Challenges

Economic vulnerabilities remained a central feature of South Sudan's instability throughout April. The country's continued dependence on oil revenue, combined with limited diversification, constrains fiscal capacity and limits the government's ability to respond to humanitarian and security challenges.

At the same time, policy initiatives indicate recognition of longer-term structural needs. The adoption of a national land policy represents a step toward addressing one of the underlying drivers of conflict, while discussions around regional infrastructure—such as oil processing and trade corridors—reflect efforts to strengthen economic integration.

Calls for a shift toward agricultural investment gained renewed attention, highlighting the unsustainability of the current political economy. However, implementation remains constrained by insecurity, governance deficits, and resource limitations.

Overall Assessment

April's developments reinforce a consistent pattern: the coexistence of formal peace structures with persistent informal instability. Localized violence, humanitarian deterioration, political fragmentation, and economic vulnerability are not isolated dynamics but mutually reinforcing pressures shaping the country's trajectory.

The absence of large-scale war reflects containment rather than resolution. South Sudan remains in a fragile equilibrium sustained by incomplete political implementation, external support, and the lack of decisive escalation among major actors.

However, this equilibrium is under increasing strain. The convergence of escalating humanitarian needs, persistent localized conflict, and a stalled political transition suggests that the system is approaching a critical threshold. Without renewed political commitment, improved humanitarian access, and meaningful institutional reform, the risk remains that accumulated localized crises could evolve into broader instability in the months ahead.

1.7 Kenya: Balancing Security Vigilance, Coalition Leadership, and Economic Resilience

In April, Kenya pulled off a high-stakes balancing act, keeping the country steady at home while punching above its weight on the global stage. The government managed to keep a lid on domestic frustration by fast-tracking a temporary fuel tax cut, a tactical "fiscal band-aid" that gave ordinary citizens some breathing room while simultaneously keeping security forces on high alert to prevent any Al-Shabaab spillover. Despite some predictable grumbling within the ruling coalition, Nairobi doubled down on its "multi-aligned" foreign

policy, moving beyond its usual Western partners to ink serious defense and economic deals with Portugal, Italy, and France. By the end of the month, with the successful hosting of the Africa We Build Summit, Kenya hadn't just managed its own crises; it had positioned itself as the leading voice for African self-reliance and the primary gateway for European investment in the region.

Throughout April, Kenya's peace and security environment reflected a resilient but layered landscape, with the government simultaneously sustaining a high counterterrorism posture,¹³⁵ managing persistent domestic grievances, holding together a restive coalition, delivering quick economic relief, conducting intensive developmental outreach, and advancing a pragmatic foreign policy anchored in concrete bilateral gains and regional leadership.¹³⁶ No major crisis erupted, yet the month was defined by the steady accumulation of interconnected pressures and strategic actions that together kept the country stable while projecting influence externally.¹³⁷

On the security front, the threat from Al-Shabaab remained active and closely monitored, particularly in the northeastern and coastal border counties near Somalia.¹³⁸ Kenyan security forces maintained continuous patrols, intelligence operations and coordinated border surveillance to prevent infiltration, reflecting a high-alert posture rather than any shift in the threat level.¹³⁹ No headline-grabbing attack occurred on Kenyan soil throughout the period, but the operational tempo stayed deliberately pre-emptive, driven by concern over potential cross-border movement. Alongside this hard-security vigilance, internal stability was continually shaped by socio-economic pressures.

Periodic protests, policing controversies and deep public dissatisfaction over the cost of living and taxation policies all added friction to the domestic environment.¹⁴⁰ While these did not escalate into widespread unrest, they remained a latent risk factor that authorities managed carefully. In several regions, localized intercommunal tensions linked to resource competition and historical grievances added further complexity, underscoring the layered nature of Kenya's domestic security challenge. The overall picture was one of a relatively resilient state structure continuously juggling conventional counterterrorism demands with non-traditional security pressures.

Domestic politics were characterised by careful coalition management and a palpable focus on the 2027 electoral horizon. Early in the month, strains appeared inside the Kenya Kwanza

¹³⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2026 Country Report Kenya*, (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2026), 6–8

¹³⁶ International Monetary Fund, *Kenya: 2026 Article IV Consultation and Second Review Under the Extended Fund Facility*, IMF Country Report No. 26/114 (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, April 2026), 12–15.

¹³⁷ International Crisis Group, "CrisisWatch: April 2026 Tracking Report Kenya," last modified April 30, 2026.

¹³⁸ Kenya Community Support Centre (KECOSCE), *Weekly Conflict Early Warning and Early Response Brief Summary: March–April 2026*, (Mombasa: KECOSCE, 2026), 2–4.

¹³⁹ Jane's Defense Weekly, "Kenya Border Posture: April 2026 Operational Intelligence Update," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 38, no. 4 (April 2026): 14–17.

¹⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch. "Kenya: Events of 2025–2026." In *World Report 2026: Events of 2025*, 342–348. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2026.

alliance when ODM partners voiced complaints about alleged harassment of their lawmakers and UDA plans to contest seats in their traditional strongholds.¹⁴¹ The friction, however, stayed contained without any formal split. In a move that helped cool public frustration, Parliament fast-tracked a temporary reduction in value-added tax on fuel from 16 per cent to 8 per cent for an initial three months, bringing pump prices noticeably lower and giving ordinary Kenyans immediate breathing room on transport and living costs.¹⁴²

Opposition criticism persisted, but it did not boil over into street protests or major unrest, leaving the domestic scene tense yet manageable. As the month progressed, parliamentary business proceeded smoothly, with the Senate convening for its Fifth Session and offering positive assessments of the government's record on service delivery, including the Social Health Authority. The latter portion of April was dominated by hands-on developmental politics in politically important central counties.

Regional and global diplomacy throughout April was marked by practical deliverables rather than dramatic summits, reinforcing Nairobi's role as East Africa's indispensable logistics, financial and diplomatic hub. In a historic first since the establishment of bilateral relations in 1977, the Portuguese Minister of State for Foreign Affairs held formal high-level talks in Nairobi.¹⁴³ Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi led the sessions and President Ruto joined at State House, with discussions firmly grounded in real deliverables: enhanced EU trade access, Portuguese investment in agriculture and technology, and joint work on the blue economy, ocean protection, energy and climate.¹⁴⁴ The engagement dovetailed with a state visit to Italy, where the President met with both the Italian president and prime minister and participated in an economic forum aimed at unlocking dam financing, expanding bilateral trade and tapping the Kenyan diaspora.¹⁴⁵

These European engagements fed directly into the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda, demonstrating Nairobi's habit of converting diplomatic access into tangible economic gains. The most prominent geopolitical moment came when Nairobi hosted the inaugural summit on African infrastructure; the President used the platform to urge African nations to finance their own projects, stressing the need for greater continental autonomy, reduced reliance on external debt and zspointing to emerging partnerships, including with France.¹⁴⁶ This call for self-reliance sat within a broader, diversified foreign policy that continues to balance strong security and economic ties with the United States and other Western partners alongside pragmatic engagement with emerging global actors.

¹⁴¹ *The Standard*, "Inside the Shaky Kenya Kwanza-ODM Marriage: Growing Pains or Impending Divorce?" April 12, 2026.

¹⁴² *The Star*, "Parliament Passes Bill Cutting Fuel VAT from 16% to 8%," April 16, 2026.

¹⁴³ Eliud Kibii, "Kenya, France Sign Defence Pact to Expand Military Cooperation, Troop Access," *The Star* (Nairobi), April 15, 2026

¹⁴⁴ Kenya, Portugal Move to Fast-Track Bilateral Deals, *The Standard* (Nairobi), April 15, 2026.

¹⁴⁵ *The Standard*. "Kenya-Italy Economic Forum: Unlocking New Frontiers in Infrastructure and Trade." April 30, 2026.

¹⁴⁶ Africa Finance Corporation. "The Africa We Build Summit Targets Mobilising Domestic Capital for Industrial Transformation." March 30, 2026.

Early in the month Kenya's Parliament approved a defense cooperation agreement with France, unlocking access to French training, technology, and expertise in maritime security, information exchange, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance, a move that deliberately diversifies Nairobi's military and diplomatic partnerships beyond its traditional reliance on the United Kingdom and the United States while deepening economic ties.¹⁴⁷ The relationship is set for an even higher profile when Kenya co-hosts the Africa-France Partnership Summit for Innovation and Growth in Nairobi, the first such gathering held in a non-Francophone African country, bringing together Presidents Ruto and Macron alongside business leaders, artists, and civil society representatives from across the continent and the diaspora to intensify mutual investment and build concrete solutions to shared challenges.¹⁴⁸

Regionally, Kenya remained deeply embedded in stabilisation efforts and mediation frameworks. Nairobi sustained its active role in East African Community processes addressing the crises in South Sudan and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo,¹⁴⁹ safeguarding its own strategic and economic interests while lending diplomatic weight to peace initiatives. Its engagement in Somalia stabilisation and broader East African diplomacy further illustrated a continuity of regional security leadership. Beyond the immediate neighbourhood, the country's leadership of the UN-backed multinational security mission in Haiti continued to evolve operationally.¹⁵⁰

Kenyan police forces remained actively deployed in the mission targeting gang violence, a commitment that reinforced the country's global security profile even while exposing it to new external risks and heightened international scrutiny.¹⁵¹ Taken together, these moves underscored a month in which Kenya steadily layered influence abroad while managing a combination of counterterrorism vigilance, internal socio-economic tensions and coalition politics at home. The near-term outlook hinges on sustaining this equilibrium as the 2027 election cycle gradually begins to cast a longer shadow over the political landscape, and as both conventional security threats and chronic domestic pressures continue to demand constant attention.

¹⁴⁷ Modern Ghana. "Kenya Approves Defence Pact with France, as Paris Shifts Focus from West Africa." April 10, 2026.

¹⁴⁸ ENA English. "Nairobi to Host Africa Forward Summit on Innovation and Growth." April 27, 2026

¹⁴⁹ IGAD Secretariat, "Communique of the IGAD Mediation Reflection Conference: Reimagining Mediation in a Fragmented World," (Nairobi: IGAD, April 28, 2026), 3–5

¹⁵⁰ United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti*, S/2026/294 (New York: United Nations, April 20, 2026), 8–11.

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch. "International Force in Haiti Allegedly Responsible for Sexual Violence." News release. April 13, 2026.

Section Two: MENA Region, Gulf, and Global Engagement

2.1 Egypt: Energy, Diplomacy, and Security Balancing

Throughout April 2026, Egypt reacted to the escalating Iran-Israel war by pivoting its energy strategy to mitigate domestic instability caused by global supply disruptions. With Gulf oil flows choked and Israeli natural gas cut off, Cairo secured vital imports from Libya to bridge the fuel gap and recalibrated long-standing energy deals with Jordan.¹⁵² Domestically, the crisis triggered a surge in gold markets as both citizens and elites sought safe havens against currency volatility. While the government normalized operating hours for shops to preserve tourism momentum, the IMF cautioned that commodity shocks have eroded growth projections by 1.1 percentage points for the coming fiscal years.¹⁵³ These maneuvers reflect a regime prioritizing energy security as an essential buffer against the external shocks threatening to trigger public discontent and austerity.

