



Weekly Geopolitical Report

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

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Horn Review: Weekly Report

Apr 27 – May 03, 2026

1. Ethiopia

Ethiopia's diplomatic engagement intensified on 27 April during an open session of the African Union Peace and Security Council in Addis Ababa, where officials underscored the urgency of strengthening African-led peace support operations. Discussions highlighted persistent financing gaps and institutional constraints while calling for predictable funding and enhanced coordination with global partners, reflecting growing concern over escalating security challenges across multiple regions of the continent.

Building directly on these deliberations, Ethiopia concluded its chairship of the Peace and Security Council with the 5th Joint Retreat of the African Peer Review Mechanism and the Council, held on 29–30 April 2026. The retreat emphasized integrating governance into conflict prevention through early warning and preventive diplomacy. The adoption of the Burayu Declaration and a joint roadmap reinforced commitments to align governance assessments with continental peace and security priorities.

Ethiopia successfully concluded its rotating chairship of the AU Peace and Security Council for April 2026, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighting the country's steady leadership and commitment to continental stability and unity. This milestone was presented as both a diplomatic achievement and a reflection of Africa's growing capacity to address its own peace and security challenges through coordinated institutional frameworks.

Following the conclusion of Ethiopia's tenure, Nigeria assumed the chairmanship of the AU Peace and Security Council for May 2026, marking a smooth and orderly transition. The handover reflected continuity within the Council's rotating leadership structure and underscored the importance of sustained momentum in advancing Africa's peace and security agenda across successive chairmanships.

Earlier in the week, Ethiopian officials reiterated the importance of regional cooperation in addressing interconnected security threats across the Horn of Africa. Emphasis was placed on collective security arrangements and sustained political dialogue among neighboring states. These engagements reflected Ethiopia's broader diplomatic approach of promoting coordinated regional responses to instability, particularly in areas affected by fragile governance and transnational security risks.

Complementing these security-focused efforts, on April 28, Ethiopia advanced its economic diplomacy agenda by highlighting ongoing macroeconomic reforms and investment opportunities. Officials pointed to infrastructure expansion, policy adjustments, and private sector engagement as central to sustaining growth amid global

economic uncertainty. Discussions with international partners reflected cautious optimism while acknowledging inflationary pressures and external vulnerabilities that require continued strategic management.

Reinforcing the connection between development and stability, in April, policymakers stressed that inclusive economic growth remains critical to long-term peace. Initiatives focusing on job creation, youth empowerment, and institutional strengthening were presented as essential tools for addressing root causes of conflict. This approach aligns with continental frameworks that link governance quality and economic opportunity to durable peace outcomes.

Taken together, developments throughout demonstrate Ethiopia's active role in shaping Africa's evolving peace and security architecture. By bridging diplomatic engagement, governance reform, and economic strategy, the country continues to position itself as a central actor within the African Union system, emphasizing preventive action, institutional coordination, and sustainable development as pillars of long-term continental stability.

2. Sudan

Sudan's war continues to deepen with escalating multi-front confrontations between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), alongside allied movements such as the SPLM-N. Fighting has intensified in North Kordofan, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan, while drone warfare and coordinated strikes have become increasingly central to both sides' strategies.

Recent drone strikes in Khartoum and El Obeid have killed civilians and targeted residential areas, reflecting a shift toward high-impact urban warfare. At the same time, SAF offensives across multiple states aim to degrade RSF logistics and territorial control, though RSF counterclaims of battlefield gains point to a persistent military stalemate.

The Nuba Mountains have emerged as a critical new theatre, where the RSF-SPLM-N alliance is leveraging rugged terrain as a strategic base. However, internal distrust and battlefield setbacks suggest that this alliance may remain tactically useful but structurally fragile.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate on a scale. Thousands of civilians have been newly displaced, particularly in North Kordofan and Darfur, adding over 12 million displaced nationwide. Reports indicate families are increasingly forced to flee due to famine conditions, while aid access remains severely constrained.

Sudan's healthcare system is nearing collapse. In cities like Dilling, up to 10 health facilities have been forced out of service due to sustained shelling, while disease outbreaks—including measles and dengue fever—are spreading rapidly amid weakened

infrastructure. Attacks on healthcare have surpassed 200 documented incidents, further compounding civilian vulnerability.

Education disruption is also deepening long-term risks, with displaced children struggling to access schooling, reinforcing concerns of a lost generation shaped by conflict and deprivation.

Human rights conditions remain severe. Armed groups continue to face accusations of targeting civilians, extortion, arbitrary detention, and violations of international humanitarian law. Reports of detainee ransom practices by RSF elements highlight the expansion of war economies and predatory governance structures.

Press freedom has sharply declined. Sudanese media organizations report over 680 violations against journalists, including killings, disappearances, and systematic intimidation. The increasing “militarization of media space” underscores how information itself has become a battleground, with implications for both domestic legitimacy and international perception.

Legal institutions are also under strain. Controversial rulings—including death sentences against legal professionals—raise concerns about due process, judicial independence, and politicization of the legal system.

Sudan’s political field is increasingly fragmented. Pro-army factions, particularly the Democratic Block, are attempting to consolidate support and expand their coalition base, presenting themselves as a vehicle for stability and national unity.

Simultaneously, the reactivation of bodies such as the Empowerment Removal Committee signals efforts to reshape the post-Bashir political and economic order, including targeting assets linked to Islamist networks. However, these moves risk deepening political polarization, especially amid the absence of a unified civilian front.