This pursuit of energy security is mirrored in Egypt's broader geopolitical balancing act, particularly its deepening ties with Moscow to counterbalance Western reliance. Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty's meeting with President Vladimir Putin in early April¹⁵⁴ signaled Cairo's willingness to lean on Russia for strategic support and sovereignty protection. This alignment focuses on critical projects like the El-Dabaa Nuclear Plant and the Russian industrial zone in the Suez Canal, ensuring essential infrastructure and grain supplies remain insulated from Middle Eastern volatility. By cultivating this partnership, Cairo aims to preserve its autonomy in a shifting multipolar order, leveraging Russian backing to maintain its standing in international forums. This strategic diversification allows Egypt to project itself as a stabilizer capable of navigating great-power rivalries while safeguarding its core national interests.

This diplomatic diversification also extends to Egypt's central role as a mediator in immediate regional crises, particularly the fragile US-Iran ceasefire process. Foreign Minister Abdelatty and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio reviewed the progress of the truce, focusing on hostage releases and the exclusion of Hamas from future Gaza governance. This engagement flowed into the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, where Egypt joined Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia in a quadrilateral group aimed at crafting joint responses to the ongoing conflict.¹⁵⁵ By embedding itself in multiple diplomatic channels, Cairo seeks to shape the post-ceasefire order and prevent spillover instability. This "hub" strategy elevates Egypt as an indispensable regional stabilizer, transforming geopolitical flux into leverage that protects its Suez-dependent trade and broader economic future.

¹⁵² "Israel Gas Cutoff Exposes Deep Energy Divide Between Jordan and Egypt." CTech (Calcalistech), April 2, 2026.

¹⁵³ Bassam Ramadan, "Egypt's Economic Growth Diminishes amid Global Commodity Price Shocks: IMF," Egypt Independent, April 17, 2026.

¹⁵⁴ "Putin Proposes 'Grain and Energy Hub' in Egypt during Abdelatty Visit," The Arab Weekly, April 3, 2026.

¹⁵⁵ "Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt FMs Meet in Antalya," QNA, April 18, 2026.

While Cairo manages high-level diplomacy, it maintains a firm stance on regional flashpoints, particularly the Palestinian cause, which serves as both a moral and strategic anchor. Egypt issued sharp condemnations of Israeli legislation proposing the death penalty for Palestinian prisoners, framing it as a dangerous escalation that risks regional stability.¹⁵⁶ Simultaneously, Cairo paired this rhetoric with military deterrence, conducting paratrooper drills with Pakistan and border exercises that signaled its readiness to enforce Sinai security.¹⁵⁷ These moves, combined with President el-Sisi's rejection of Palestinian displacement, define Gaza as a strategic red line.¹⁵⁸ By blending diplomatic advocacy with visible military readiness, Cairo aims to secure its borders and prevent the conflict from inflaming domestic tensions or causing extremist spillover into Egyptian territory.

Beyond the Levant, Egypt's strategic focus has increasingly turned toward its southern interests and the critical issue of Nile water security. On April 4, Egypt internationalized its dispute with Ethiopia through a high-profile public appeal to the United States for intervention. President el-Sisi warned that the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam poses an acute threat to Egypt's water security, bypassing African Union mediation to exert external pressure on Addis Ababa. Simultaneously, Cairo deepened defense ties with Somalia and Djibouti, deploying troops and arms to contain Ethiopian influence in the Horn of Africa. This aggressive posture seeks to project strength and secure water interests, yet it risks transforming a manageable resource dispute into a proxy arena for great-power rivalry, potentially destabilizing the broader Red Sea region.

The push for water security is complemented by a broader strategy to anchor Egypt within a cohesive Arab security framework. President el-Sisi reaffirmed this commitment during consultations with Kuwaiti officials on April 19, declaring Arab sovereignty a non-negotiable red line.¹⁵⁹ By linking Kuwait's security directly to Egypt's national interest, Cairo fosters a protective belt of Gulf cohesion to buffer against regional threats. This solidarity extends beyond rhetoric to include defense networking with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, emphasizing joint coordination against unconventional threats. Sisi's message to visiting Finnish President Alexander Stubb echoed this stance, asserting that Gulf stability is the cornerstone of Middle Eastern peace.¹⁶⁰ This alignment ensures that Egypt remains a central pillar of the Arab security architecture, leveraging its military weight to secure financial support.

¹⁵⁶ "Egypt, 7 Nations Condemn Israel's Death Penalty Law on Palestinians, 'Apartheid-Entrenching' Measures," Egypt Today, April 2, 2026.

¹⁵⁷ "AFRICA IS HOME," "Egypt and Pakistan have completed a joint military exercise focused on counterterrorism and tackling non-conventional threats," Facebook, April 26, 2026.

¹⁵⁸ "Egyptian President Reiterates Rejection of Attempts to Displace Palestinians," Xinhua, April 25, 2026.

¹⁵⁹ "Egypt's President Reaffirms Rejection of Any Violation of Arab States' Sovereignty," QNA, April 19, 2026.

¹⁶⁰ "President El-Sisi's Speech at Joint Press Conference with President of Finland Stubb," State Information Service (Egypt), April 21, 2026.

This security-driven alignment is being physically realized through new infrastructure projects that shield regional trade from Persian Gulf instability. Egypt is currently constructing a maritime-logistics corridor with Saudi Arabia that bypasses the volatile Strait of Hormuz entirely. This bridge connects Mediterranean and Red Sea ports to Saudi facilities, cutting transit times and protecting supply chains from regional conflict.¹⁶¹ This proactive step is crucial as the IMF recently cut Egypt's growth forecast to 4.2%, citing the impact of heightened energy prices and commodity shocks. To further diversify, Cairo is exploring renewable ventures and framework agreements with Azerbaijan's SOCAR to satisfy electricity demands.¹⁶² These initiatives represent a pragmatic realism: constructing a layered security-and-prosperity architecture to convert geopolitical flux into tangible economic buffers against a darkening global landscape.

Physical logistics are matched by industrial self-reliance, particularly in the management of the nation's most vital waterway, the Suez Canal. This industrial localization is a key component of the domestic narrative of strength, transforming the Suez corridor into a self-reliant hub. By fortifying its maritime infrastructure, Egypt aims to preserve its primary foreign currency stream while projecting mastery over its assets.

Complementing this maritime fortification, Egypt is looking toward long-term sustainability and future-ready economic hubs to attract international capital. A significant deal with Chinese firms for a large-scale green hydrogen facility reflects Cairo's intent to reduce future fuel vulnerability and satisfy electricity needs for data-center expansion.¹⁶³ This commitment is mirrored in the Red Sea Olympic Village project, which aims to boost tourism and high-value infrastructure along the strategic coastline. Furthermore, a new strategic partnership with Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean deepens energy cooperation and broadens links to European markets.¹⁶⁴ These initiatives, alongside continued talks with Saudi ambassadors, signal that Egypt remains focused on prestige development and sustainability. By weaving these economic threads together, Cairo seeks to anchor its future growth in a diversified, multipolar landscape.

¹⁶¹ The New Arab Staff & Agencies, "Egypt and Saudi Arabia Are Building Alternatives to Hormuz to Keep Gulf Supplied," The New Arab, April 16, 2026.

¹⁶² "Azerbaijan Considers Renewable Energy Cooperation with Egypt's Elsewedy Electric," Renewables.az, April 14, 2026.

¹⁶³ Doaa Ashraf, "Egypt Signs MoU with China's UEG to Develop Mediterranean Green Hydrogen Hub," Egypt Oil & Gas, April 8, 2026.

¹⁶⁴ "Joint Declaration on the Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Cyprus and the Arab Republic of Egypt," Presidency of the Republic (Cyprus), April 24, 2026.

2.2 Yemen: Controlled Escalation, Ceasefire Fragility, and the Red Sea as Strategic Theatre

Escalation and Its Limits

The Houthis entered April having launched their first direct strikes on Israel on March 29. A fourth attack followed in the first days of April, with Houthi leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi framing the shift from political support to direct military engagement as a cross-border obligation and promising gradual escalation. A further strike on April 6 targeted sites in Eilat with cruise missiles and UAVs, claiming coordination with Iran and Hezbollah; Israeli air defences intercepted it without reported damage.¹⁶⁵

What followed was a studied pause. No further strikes were launched through the remainder of the month, as the group abided by the roughly two-week ceasefire window for negotiations. On April 9, al-Houthi outlined a longer-term posture guided by what he described as a planned strategy for a potentially protracted conflict, while warning of unspecified surprise actions. The absence of follow-through confirmed what the preceding weeks had suggested: the Houthis are managing their entry into the regional conflict with deliberate restraint, calibrating operations to preserve leverage rather than expend it.

The threat to close the Bab el-Mandeb remained the group's most prominent instrument of pressure throughout April. Senior official Hussein al-Ezzi stated on April 19 that no force would be capable of reopening the strait if such a decision were taken.¹⁶⁶ Despite the intensity of the rhetoric, no maritime attacks or disruptions were recorded. The threats are directed at Washington and Tel Aviv, aimed at raising the cost of continued operations and pressing toward a more durable settlement on shipping. Their amplification by Chinese and Iranian outlets suggests the messaging is also being channelled into the broader strategic communications contest around the conflict.

Ceasefire Politics and the Peace Process

The Houthi assessment seems to be that the ceasefire is fragile and at risk of collapse, attributing the failure of the first negotiating round to U.S. demands and pointing to prolonged Israeli military activity in Lebanon. The framing positions any breakdown as a product of external actors' conduct rather than Houthi decision-making, a posture consistent with the group's approach throughout the conflict.

UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg to the country has been proactive this April. He conducted visits to Aden and Riyadh in the week of April 6 to 13, meeting Yemeni government officials and Saudi counterparts to assess the regional escalation's impact on the

¹⁶⁵ "Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis Join Iran in Strike on Israel," *Al Jazeera*, April 6, 2026.

¹⁶⁶ "Houthis Official Says Bab al-Mandeb May Be Closed," *Middle East Eye* (live blog update), April 19, 2026.

peace track.¹⁶⁷ On April 14, he briefed the UN Security Council, warning that Yemen remains highly exposed to renewed regional shocks despite the relative calm since the 2022 truce, and noting that rising fuel and food costs linked to wider Middle East tensions are compounding structural failures including divided state institutions, blocked exports, and delayed salaries in Presidential Leadership Council-administered areas. Humanitarian officials placed the number of people requiring assistance at over 22 million, with acute hunger, malnutrition, and strained health services worsening alongside access constraints and detentions of aid workers.

On April 20 and 21, UN-facilitated military talks concluded in Amman under the Military Coordination Committee, bringing together representatives of the internationally recognised government, the Saudi-led coalition, and the Houthis.¹⁶⁸ No major breakthrough was announced, but preparations for a broader follow-up meeting pointed to cautious continuity in a process that has so far survived the regional escalation without formally collapsing. Egypt's foreign minister held a phone call with Yemeni Foreign Minister Shaya Mohsin Zindani on April 22, reflecting Cairo's sustained interest in Yemen as Red Sea security remains central to wider regional competition, and forming part of the internationally recognised government's effort to maintain Arab diplomatic backing.¹⁶⁹

The Red Sea's Expanding Strategic Geography

The Houthis issued a formal warning against Israel's deepening relationship with Somaliland, describing any Israeli presence there as a red line that could raise tensions across the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea.¹⁷⁰ The statement followed Israel's appointment of its first ambassador to Somaliland after recognising the territory in December. For the Houthis, Somaliland's position directly across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen's southern coast gives the issue operational significance beyond its diplomatic framing: closer Israeli ties with Hargeisa, if they evolve toward security or intelligence cooperation, would introduce a new node into the Red Sea confrontation at a point the Houthis currently have limited capacity to contest.

2.3 Iran-Israel conflict

The month of April 2026 witnessed a profound shift in the Iran-Israel conflict as the United States initiated a comprehensive naval blockade of Iranian ports, a strategy internally designated as Operation Epic Fury. Implemented east of the Strait of Hormuz, this maneuver sought to extract nuclear and proxy-related concessions from Tehran by substituting kinetic strikes with sustained maritime coercion. U.S. Central Command reported that the blockade

¹⁶⁷ Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY), "Briefing by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, to the Security Council," press release, April 14, 2026.

¹⁶⁸ Middle East Online, "UN-Backed Talks Signal Fragile Progress towards De-escalation in Yemen," *Middle East Online*, April 22, 2026.

¹⁶⁹ Egypt Today Staff, "Egypt's FM Discusses Bilateral Relations and Latest Developments with Yemeni PM," *Egypt Today*, April 23, 2026.

¹⁷⁰ Faisal Ali, "Israel Appoints First Ambassador to Somaliland," *Al Jazeera*, April 15, 2026.

had successfully turned away twenty-three merchant vessels, effectively tightening Iran's fiscal isolation.¹⁷¹ While humanitarian aid remained exempt following strict verification, Washington's strategy underscored a calculated effort to preserve a fragile ceasefire framework while applying maximalist economic pressure, signaling that naval dominance would serve as the primary instrument for enforcing regional compliance and nuclear restraint. This transition from ledger-based sanctions to physical maritime denial represents a shift toward kinetic-adjacent coercion, forcing Tehran into a strategic paradox where any attempt to break the siege renders them the aggressor in a conflict they cannot economically sustain. By weaponizing the geography of the Strait, the U.S. has effectively externalized the cost of enforcement while placing the entire burden of escalation on Iranian shoulders.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately endorsed the blockade as indispensable leverage, aligning Israeli strategic objectives with Washington's maritime campaign.¹⁷² This endorsement reflects a shared goal of degrading Iranian proxy capabilities, particularly those of Hezbollah, while maintaining a unified front against Tehran's nuclear ambitions. However, this strategic alignment has heightened the risk of regional escalation, as analysts warn of potential Houthi retaliation in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Such a development could trigger broader Red Sea instability and further disrupt global supply chains already strained by Gulf volatility. Despite the internal Israeli fatigue regarding the conflict, the government maintains that maritime pressure remains the most viable pathway toward securing a favorable diplomatic outcome without resorting to full-scale regional warfare. This alignment effectively transforms the blockade into a structural buffer, allowing Israel to prioritize its northern security zone while the U.S. assumes the primary escalatory risk of fiscal maritime denial. The strategy represents a pivot toward distributed deterrence, where success hinges on the coalition's ability to prevent a "chokepoint cascade", the systematic weaponization of the Red Sea by proxies to offset the economic pressure applied in the Gulf.

In response to the naval squeeze, Tehran's tactics oscillated between military defiance and tentative diplomatic signaling. Iranian forces intensified their presence in the Strait of Hormuz, utilizing fast-boat swarms to interdict commercial traffic and seizing vessels such as the container ship *Touska* under claims of maritime violations.¹⁷³ By mid-April Iran had effectively brought traffic in the strait to a standstill, with Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei warning of "bitter defeats" for the U.S. and Israel should the blockade persist.¹⁷⁴ This maritime retaliation served to demonstrate that despite U.S. pressure, Iran retains the capacity to disrupt global energy arteries, turning control over commercial shipping into a central battlefield in the broader confrontation and complicating international efforts to

¹⁷¹Kostov, Nick. "U.S. Blockade Has Turned Back 23 Ships, Central Command Says." *Wall Street Journal*. April 18, 2026.

¹⁷²"Netanyahu Backs Reported U.S. Naval Blockade on Iran, Says Israel Expanding Buffer Zone in Lebanon." *Xinhua*. April 13, 2026.

¹⁷³"Iran Fast-Boat Swarms Add to Hormuz Threats for Shipping." *Reuters*. April 23, 2026.

¹⁷⁴"How Traffic Through the Strait of Hormuz Shrank to a Trickle – a Visual Deep Dive." *CNN*. April 29, 2026

ensure safe passage. Tehran is employing a strategy of asymmetric escalation dominance to transform the Strait of Hormuz into a geopolitical hostage, effectively betting that the global economy's intolerance for \$150 oil will break the U.S. diplomatic coalition before the blockade breaks the Iranian treasury. This shift from regional defense to mutually assured economic destruction forces the international community to choose between enforcing nuclear restraint and maintaining the fundamental viability of global maritime commons.

The diplomatic dimension of the crisis centered on Pakistani-mediated talks, though these efforts faced significant setbacks as the month progressed. Although Tehran signaled a willingness to discuss enrichment caps in Islamabad, the process stalled due to what Iranian officials described as Washington's "maximalist" demands.¹⁷⁵ The situation reached a critical point when President Trump canceled a planned envoy mission to Pakistan, citing dissatisfaction with Iran's proposals and demanding direct communication from Tehran.¹⁷⁶ This cancellation, coupled with a security lockdown in Islamabad that failed to yield a meeting, highlighted the deep-seated mistrust between the parties.¹⁷⁷ Consequently, the ceasefire remained a tactical pause rather than a diplomatic breakthrough, with both sides refusing to yield on the fundamental issue of sanctions relief. The collapse of the Islamabad track signals the obsolescence of intermediary-led de-escalation, as Washington pivots from a deal-making posture to one of existential maritime leverage. By bypassing Pakistani mediation, the U.S. is effectively forcing Tehran into a binary choice: direct, high-stakes capitulation on nuclear enrichment or a slow-motion economic collapse under the weight of Operation Epic Fury.

Parallel to the Gulf tensions, the Lebanon theater provided a temporary but fragile relief through a U.S.-facilitated ten-day truce.¹⁷⁸ The pause was intended to enable permanent security negotiations and provide civilian relief. However, the truce's integrity was immediately challenged by an Israeli strike on Ghaziyeh that resulted in significant casualties,¹⁷⁹ illustrating the difficulty of enforcing a cessation of hostilities amid proxy entanglements. While thousands of displaced Lebanese attempted to return home, continued Israeli operations against Hezbollah strongholds and reported violations by both sides underscored the fragility of the agreement. International stakeholders, including the European Union and G7, have since called for a more durable halt to the fighting to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. The Lebanon truce serves less as a humanitarian off-ramp and more as a strategic litmus test, designed to probe Hezbollah's internal cohesion while Israel preserves the operational right to "punitive calibration" as seen in the Ghaziyeh strike. This creates a volatile equilibrium where diplomatic pauses are weaponized as tactical windows,

¹⁷⁵ Rahman, Abdul. "Talks in Islamabad Failed Because of Washington's Maximalist Approach, Iran Claims." Peoples Dispatch. April 13, 2026.

¹⁷⁶ "Trump Says Cancelled Envoys' Pakistan Trip, but Iran War Not Resuming." The Hindu. April 26, 2026.

¹⁷⁷ Latif, Aamir. "Pakistan Lifts Days-Long 'Security Lockdown' in Capital with No Immediate US-Iran Talks on Sight." Anadolu Agency (AA). April 26, 2026.

¹⁷⁸ Chehayeb, Kareem, Abby Sewell, and Elena Becatoros. "A 10-Day Ceasefire Agreed on by Israel and Lebanon Goes into Effect." OPB (Associated Press). April 17, 2026.

¹⁷⁹ "Israeli Airstrike Kills 8 in Lebanon After Ceasefire Announcement." Yeni Şafak. April 17, 2026.

effectively subordinating civilian stability to the high-stakes logic of escalation management.

Hezbollah's leadership has largely rejected the practical value of the Lebanon truce, framing it as a temporary constraint rather than a genuine settlement.¹⁸⁰ The group pointed to ongoing village demolitions and targeted assassinations as evidence that the ceasefire lacked credibility, and they demonstrated continued military capability by downing an Israeli Hermes drone. This tactical success in the air reinforced Hezbollah's narrative of resistance, even as Israel ordered evacuations in areas like Deir Aames to prepare for further operations.¹⁸¹ The persistence of cross-border fire and the hardening of an Israeli-controlled buffer zone south of the Litani River indicate that the Lebanon front remains a volatile arena where localized strikes frequently threaten to undermine broader diplomatic efforts. This friction underscores a fundamental misalignment between diplomatic frameworks and the ground-level necessity for both actors to signal "credible deterrence" through selective kinetic engagement. Consequently, the arrangement functions less as a definitive resolution and more as a strategic pause used to recalibrate the costs of a persistent, low-intensity stalemate.

The intersection of these regional tensions drew significant intervention from global powers concerned with energy security and international law. China and Saudi Arabia notably coordinated to advocate for the continued opening of the Strait of Hormuz, with President Xi Jinping emphasizing the need for stability in global shipping lanes.¹⁸² Meanwhile, Washington rejected a Russian proposal to store Iran's enriched uranium, insisting on irreversible steps toward disarmament rather than interim storage measures.¹⁸³ This rejection, combined with fresh Treasury sanctions against Chinese banks facilitating Iranian trade,¹⁸⁴ exposed the deep fault lines in great-power maneuvering. Beijing's sharp rebuke of the blockade¹⁸⁵ as a violation of international norms highlights the growing friction between U.S. coercive measures and the energy interests of major global consumers.

The resulting maritime insecurity has generated a complex economic landscape characterized by extreme energy market volatility and unintended corporate windfalls. While oil prices briefly dropped following a temporary reopening of Hormuz, they surged again as Iran re-closed the strait, causing significant strain on global factories and supply chains.¹⁸⁶ Paradoxically, logistics giants such as DHL and Kuehne+Nagel reported increased profits as

¹⁸⁰ "Hezbollah Rejects Lebanon-Israel Talks as Truce Frays." MSN. April 29, 2026.

¹⁸¹ "Israel-Lebanon Fighting Ceasefire." New York Times. April 24, 2026.

¹⁸² "China's Xi Insists Strait of Hormuz Must Remain Open to Navigation During Call with Saudi Crown Prince." Arab News. April 20, 2026.

¹⁸³ "US Rejected Russia's Offer to Take Iran's Enriched Uranium, Kremlin Says." Anadolu Agency (AA), April 16, 2026.

¹⁸⁴ "Treasury Warns of Sanctions Risks Linked to China-Based Independent 'Teapot' Oil Refineries." U.S. Department of the Treasury. April 28, 2026.

¹⁸⁵ "U.S. Warns Banks of Sanctions Risk over China 'Teapot' Refineries Handling Iranian Oil." CNBC. April 29, 2026.

¹⁸⁶ Williams, Holly. "Oil Prices Drop Sharply and Global Markets Surge as Strait of Hormuz Reopened." Yahoo Finance (Press Association). April 17, 2026.

companies sought expensive freight alternatives to bypass the Gulf.¹⁸⁷ Additionally, damage to regional energy infrastructure has yielded massive revenue for major oil producers, even as the broader global economy faces higher production costs. This energy shock has transformed the regional conflict into a macroeconomic crisis, affecting industrial sectors far beyond the immediate geography of the Middle East.

Domestically, both Iran and Israel face internal pressures that constrain their diplomatic flexibility and harden their respective postures. In Iran, the execution of individuals accused of ties to Israeli intelligence signaled a domestic crackdown intended to project strength amid the external naval blockade. President Pezeshkian remains firm on preserving "peaceful nuclear rights," reflecting a leadership that views surrender as a threat to national sovereignty. In Israel, public opinion remains skeptical of the U.S.-brokered ceasefire, with a majority of citizens insisting on the complete disarmament of Hezbollah before any permanent accord. These internal political dynamics, coupled with the humanitarian concerns raised by the United Nations regarding civilian casualties in Lebanon and Gaza, ensure that the conflict remains locked in a cycle of conditional pauses and strategic deadlock. This friction suggests that for both leaderships, the primary theater of operations is domestic legitimacy, where the political risk of perceived concession outweighs the tactical benefits of a formal settlement. Consequently, the stalemate persists because managed conflict currently offers a more stable internal equilibrium for both regimes than the existential uncertainty of a compromised peace.

2.4 Türkiye: Crisis Diplomacy, NATO Leverage, and Regional Mediation

Turkey's April was defined by a deliberate effort to turn crisis into convening power. The 5th Antalya Diplomacy Forum, held in Antalya on 17–19 April under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's auspices, was built around the theme "Mapping Tomorrow, Managing Uncertainties" and brought together leaders and senior officials from more than 150 countries.¹⁸⁸ The official messaging was clear: Turkey wanted to present itself not just as a host, but as a hub where fractured diplomatic channels could still be brought into the same room. That framing matters because it links Turkey's regional activism to a broader claim of strategic relevance in a more unstable international order. This push highlights Turkey's transition toward transactional multilateralism, where it leverages its geographic and political centrality to act as a vital shock absorber for global tensions. By institutionalizing its role as a mediator, Ankara effectively transforms regional volatility into diplomatic equity, ensuring its indispensability to both Western and non-Western power blocs.

The Iran war's spillover gave that forum its sharper edge. Erdoğan said Turkey was working to extend the ceasefire and keep talks alive, while Iran's deputy foreign minister, Saeed

¹⁸⁷ Khan, Sana. "War Driven Disruption Lifts European Logistics Profits but Risks Lie Ahead." *Modern Diplomacy*. April 23, 2026.

¹⁸⁸ "TRT Host Broadcaster of the 5th Antalya Diplomacy Forum." *Copeam*. April 14, 2026.

Khatibzadeh, used the Antalya platform to say no date had been set for the next round of negotiations and to accuse Washington of maximalist demands.¹⁸⁹ Turkey's role here was not neutral in the passive sense; it was actively trying to stay in contact with the United States, Iran, and mediator Pakistan while keeping a diplomatic lane open for talks. This proactive engagement illustrates the Turkish pursuit of strategic autonomy through the facilitation of communication between adversarial sovereign entities to mitigate regional destabilization. Ultimately, Ankara leverages these diplomatic conduits to solidify its status as an indispensable intermediary within a fragmented global security architecture.

Syria was the second major pillar of that diplomacy. Erdoğan met Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa on the forum sidelines, and the Turkish readout said the discussion covered bilateral ties, the situation inside Syria, and wider regional issues.¹⁹⁰ At the same time, the forum was used to signal that Washington was willing to accommodate Turkey's regional role: U.S. Ambassador Tom Barrack said the sanctions dispute over Turkey's S-400 purchase could be solved soon and linked that to a possible path back toward F-35 participation.¹⁹¹ This diplomatic synchronization illustrates the Turkish strategy of utilizing the Syrian transition as a primary vehicle for reclaiming regional preeminence while simultaneously incentivizing a revitalization of its defense partnership with the United States. Ultimately, the integration of bilateral rapprochement and transatlantic security negotiations establishes Turkey as the indispensable arbiter of stability within the evolving Levant geopolitical framework.

The NATO dimension gave the month a harder security tone. Mark Rutte visited Ankara, and met Turkish leaders, and toured ASELSAN in preparation for the NATO summit planned for Ankara.¹⁹² In his ASELSAN speech, he said NATO had intercepted ballistic missiles heading to Türkiye from Iran on four occasions, called Türkiye a highly valuable ally, and argued that the alliance would do what was necessary to defend Turkey and all members. He also praised Türkiye's "defence industrial revolution," making the point that deterrence now depends as much on production capacity and innovation as on formal guarantees. That message neatly matched Turkey's effort to be seen as both frontline state and defense-industrial contributor.

Turkey also used the NATO channel to push its Ukraine mediation line. Erdoğan told Rutte that Ankara was trying to revive Russia-Ukraine negotiations and bring the leaders back to direct talks; Reuters also reported that Ukraine had asked Turkey to host a Zelenskyy-Putin meeting.¹⁹³ In the same discussion, Erdoğan said transatlantic ties remained indispensable but pressed European NATO allies to shoulder more responsibility. He later told German Chancellor Friedrich Merz that the U.S.-Iran war was weakening Europe and would do more

¹⁸⁹ "Turkish FM Says Talks with Iran, U.S., Optimistic about Ceasefire Extension," Xinhua, April 19, 2026,

¹⁹⁰ "Türkiye's President Erdogan, Syrian Counterpart Discuss Bilateral Ties, Latest Developments in Syria," Anadolu Agency (AA), April 17, 2026.

¹⁹¹ "Envoy Expects U.S.-Turkey to 'Soon' Solve Issue of Sanctions over S-400 Defences." Reuters. April 17, 2026.

¹⁹² "NATO Secretary General Visits Türkiye in Preparation for Ankara Summit, Underlines Importance of Defence Industry." NATO. April 22, 2026.

¹⁹³ "Ukraine Has Asked Turkey to Host a Zelenskyy-Putin Meeting, FM Says." Reuters. April 22, 2026.

damage without peace-oriented diplomacy.¹⁹⁴ The strategic reading is straightforward: Turkey is converting its access to both Moscow and Kyiv into leverage with NATO, while presenting itself as one of the few capitals still able to bridge multiple wars at once.

The conflict was not only diplomatic; it also fed directly into Turkey's macroeconomic stance. The Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye kept its policy rate at 37% and warned that fallout from the Iran war could still alter the inflation outlook. The bank said energy prices remained elevated and volatile, and it signaled that second-round inflation effects were still a live risk.¹⁹⁵ That decision shows how quickly regional conflict has been absorbed into domestic stabilization policy. Turkey's leaders may be presenting themselves as regional stabilizers, but the central bank's caution suggests the war is already constraining room for maneuver at home.

Economic diplomacy with Syria and Jordan moved in parallel. In early April, Turkey and Syria stepped up banking cooperation, and by mid-April Syria said it was in the final stages of establishing a correspondent account with Turkey's central bank while also considering a currency swap.¹⁹⁶ Separately, Turkey, Jordan, and Syria signed a transport cooperation deal, and Turkish officials tied the project to reviving the historic Hejaz Railway and broader north-south connectivity toward Saudi Arabia.¹⁹⁷ This is more than infrastructure nostalgia: it is a reconstruction strategy that aims to rebuild trade routes, normalize cross-border payments, and bind postwar Syria into a Turkey-centered commercial geography.

A lighter but still important institutional layer came from parliamentary diplomacy. The 152nd IPU Assembly met in Istanbul, bringing together the IPU's governing bodies and related committees.¹⁹⁸ That mattered because Turkey was not only hosting executive-level mediation; it was also building parliamentary legitimacy around peace, justice, and conflict management. The broader regional context was visible a week later in Cyprus, where EU leaders and Middle Eastern partners met on 24 April to discuss the Iran crisis and Middle East security, and where the EU asked officials to prepare a blueprint for mutual assistance.¹⁹⁹ The pattern is consistent: Turkey spent the month trying to sit at the center of every major conversation, from high diplomacy and defense to trade corridors and institutional repair. This synchronization of legislative and executive engagement signifies a calculated effort to embed Turkish influence within the foundational structures of international governance. By expanding its mediation capacity across multiple institutional tiers, Ankara effectively transitions from a situational facilitator to a structural linchpin of regional stability

¹⁹⁴ "Turkey Trying to Revive Russia-Ukraine Negotiations, Erdogan Tells NATO Chief." Reuters. April 22, 2026.

¹⁹⁵ "Turkey Central Bank Holds Rates at 37% as It Eyes Iran War Fallout." Reuters. April 22, 2026.

¹⁹⁶ "Syria, Türkiye Move to Establish Correspondent Banking Relations." SANA. April 10, 2026.

"Türkiye, Syria, Jordan to Modernize Their Railways, Eye New Corridor." Daily Sabah. April 16, 2026.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁸ "152nd IPU Assembly and Related Meetings." Inter-Parliamentary Union. April 15–19, 2026.

¹⁹⁹ Herman, Yves. "EU Leaders Discuss Iran Crisis and Middle East with Regional Partners in Cyprus." Reuters Connect. April 24, 2026.

2.5 Gulf States: Diplomatic, Security and Geopolitical Engagement in the Horn of Africa

April was a pivotal month for the Gulf states, defined by sustained Iranian military pressure, intensive ceasefire diplomacy and a strategic recalibration of external partnerships. A fragile US-Iran truce took hold late in the month following direct Gulf intervention, but Iranian missile and drone campaigns continued targeting energy, water, aluminum infrastructure and military installations across the region exposing the limits of Western security guarantees. In response, Saudi Arabia positioned itself as the indispensable mediator capable of moving Washington the UAE transformed its vulnerability into deeper ties with global powers while expanding its Horn of Africa footprint and Qatar doubled down as a diplomatic bridge, balancing mediation with defense diversification. All three deepened defense cooperation with Ukraine through ten-year agreements exchanging drone expertise for air.

United Arab Emirates:

The UAE entered April under sustained Iranian pressure, absorbing some of the heaviest barrages of the conflict while simultaneously transforming its security vulnerability into a driver of deeper strategic partnerships with Washington, London, Moscow, and New Delhi.²⁰⁰ Iranian missile and drone strike targeted population centers, industrial facilities, and military sites. Air defenses maintained high interception rates, but cumulative impacts included significant damage to energy and civilian infrastructure. Particularly notable was an Iranian strike on aluminum facilities in Abu Dhabi part of a deliberate effort to extend pressure beyond oil and military targets into critical industrial sectors. Civilian areas and tourism sites remained on alert, and maritime security in the Gulf and Strait of Hormuz stayed under heightened monitoring.

The UAE's diplomatic response was swift and multi-layered. The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister coordinated closely with the US Secretary of State, jointly condemning Iranian attacks as unprovoked and terrorist in nature, reviewing consequences for global energy supplies and economic stability, and welcoming the ceasefire announcement while insisting on sustainable political solutions.²⁰¹ In parallel, Abu Dhabi engaged Moscow, with the Foreign Minister holding talks with his Russian counterpart and both sides expressing a shared position on the need to resume negotiations for a lasting resolution to the Strait of Hormuz crisis. ²⁰²The Emirates also hosted the UK Foreign Secretary, issuing a joint statement that condemned Iranian attacks in the strongest terms and formally agreed on a framework for enhanced cooperation covering foreign affairs, defence, trade, artificial

²⁰⁰ Khaleej Times, "2 months on: UAE's 'strength without escalation' strategy under Iran attacks," April 28, 2026.

²⁰¹ Aletihad News Center, "Abdullah bin Zayed, US Secretary of State discuss regional developments in phone call," April 25, 2026.

²⁰² Izvestia, "Lavrov discussed the situation in the Strait of Hormuz with the UAE Foreign Minister," April 24, 2026.

intelligence, and the energy transition.²⁰³

Underpinning this diplomatic offensive was a parallel mediation track. The UAE announced the success of its efforts between Russia and Ukraine, securing the exchange of nearly four hundred prisoners a high-profile demonstration of Abu Dhabi's ability to bridge even the most intractable conflicts. The Indian National Security Advisor met with the UAE President to discuss regional stability and the deepening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.²⁰⁴ In a significant public articulation, the UAE Ambassador to the United States published an op-ed arguing that a ceasefire alone is insufficient and that the war requires a conclusive outcome addressing Iran's nuclear capabilities, missile and drone arsenal, proxy networks, and blockade of international sea lanes.²⁰⁵ He noted that Iran had launched more missiles and drones at the UAE than at any other country and reaffirmed Abu Dhabi's massive investment commitment to the United States.

In the Horn of Africa, the UAE's engagement blended economic statecraft, hard security positioning, and the sharpening rivalry with Saudi Arabia.²⁰⁶ Abu Dhabi moved to reassure Kenya that trade and travel links remained uninterrupted despite the Gulf crisis, pointing to a comprehensive economic partnership agreement as a vehicle for deeper cooperation in logistics, infrastructure, and renewable energy. The President of Somaliland departed for a working visit to the Emirates a trip that unfolded against the backdrop of Somalia's recent decision to terminate all bilateral agreements with Abu Dhabi, nullifying defense, security, and port cooperation pacts.²⁰⁷ The Sudan file further illustrated Abu Dhabi's assertive posture, with reports highlighting that the UAE and Saudi Arabia appear to be backing opposing sides in the Sudanese conflict, though the Emirates has consistently denied arming any faction. On the economic front, the UAE shut down Iranian-linked institutions in Dubai and warned it could freeze billions of dollars in Iranian assets targeting IRGC-linked entities measures that would significantly restrict Iran's access to foreign currency and trade. Taken together, the month captured a UAE foreign policy that is both reactive absorbing fire while binding global powers more tightly to its side and proactive, leveraging ports, trade pacts and security partnerships to entrench its influence from Berbera to Nairobi even as competition with Riyadh intensifies across the Red Sea basin.

Qatar

Qatar's April posture was structured around three interlocking priorities buttressing the fragile US-Iran ceasefire through relentless mediation advocacy, coordinating with regional and global powers to solidify a platform for de-escalation, and protecting its political and

²⁰³ Khaleej Times, "UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs, UK counterpart jointly condemn Iran's 'egregious attacks'," April 25, 2026.

²⁰⁴ Hindustan Times, "NSA Ajit Doval meets UAE President, discusses regional situation amid Iran war," April 26, 2026.

²⁰⁵ UAE Embassy in Washington, DC, "Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba Writes for The Wall Street Journal: The UAE Stands Up to Iran," March 25, 2026.

²⁰⁶ eNCA, "Horn of Africa becoming 'battleground' for rival Gulf monarchies," April 25, 2026.

²⁰⁷ FTL Somalia, "Somaliland Leader Visits UAE Amid Somalia-Abu Dhabi Tensions," April 22, 2026.

security equities in the Horn of Africa and Libya. The country experienced direct threats to its territory and economic waters, with Iranian drones and cruise missiles launched toward Qatari airspace.²⁰⁸ Air defenses successfully intercepted all incoming threats, with no reported casualties or major damage, though earlier weeks had seen strikes near the critical Ras Laffan LNG hub. Alerts and monitoring continued for energy infrastructure and maritime zones, underscoring ongoing risks to global energy supply chains.

Diplomatically, Doha positioned itself as an indispensable voice for de-escalation. The Foreign Ministry spokesperson publicly endorsed extending the truce, warning that a return to hostilities would choke the global economy and stressing the need to restore full freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.²⁰⁹ The Emir spoke directly with the US President to review the ceasefire, highlight its importance for maritime security and supply chains, and reaffirm Qatar's commitment to supporting mediation efforts. The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister then engaged in a coordinated round of phone calls with Iranian, Egyptian, and Saudi counterparts.²¹⁰ With Iran, he was briefed on Tehran's latest initiatives and challenges, welcomed Iran's diplomatic approach, and stressed Qatar's readiness to continue playing a constructive mediating role. With Egypt, the two ministers discussed de-escalation efforts. With Saudi Arabia, they reviewed bilateral cooperation and the broader ceasefire framework. Throughout these engagements, Qatar insisted that all parties must respond to mediation to address root causes through dialogue and reach sustainable agreements. The country also pushed back firmly against claims that it was striking side arrangements with Tehran, emphasizing that its actions are coordinated with regional partners rather than pursued independently.

Beyond the immediate Gulf theatre, Qatar joined a coordinated high-level diplomatic move by Arab and Islamic nations strongly condemning Israel's appointment of a diplomatic envoy to Somaliland, considering it a blatant violation of Somali sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity.²¹¹ The ministers warned that such unilateral actions represent a dangerous precedent that could undermine stability in the Horn of Africa and negatively impact regional peace and security. In parallel, Qatar redoubled its support for political stability in Libya, with its ambassador meeting the Libyan Presidential Council head in Tripoli to underscore Qatar's commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation, supporting the UN political process, and advancing efforts to unify Libyan institutions.

Qatar also deepened its defense partnership with Ukraine, signing a ten-year agreement covering co-production, joint investment, and the exchange of expertise in countering drones and missiles following similar arrangements by Saudi Arabia and the UAE during the

²⁰⁸ Qatar News Agency, "Qatar Sends 2 Identical Letters (12th and 13th) to UN, Security Council Regarding Latest Developments of Iranian Attacks on its Territories," April 8, 2026.

²⁰⁹ Al-Watan (Qatar), "Assistant Foreign Ministry Spokesperson: We Support Extending US-Iran Truce," April 23, 2026.

²¹⁰ Islamic Republic of Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Iranian Qatari Foreign Ministers Hold Phone Talks on Regional Developments," April 26, 2026.

²¹¹ Qatar News Agency, "Qatar, 15 Arab, Islamic Countries Condemn Israel's Appointment of a Diplomatic Envoy to So-Called 'Somaliland'," April 19, 2026.

Ukrainian president's Gulf tour.²¹² Ukraine has deployed over two hundred anti-drone specialists across the region and Qatar holds additional significance for Kyiv as a mediator on humanitarian issues, having previously facilitated the return of Ukrainian children deported by Russia and exchanges of prisoners of war. In its own neighborhood, Doha enhanced coordination with Oman and Turkey to bolster regional stability and continued to coordinate with Saudi Arabia and the UAE under the GCC framework to reinforce the ceasefire.²¹³ Qatar's overall approach reflected a deliberate balancing act staying anchored to Western security ties while preserving its role as a regional mediator and limiting the risk of wider conflict, operating through quiet, selective engagement that allows it to remain relevant without being tied to any single alignment.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's posture throughout April combined active crisis diplomacy at the highest levels, continued exposure to Iranian aerial threats against its Eastern Province energy heartland, and careful stewardship of its long-term economic transformation.²¹⁴ The Kingdom faced repeated waves of ballistic missiles and drones targeting oil infrastructure, with air defenses achieving consistently high interception rates.²¹⁵ Debris from intercepted projectiles caused limited damage near energy facilities, but no major ground incursions occurred. Of greater strategic concern, a strike on Prince Sultan Air Base injured multiple US troops and damaged aerial refueling aircraft one of the most serious breaches of American air defences since the conflict began. The Houthi signal of potential entry into the war also raised the prospect of the Red Sea becoming an additional front, threatening the East-West pipeline and Yanbu exports that had become the kingdom's primary oil lifeline after the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz.²¹⁶

On the diplomatic front, the Crown Prince personally pressed the US President to prioritize a Lebanon ceasefire, framing it as essential to keeping the broader Iran negotiations alive.²¹⁷ That push proved decisive, and a truce was announced and subsequently extended. A Saudi envoy then travelled to Beirut to consolidate the fragile agreement and push for full implementation of long-standing arrangements on state authority over weapons.²¹⁸ In parallel, Riyadh hosted the head of Sudan's Transitional Council to discuss ending that conflict and safeguarding Sudanese sovereignty, while also receiving a written message from Djibouti's president on strengthening bilateral relations.²¹⁹ The Foreign Minister engaged in a flurry of high-level calls with his Iranian counterpart on de-escalation, with the Qatari Prime

²¹² Ukrinform, "Ukraine and Qatar signed defense partnership agreement for at least 10 years, says Zelensky," March 28, 2026.

²¹³ The New Arab, "Gulf diplomacy intensifies amid uncertainty of Iran-US ceasefire talks," April 19, 2026.

²¹⁴ Hindustan Times, "Saudi caught panicking? Crown prince MBS begs Trump to save Lebanon ceasefire or face Iran revenge?" April 18, 2026.

²¹⁵ WION, "WATCH | Fire erupts in Saudi Arabia's Al Jubail industrial area after Iranian missile strike," April 7, 2026.

²¹⁶ South China Morning Post, "Iran war escalates as Houthis threaten to sever Saudi oil exports," April 19, 2026.

²¹⁷ Middle East Eye, "Saudi Arabia pressed US to secure a Lebanon ceasefire to preserve Iran negotiations, sources say," April 16, 2026.

²¹⁸ The National, "Saudi Arabia ramps up diplomatic outreach to Lebanon," April 24, 2026.

²¹⁹ Saudi Gazette, "Saudi Crown Prince, Al-Burhan discuss safeguarding Sudan's security and sovereignty," April 20, 2026.

Minister to review bilateral cooperation and discuss the US-Iran ceasefire, and with other regional partners to coordinate multilateral efforts.²²⁰ Riyadh also reversed its earlier position by allowing US forces to use a key air base, though the Foreign Minister simultaneously warned that the kingdom's patience is finite and that any assumption of Gulf incapacity would be a miscalculation.

Beyond immediate crisis management, Riyadh broadened its strategic partnerships. The Ukrainian President met with the Crown Prince to advance security cooperation focused on air defense expertise, alongside agreements in energy, infrastructure, and food security.²²¹ Saudi Arabia also deepened its engagement with Pakistan to steady the US-Iran talks.²²² The Kingdom aligned with GCC partners in supporting a UN Security Council draft resolution on Strait of Hormuz security which ultimately failed due to Russian and Chinese vetoes and maintained a public stance emphasizing de-escalation and sovereignty while privately coordinating on regional defense.²²³ The month underscored Saudi Arabia's focus on protecting its Vision 2030 goals amid sustained aerial risks, with the country navigating between its traditional US security relationship and an expanding set of parallel ties with China, Russia, and Ukraine.

Section Three: International/Regional Organizations and Global Powers Engagement

African Union

Throughout April 2026, the African Union moved along three interconnected tracks: the consolidation of Ethiopia's leadership of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) intensified continental engagement on Sudan and South Sudan, and the expansion of AU institutional diplomacy into global governance, infrastructure, and technological security. Rather than a month of dramatic headline interventions, April reflected a gradual repositioning of the Union as both a continental conflict manager and an increasingly vocal diplomatic actor in wider international affairs.

The month opened with a notable institutional transition as Ethiopia assumed the rotating chairmanship of the AU Peace and Security Council on April²²⁴, the opening statements by H.E. Dr. Gedion Timothewos, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Chairperson of the PSC for April 2026, succeeding Eswatini. This shift mattered beyond routine procedure. Ethiopia immediately pushed a security-heavy agenda centered on "silencing the guns,"²²⁵ conflict field engagement, and updating the

²²⁰ Pakistan Today, "Saudi Arabia steps up diplomacy as regional powers intensify backchannel efforts," April 27, 2026.

²²¹ Office of the President of Ukraine, "The President of Ukraine Met with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia to Discuss Agreements in Security, Infrastructure, and Energy," April 24, 2026.

²²² Arab News, "Pakistani PM, Saudi crown prince discuss regional tensions, US-Iran mediation efforts," April 16, 2026.

²²³ Xinhua News Agency, "UN Security Council fails to adopt draft resolution on Strait of Hormuz," Guangming Online, April 8, 2026.

²²⁴ Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia Assumes Chairship of AU Peace and Security Council." ENA English, April 3, 2026.

²²⁵ "AU Agenda 2063 Mission Pushes Digital Drive to Silence the Guns across Africa." Global Sentinel, 2026.

continental peace architecture to accommodate new threats. Under Addis Ababa's stewardship, the PSC moved away from passive communiqués and toward more issue-driven sessions, particularly on Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, and the implications of artificial intelligence²²⁶ for conflict prevention.²²⁷ The April 16 PSC ministerial discussion on AI governance and peace²²⁸ was particularly significant because it signaled the AU's growing awareness that future insecurity on the continent will not be shaped only by insurgencies and coups, but also by cyber manipulation, misinformation ecosystems, and digital surveillance asymmetries.

Sudan remained the AU's most persistent crisis file throughout the month. As the war entered its fourth year,²²⁹ AU diplomacy sharpened around the argument that neither the Sudanese Armed Forces nor the Rapid Support Forces could deliver a viable military settlement. This position was repeated in Addis Ababa and amplified internationally when AU Commission Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Yousouf addressed the Third International Sudan Conference in Berlin on April 15,²³⁰ calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and unrestricted aid access, especially around El Fasher and North Darfur. Parallel to Sudan, the PSC also deployed a field mission to South Sudan from April 23–25²³¹ to assess the implementation of the Revitalised Peace Agreement²³² and growing fears surrounding the December 2026 electoral roadmap.²³³ Together, these engagements showed that the AU spent much of April trying to prevent the Horn–Nile security corridor from sliding into simultaneous state failure.

Beyond direct conflict mediation, the Union also invested in broader continental governance frameworks. On March 31 the AU launched the Fifth Session of its Sub-Committee on Tax and Illicit Financial Flows,²³⁴ underscoring a renewed push for domestic resource mobilization at a time when many African states are facing debt stress and shrinking development assistance. This governance focus continued later in the month as AU member states convened to define their six common G20 priorities for 2026–2028 following the Union's admission into the G20. The agenda financial reform, vaccine manufacturing, food production, and Agenda 2063 acceleration indicated that the AU is attempting to convert symbolic G20 membership into a coordinated bargaining platform rather than merely ceremonial representation.

²²⁶ African Union Peace and Security Council. "Communiqué of the 1339th Meeting of the PSC on 'Artificial Intelligence: Governance, Peace and Security,' Held on Thursday, 16 April 2026." African Union Commission Library, April 16, 2026

²²⁷ Institute of Foreign Affairs. "Ethiopia's PSC Chairmanship Priorities for a Credible Month at the Helm." Institute of Foreign Affairs, April 6, 2026.

²²⁸ Amani Africa. "Provisional Programme of Work of the Peace and Security Council for April 2026." April 2026.

²²⁹ United Nations News. "Sudan's War Leaves Millions of Children at Risk as Humanitarian Needs Soar." April 2026.

²³⁰ African Union Commission. "AUC Chairperson at the Third International Sudan Conference in Berlin." African Union, April 15, 2026.

²³¹ "AU Assessment to Determine Path Forward for South Sudan's Transition: Amb. Hirut." Eye Radio, April 2026.

²³² Amani Africa. "Provisional Programme of Work of the Peace and Security Council for April 2026." April 2026.

²³³ "AU Delegation to Visit South Sudan for Talks." Radio Tamazuj, April 2026.

²³⁴ African Union. "Fifth Session of the Sub-Committee on Tax and Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs)." African Union, March 31.

April also revealed an AU leadership increasingly active in extra-continental diplomacy.²³⁵ Chairperson Youssouf's consultations with Emmanuel Macron in Paris,²³⁶ meetings with German officials in Berlin,²³⁷ engagements with the U.S. Mission to the AU,²³⁸ and the Commission's endorsement of the China–Pakistan Five-Point Initiative on Gulf de-escalation²³⁹ collectively suggested a Commission seeking relevance beyond African conflict theatres. This same internationalization was visible in AU reactions to the U.S. Iran ceasefire, developments surrounding the Persian Gulf, and the organization has continued diplomatic signaling on Palestine. The implication is clear: the AU no longer wishes to be confined to internal African mediation alone, but increasingly frames external geopolitical crises as matters with direct African economic and maritime consequences.

Institutionally, the Union closed the month by reinforcing its legislative and technical arms. The Pan-African Parliament's extraordinary session in Midrand elected new bureau leadership,²⁴⁰ while the Specialized Technical Committee on Transport and Energy advanced infrastructure connectivity discussions. Though less visible than PSC diplomacy, these processes matter because they align with the AU's long-term attempt to bind security stabilization to continental integration ports, corridors, energy grids, and trade routes. In that sense, April 2026 was not defined by a single dramatic AU intervention, but by a steady consolidation of the Union's dual identity: as Africa's principal peace-security forum under Ethiopian PSC leadership and as a more assertive institutional bloc seeking advantage in global economic and diplomatic negotiations.

United Nations Security Council

During April 2026, the United Nations Security Council operated under the rotating presidency of Bahrain,²⁴¹ and the month was shaped by three dominant concerns: the militarization of maritime insecurity in the Middle East, the renewal and review of vulnerable peacekeeping mandates, and sustained monitoring of African conflict theatres particularly Sudan, South Sudan, and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unlike March, which was defined by dramatic voting over Resolution 2817, April was a month of diplomatic containment: repeated closed consultations, mandate management, and attempts to prevent already active crises from widening further.

The Middle East remained the Council's most destabilizing file. Bahrain used its presidency

²³⁵ African Union Commission. "AUC Chairperson Held a Series of High-Level Engagements with Key Partners." African Union, April 16, 2026.

²³⁶ African Union. "African Union Commission Participates in the Group of Twenty (G20) Development Working Group Meeting." African Union, April 2026.

²³⁷ African Union Commission. "AUC Chairperson Hosted the Federal Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany." African Union, April 14, 2026.

²³⁸ African Union Commission. "AUC Chairperson Met with the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the U.S. Mission to the AU." African Union, April 22, 2026.

²³⁹ Anadolu Agency. "AU Backs China-Pakistan Peace Push on Middle East, Urges Urgent De-Escalation." Anadolu Agency, April 2026.

²⁴⁰ African Union. "African Union Statement on Escalating Middle East Tensions and Call for Restraint." African Union, April.

²⁴¹ Security Council Report. "Security Council Programme of Work for April 2026." What's in Blue, April 2026.

to elevate maritime security²⁴² after the March Hormuz confrontation²⁴³ and the continuing fallout from Iranian retaliatory strikes. Early April consultations revolved around a Bahrain–Jordan backed draft initiative on freedom of navigation,²⁴⁴ but Russian and Chinese resistance prevented consensus,²⁴⁵ leaving the Council diplomatically paralyzed on one of the world’s most economically sensitive waterways. This paralysis spilled into subsequent emergency meetings after failed Islamabad talks²⁴⁶ and continued Israeli-Iranian escalation across Lebanon and Gulf maritime lanes. By the final week of April, Bahrain had transformed this unresolved crisis into a broader thematic open debate on “The Safety and Protection of Waterways in the Maritime Domain,”²⁴⁷ attempting to push the Council from reactive crisis language toward a wider security doctrine on global shipping chokepoints.

Parallel to the Gulf crisis, the Council spent considerable time managing fragile UN missions whose mandates were approaching political exhaustion. The closure of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement in Yemen at the end of March symbolized a larger trend: shrinking tolerance for open-ended monitoring missions with limited leverage. That concern was visible again in April’s discussions over the renewal of UNMISS,²⁴⁸ where troop contributors and Security Council members debated how to maintain deterrence capacity amid worsening political deadlock in Juba. Similar review pressures appeared in Haiti, Syria, Libya, and Colombia, indicating that April was not simply about conflict response, but about whether the UN’s inherited peacekeeping architecture remains structurally capable of managing prolonged instability.

African crises remained embedded across the Council’s April program, though mostly through humanitarian and mandate-centered lenses rather than new resolutions. Sudan returned repeatedly in closed consultations,²⁴⁹ particularly after worsening reports from Darfur and expanding humanitarian collapse. Several members pressed for stronger language on civilian protection, but divisions persisted over enforcement and the role of external backers in fueling the war. South Sudan likewise remained a central concern as Council briefers²⁵⁰ warned that deteriorating security and electoral delays could undermine the 2026 transition timetable.²⁵¹ Meanwhile, on April 15 the Council reviewed the Great Lakes framework²⁵² and the worsening eastern DRC theatre,²⁵³ including the future of MONUSCO and the risks associated with any accelerated drawdown. Collectively, these files revealed a

²⁴²Security Council Report. “Maritime Security High-Level Open Debate.” What’s in Blue, April 2026.

²⁴³ United Nations. “Security Council High-Level Debate on Maritime Security.” United Nations Media, April 2026.

²⁴⁴ Security Council Report. “Middle East Crisis: Vote on a Draft Resolution on the Strait of Hormuz.” What’s in Blue, April.

²⁴⁵ Anadolu Agency. “UN Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Freedom of Navigation in Strait of Hormuz.” Anadolu Agency, April 2026.

²⁴⁶ Al Jazeera. “US and Iran Fail to Reach Peace Deal after Marathon Talks in Pakistan.” Al Jazeera, April 12, 2026.

²⁴⁷ Safety4Sea. “UN Security Council Convenes to Protect Maritime Trade.” Safety4Sea, April 2026.

²⁴⁸ Security Council Report. “South Sudan.” Monthly Forecast, April 2026.

²⁴⁹ Security Council Report. “Sudan: Closed Consultations.” What’s in Blue, April 17, 2026

²⁵⁰ United Nations. “Security Council Briefing on Sudan Humanitarian Situation.” United Nations, April 2026.

²⁵¹ Security Council Report. “South Sudan.” Monthly Forecast, April 2026.

²⁵² United Nations. “Security Council Meeting on Middle East Maritime Escalation.” United Nations Media, April 2026.

²⁵³ United Nations News. “Sudan Conflict Worsens as Humanitarian Needs Reach Breaking Point.” UN News, April 2026.

Council increasingly trapped in managerial diplomacy aware of expanding African instability, but unable to move beyond monitoring, sanctions maintenance, and mandate recalibration.

April also showed the Security Council placing unusual emphasis on humanitarian norms and regional partnerships. Repeated references to Resolution 2730²⁵⁴ on the protection of humanitarian personnel reflected frustration over attacks on aid workers in Gaza and Sudan,²⁵⁵ while annual consultations on EU–UN cooperation²⁵⁶ and broader UN–League of Arab States coordination indicated Bahrain’s effort to foreground Chapter VIII partnerships.²⁵⁷ This mirrored a larger institutional reality: as permanent member divisions continue to block decisive resolutions, the Council is increasingly dependent on regional organizations to shoulder operational burdens it can no longer politically coordinate alone.

In strategic terms, therefore, April 2026 was a month in which the Security Council looked active but not authoritative. It met frequently, reviewed multiple mandates, held emergency consultations, and staged high-level debates yet on the month’s most dangerous crises, from the Strait of Hormuz to Sudan, it remained essentially a forum for damage control rather than decisive conflict resolution. The Bahrain presidency succeeded in keeping maritime and Arab security at the center of the agenda, but the broader picture was one of a Council struggling to convert deliberation into enforceable international order.

Inter-Governmental Authority on Development

Throughout April 2026, IGAD remained primarily preoccupied with its traditional security belt Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti while simultaneously attempting to preserve momentum on long-term regional integration programs. Unlike the African Union’s broader continental diplomacy, IGAD’s April posture was narrower and more operational: election observation, ceasefire monitoring, humanitarian coordination, and the continued search for a workable regional framework capable of preventing multiple Horn crises from converging.

The first half of the month was dominated by Djibouti’s presidential election, where IGAD deployed one of its most visible political missions of the quarter.²⁵⁸ Led by former Ethiopian President Mulatu Teshome, the IGAD Election Observation Mission engaged Djiboutian state institutions before the April 10 vote, trained regional short-term observers,²⁵⁹ and subsequently endorsed the election as orderly after President Ismail Omar Guelleh secured

²⁵⁴ United Nations News. “UN Relief Chief Condemns Escalating Attacks on Humanitarian Workers.” UN News, April 2026.

²⁵⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Over 1,000 Aid Workers Killed in Three Years, Often at Hands of Member States, UN Relief Chief Demands Accountability.” UNOCHA, April 2026.

²⁵⁶ Security Council Report. “EU-UN Cooperation.” Monthly Forecast, April 2026.

²⁵⁷ United Nations Security Council. “Letter Dated 1 April 2026 from the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council.” United Nations Official Documents, April 1, 2026.

²⁵⁸ Xinhua News Agency. “China Reaffirms Support for African Peace and Security Governance Cooperation.” Xinhua, April 14, 2026.

²⁵⁹ Intergovernmental Authority on Development. “IGAD Deploys Election Observation Mission for the 10 April 2026 Presidential Election in Djibouti.” IGAD, April 2026.

re-election.²⁶⁰ Although procedurally routine, the mission carried wider strategic importance. Djibouti remains the diplomatic and logistical hinge of the Horn, and IGAD's heavy visibility there was less about electoral norms than about signaling regional continuity at a time when Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia remain politically fragile.

Sudan and South Sudan continued to consume the organization's highest diplomatic bandwidth. Following Khartoum's formal reintegration into IGAD earlier in the year, Executive Secretary Workneh Gebeyehu spent much of April reviving consultations aimed at re-centering a Sudanese-led peace process.²⁶¹ IGAD repeatedly aligned itself with AU and Arab League efforts calling for a humanitarian ceasefire, civilian dialogue, and restraint among external sponsors of the war.²⁶² Yet IGAD's more urgent concern lay to the south in South Sudan, where CTSAMVM monitors continued investigating ceasefire violations in Upper Nile while the Secretariat increased pressure on Juba to adhere to the 2018 Revitalized Agreement ahead of the December 2026 elections.²⁶³ The recurring message from IGAD throughout April was unmistakable: if South Sudan's electoral roadmap collapses while Sudan remains in civil war, the entire eastern corridor from the Nile basin to the Red Sea could face renewed armed destabilization.²⁶⁴

A third persistent file was Somalia and the wider Horn diplomatic balance. IGAD used early April workshops in Mogadishu on refugee-host community social cohesion to advance one of its softer but increasingly strategic narratives that displacement management is no longer a humanitarian side issue but a core regional security concern.²⁶⁵ This logic was reinforced through IGAD's participation in the Africa Urban Forum in Kenya, where urban displacement and unmanaged migration²⁶⁶ were framed as future drivers of extremism, social fragmentation, and interstate friction. By mid-to-late April, this security lens widened further as Somalia's complaints over regional territorial integrity and renewed political tensions in the South West State forced IGAD to quietly resume its familiar role as de-escalatory interlocutor among Horn governments.

Despite these active crisis engagements, IGAD also attempted to preserve its integration credentials. Technical work continued on migration harmonization, free movement implementation, vocational training alignment, and the broader IGAD Strategy 2026–

²⁶⁰ Intergovernmental Authority on Development. "IGAD Election Observation Mission for the 10 April 2026 Presidential Election in the Republic of Djibouti: Preliminary Report." IGAD, April 2026.

²⁶¹ Intergovernmental Authority on Development. "Opening Speech by H.E. Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu at the IGAD Mediation Reflection Conference: Reimagining Mediation in a Fragmented World." IGAD, April 2026.

²⁶² Intergovernmental Authority on Development. "Quintet Statement on the Sudan Conference: Civilian Call for an End to the War and Advancement of Peace." IGAD, April 2026.

²⁶³ "Ceasefire Monitors Warn Implementation of 2018 Peace Deal Still Shaky." Sudans Post, April 2026.

²⁶⁴ Amani Africa. "IGAD Mediation Conference Warns Risk of Nations or Parts of Nations Becoming Objects of Acquisition as Peace Gets Commercialized." Amani Africa, April 2026.

²⁶⁵ Intergovernmental Authority on Development. "IGAD Organized a Workshop on Enhancing Social Cohesion for Refugees, IDPs and Host Communities." IGAD, April 2026.

²⁶⁶ Cities Alliance. "Cities Alliance Africa Urban Forum 2026." Cities Alliance, April 2026.

2030.²⁶⁷ These may appear bureaucratic beside Sudan or South Sudan, but they reveal an institution trying to escape its long-standing image as merely a conflict-response platform. The Secretariat increasingly frames climate resilience, labor mobility, refugee inclusion, and local governance capacity as security stabilizers rather than development accessories. That same philosophy informed April's workshops on social cohesion, health coordination, and regional planning.

Overall, April showed IGAD functioning less as a headline diplomatic broker and more as the Horn's crisis maintenance mechanism. It lacked the coercive power to impose settlements in Sudan, South Sudan, or Somalia, yet remained indispensable as the forum through which dialogue channels, observer missions, ceasefire verification, and technical regional integration continue to operate. In practical terms, IGAD spent April trying to ensure that the Horn's overlapping emergencies do not harden into a single systemic regional breakdown.

Global Powers: Structured Escalation and Strategic Divergence in Global Power Relations

April 2026 saw the Trump administration intensely pursue U.S. interests in the Middle East through military pressure and economic enforcement against Iran, while facing pushback from European allies, advancing limited diplomatic efforts via Pakistani mediation, and extending transactional tensions into NATO relations and the Ukraine conflict. The month began with ongoing U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iranian targets, including over 90 U.S. attacks on Kharg Island oil facilities and Israeli operations against infrastructure and commanders, prompting Iranian missile and drone responses against Gulf allies like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain.

On April 7, President Trump issued a stark ultimatum, threatening severe strikes on Iranian infrastructure if commercial shipping did not resume through the Strait of Hormuz.²⁶⁸ Later that day, he announced a two-week conditional cease-fire, explicitly linked to Iran immediately reopening the strait, stating that U.S. and Israeli forces had met their military objectives and that longer-term peace talks were progressing.²⁶⁹ Pakistani mediation played a central role, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif facilitating messages and a proposed extension.²⁷⁰ Iran submitted a 10-point plan but continued limited retaliatory actions, while Trump described the Iranian offer as a step forward yet insufficient.

Tensions with key allies surfaced quickly. By April 10, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer expressed frustration with the direction of U.S. policy amid the Iran war, seeking to

²⁶⁷ Intergovernmental Authority on Development. "IGAD Member States Validated the IGAD Revised TVET Strategy." IGAD, April 27, 2026.

²⁶⁸ Robert Greenall and Toby Mann, "Trump Issues Expletive-Laden Threat to Iran over Hormuz Strait Blockage," BBC, April 6, 2026

²⁶⁹ Andrew Roth, "US and Iran Agree to Provisional Ceasefire as Tehran Says It Will Reopen Strait of Hormuz," The Guardian, April 7, 2026

²⁷⁰ Elian Peltier, "How Pakistan Became Key Mediator Between U.S. and Iran," The New York Times, April 8, 2026

strengthen ties with other partners.²⁷¹ On April 13, Starmer explicitly stated that Britain would not join any U.S. military blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, preferring a diplomatic path to restore navigation despite rising oil prices caused by Iranian restrictions.²⁷² This refusal deepened Trump's irritation with London.

Mid-month diplomacy continued alongside enforcement. On April 14, Secretary of State Marco Rubio hosted rare direct talks in Washington between Israeli and Lebanese officials, focused on weakening Hezbollah.²⁷³ The sides agreed to pursue further negotiations and shared the goal of disarming the group, though no immediate cease-fire emerged and Israel maintained operations in Lebanon. Around April 15, Pakistani mediators, including army chief Syed Asim Munir, traveled to Tehran to sustain momentum on the expiring cease-fire.²⁷⁴ The U.S. had by then implemented a naval blockade of Iranian ports (starting around April 13), turning back dozens of vessels and, in one case, disabling and seizing the Iranian-flagged cargo ship *Touska* in the Gulf of Oman after it ignored warnings.

Enforcement actions intensified as the U.S. Navy turned back 27 ships in the early days of the blockade²⁷⁵ and later seized additional Iranian-linked tankers carrying oil (including the *M/T Majestic X* bound for China and another vessel), using Navy SEALs and Marines in international waters to disrupt sanctions evasion. Iran responded by seizing two commercial ships (*Epaminondas* and *MSC Francesca*) near the strait and threatening broader disruptions across the Persian Gulf and Red Sea.²⁷⁶ The U.S. also considered financial support via the Exchange Stabilization Fund for the UAE,²⁷⁷ a key ally hit by Iranian retaliation and regional economic fallout.

Talks in Pakistan advanced unevenly. Vice President JD Vance participated in earlier rounds in Islamabad, followed by further exchanges. On April 25, Trump called off a planned trip by envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, citing Iran's inadequate proposal and low-level representation.²⁷⁸ Iran's latest framework offered to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and end the war but sought to postpone nuclear issues and demanded an end to the U.S. blockade; Trump reviewed it on April 27 and expressed dissatisfaction, insisting on curbs to Iran's uranium enrichment and handover of its highly enriched stockpile as non-negotiable for any durable deal.²⁷⁹ He extended the cease-fire conditionally while maintaining the port blockade to

²⁷¹ Michael D. Shear, "'I'm Fed Up.' Frustrated With Trump, Starmer Embraces Other Allies," *The New York Times*, April 10, 2026

²⁷² "UK Will Not Back Blockade of Strait of Hormuz, PM Starmer Says," *Reuters*, April 13, 2026

²⁷³ Victoria Craw, Lior Soroka, Suzan Haidamous, and Adam Taylor, "Lebanese, Israeli Diplomats Hold Rare Face-to-Face Meeting in Washington," *The Washington Post*, April 14, 2026.

²⁷⁴ Elian Peltier, Eric Schmitt, Jenny Gross, and Thomas Fuller, "Pakistan Hosts High-Level Talks as U.S. Maintains Blockade on Iran," *The New York Times*, April 15, 2026

²⁷⁵ Lekshmy Pavithran, "US Forces Say 27 Vessels Redirected Amid Iran Blockade in Strait of Hormuz," *Gulf News*, April 20, 2026

²⁷⁶ Jonathan Saul et al., "Iran Seizes Two Container Ships Attempting to Leave Gulf," *Reuters*, April 22, 2026,

²⁷⁷ Andrew Ross Sorkin, "U.S. Considers Financial Support Package for UAE Amid Iran Conflict Fallout," *The New York Times*, April 21, 2026

²⁷⁸ "Trump Cancels Witkoff and Kushner's Trip to Pakistan for Iran Talks," *BBC News*, April 25, 2026

²⁷⁹ Tyler Pager and Julian E. Barnes, "Trump Is Dissatisfied With Iran's Plan to Reopen Strait of Hormuz," *The New York*

sustain leverage.

Transatlantic strains widened. Reports emerged on April 24 that the Pentagon was considering punitive measures against Britain and Spain for limited support on Iran—including potentially withdrawing backing for UK sovereignty over the Falklands or suspending Spain from NATO—which both governments firmly rejected.²⁸⁰ On April 28–29, King Charles III and Queen Camilla paid a state visit to Washington for America's 250th anniversary celebrations. Trump hosted a White House dinner and praised the enduring alliance, but used the occasion to reference ongoing “Middle East work” and nuclear concerns.²⁸¹ Charles subtly emphasized checks and balances, NATO, and Ukraine while the visit highlighted underlying UK public unease over U.S. policy and Trump’s unpopularity in Britain.

On April 29, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth defended the Iran campaign (dubbed Operation Epic Fury, costing \$25 billion with 14 U.S. deaths) in congressional testimony, clashing with Democrats over strategy and rules of engagement.²⁸² The same day, Trump lashed out at German Chancellor Friedrich Merz after Merz criticized the lack of U.S. strategy in Iran and noted slow Iranian negotiations. Trump accused Merz of effectively supporting Iranian nuclear ambitions and threatened to review and reduce the roughly 35,000 U.S. troops stationed in Germany, a key European logistics hub.²⁸³ This reflected broader frustration with European allies who offered minimal backing for the Iran operation.

In parallel, Trump and Vladimir Putin held their 12th phone call since Trump’s second term began. The leaders endorsed a brief cease-fire in Ukraine timed to Russia’s Victory Day on May 9 (following an earlier Easter pause that collapsed), while also discussing the Middle East.²⁸⁴ Putin supported extending the Iran cease-fire and offered input on Iran’s nuclear program. Trump expressed optimism for quicker Ukraine progress.

Throughout the month, the Iran conflict served as the connective thread. Military and naval pressure aimed at reopening the Strait of Hormuz and curbing Iran’s nuclear program created direct costs (higher energy prices, diverted U.S. resources) and tested alliances, prompting Trump’s transactional demands for burden-sharing and retaliatory signals toward less supportive partners like the UK and Germany. These strains, in turn, reinforced the administration’s push for European self-reliance on Ukraine and selective engagement elsewhere.

A key early-month development came around April 10 when Chinese President Xi Jinping hosted Cheng Li-wun, chairwoman of Taiwan’s main opposition Kuomintang (KMT) party,

Times, April 27, 2026

²⁸⁰ Alexandra Sharp, “U.S. Floats Suspending Spain From NATO for Refusing to Join Iran War,” *Foreign Policy*, April 24, 2026

²⁸¹ Michael D. Shear et al., “King Charles’s U.S. Visit: Trump Hosts Royal Meeting,” *The New York Times*, April 28, 2026

²⁸² Joseph Gedeon, “Pete Hegseth Denies Iran War Is a ‘Quagmire’ as Estimated US Cost So Far Hits \$25bn,” *The Guardian*, April 29, 2026

²⁸³ “Trump Scolds Germany’s Merz for Criticism of Iran War,” *Al Jazeera*, April 28, 2026.

²⁸⁴ Lilia Sebouai, “Trump Discussed Ukraine Ceasefire in ‘Very Good’ Call with Putin,” *The Telegraph*, April 29, 2026

in Beijing — the first such high-level meeting in a decade. Xi invoked the “threat” of Taiwan independence and emphasized cross-strait “reunification,” using the engagement to project Beijing’s preference for political dialogue with more China-friendly Taiwanese voices and to subtly pressure the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government.²⁸⁵ The visit was framed by Beijing as stabilizing relations but criticized by Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council as advancing a divisive agenda. It occurred against the backdrop of ongoing U.S. concerns about Chinese gray-zone tactics, including military patrols, airspace incursions, and hybrid activities around Taiwan.

European Countries: Alliance Stress and Strategic Divergence

On April 1, Trump publicly called NATO a “paper tiger,” threatened to reconsider or pull the U.S. out of the alliance after the Iran war, and told Europe it was “on its own” in securing the Strait of Hormuz. He explicitly linked continued U.S. military aid to Ukraine with European willingness to commit “significant combat forces” to Persian Gulf operations, framing it as a “security-for-security” deal.²⁸⁶ This ultimatum placed European capitals in a difficult position amid rising energy prices caused by Hormuz disruptions.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer bore much of Trump’s personal ire. Starmer repeatedly stated that Britain would not join offensive actions or the naval blockade, preferring diplomacy and de-escalation.²⁸⁷ He described himself as “fed up” with the pressure and insisted on acting in Britain’s national interest. Trump repeatedly dismissed Starmer as “not Winston Churchill” and mocked the UK’s naval capabilities.

On April 28, Merz sharply criticized the U.S., stating that America was being “humiliated” by Iran, lacked a convincing strategy, and that the war was becoming a “catastrophe.”²⁸⁸ Trump responded angrily, accusing Merz of not understanding the threat of a nuclear Iran and effectively siding with Tehran. On April 29, Trump announced on Truth Social that the U.S. was “studying and reviewing the possible reduction” of the nearly 35,000–40,000 American troops stationed in Germany, a key NATO logistics hub with a decision expected soon

At the collective level, Europe moved gradually from passive concern to partial coordination. By mid-April, discussions involving multiple European states and external partners explored maritime security mechanisms that could either complement or hedge against the U.S. blockade approach.²⁸⁹ This reflects an important structural shift: Europe was not simply opposing U.S. policy, but attempting to preserve strategic flexibility in case the crisis escalated further.

²⁸⁵ Amy Hawkins, “Xi Tells Taiwan Opposition Leader People on Both Sides of Strait Are Chinese in Rare Meeting,” *The Guardian*, April 10, 2026

²⁸⁶ Michael D. Shear, “Trump Warns Europe Over NATO Support as Iran Crisis Deepens,” *The New York Times*, April 1, 2026

²⁸⁷ Mason Boycott-Owen, “UK Won’t Support US on Trump’s Iran Blockade, Says Britain,” *Politico Europe*, April 29, 2026

²⁸⁸ Richard Connor, “Merz Says U.S. Has No Convincing Strategy and Is Being Humiliated by Iran,” *Deutsche Welle*, April 2026.

²⁸⁹ “Various Countries Call for De-escalation in Strait of Hormuz Crisis,” *Xinhua News Agency*, April 14, 2026,



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