The coexistence of parallel governance structures, particularly RSF-controlled administrations in parts of Darfur, reflects a growing de facto territorial fragmentation of the state.

Sudan’s formal economy remains largely paralyzed. The industrial sector is operating at approximately 10% of capacity, with widespread destruction of factories and supply chain disruptions. Losses are estimated at over \$50 billion, underscoring the depth of economic collapse.

However, the gold sector continues to function as a critical economic lifeline, generating the majority of export revenues despite significant smuggling and informal activity. This reinforces a broader shift toward a war economy model, where extractive industries and illicit networks sustain conflict actors.

At the same time, limited initiatives—such as refugee return programs backed by state-linked entities—highlight attempts to project a narrative of stabilization, though conditions on the ground remain highly fragile.

The conflict is increasingly shaped by external actors and geopolitical competition. Reports of arms flows, mercenary recruitment, and financial networks underline how Sudan has become an arena for regional and international proxy dynamics, complicating prospects for resolution.

In response, the United States and international partners are intensifying diplomatic efforts to revive peace negotiations, with renewed calls for an immediate ceasefire and a comprehensive political settlement framework. Recent international conferences have mobilized financial pledges, but translating these into tangible outcomes remains uncertain.

Meanwhile, legal actions abroad—including arms trafficking cases involving Sudanese networks in the UAE—reflect growing international scrutiny of the war's transnational dimensions.

Overall, Sudan's trajectory points toward a prolonged, structurally entrenched conflict. The persistence of a military stalemate, combined with expanding frontlines, war economy dynamics, and external involvement, reduces incentives for compromise.

Without a significant shift either through coordinated international pressure or a recalibration of internal alliances, the conflict risks evolving into a long-term fragmented crisis, with enduring consequences for regional stability, particularly in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea corridor.

3. Egypt

Egypt's recent announcement of a significant gas discovery in the Nile Delta represents a calculated effort to bolster its standing as a regional energy hub. Beyond the immediate economic gains, this discovery serves Cairo's strategic imperative to decouple its energy security from volatile regional markets currently disrupted by the ongoing Iran-West conflict. By securing domestic reserves, Egypt seeks to insulate its fragile economy from further external inflationary pressures and resource scarcity.

This pursuit of energy independence directly informs the government's decision to terminate the early closing hours policy for commercial establishments, which was originally imposed to mitigate a severe energy crisis. Strategically, Cairo is attempting to project a sense of normalcy and economic resilience to both its restive citizens and skeptical foreign investors. This policy shift is less about an energy surplus and more about preventing the social unrest often sparked by austerity measures.

To further stabilize its external environment, Egyptian leadership has engaged with U.S. envoys to mediate complex negotiations between Washington and Tehran. Egypt's deeper interest lies in maintaining its status as an indispensable regional pivot, ensuring that it remains central to American security architecture in the Middle East. This diplomatic maneuvering is a calculated attempt to prevent a total regional collapse that would effectively bankrupt the Egyptian state and disrupt Suez Canal revenues.

Complementing these bilateral efforts, Egypt participated in a high-level joint statement with major Islamic powers, including Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, to address the escalating regional warfare. This multilateral approach serves Cairo's interest in diversifying its security dependencies beyond just the United States. By aligning with other regional heavyweights, Egypt is hedging its bets and ensuring it has a seat at the table in any post-conflict regional order or security pact.

This regional alignment is particularly evident in Cairo's deepening coordination with Saudi Arabia to address shared economic and security challenges. For Egypt, the strategic alliance with Riyadh acts as a financial lifeline that provides the necessary liquidity to survive current global shocks. In exchange, Egypt offers its military prestige and geographical leverage, creating a symbiotic relationship aimed at countering Iranian expansionism while asserting a unified, Arab-led plan for regional stabilization.

Expanding its influence further south, Egypt is aggressively brokering a thaw between the United States and Eritrea to strategically isolate Ethiopia. This is a cold-blooded maneuver designed to gain regional leverage in the existential dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. By establishing a security presence and diplomatic rapport on Ethiopia's northern border, Cairo is signaling that it is prepared to use unconventional diplomatic channels to safeguard its Nile water rights.

Egypt's strategic reach now extends into Central Asia, evidenced by the accreditation of a new ambassador to Turkmenistan to foster deeper bilateral cooperation. This move is part of Cairo's broader strategy to find new markets and diversify its geopolitical partnerships away from traditional power blocs. By engaging with energy-rich nations in Central Asia, Egypt aims to lessen its reliance on Western allies and secure alternative supply chains for essential commodities and industrial resources.

Finally, Egypt's continued diplomatic engagement with Damascus highlights its commitment to a state-centric regional order that prioritizes the preservation of central governments over revolutionary movements. Cairo views the rehabilitation of the Syrian state as essential for regional stability and for limiting the influence of both Turkey and Iran. This pragmatism reflects Egypt's long-standing policy of favoring established regimes to ensure its own national security and prevent the regional spread of Islamist ideologies.

4. Eritrea

A report published in *Expressen* in late April, following the visit of Maria Malmer Stenergard to Asmara, offers a rare on-the-ground account of Eritrea's current diplomatic posture. The piece includes interviews with Osman Saleh and Information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel, providing insight into how the Eritrean government is framing engagement with European states.

Osman Saleh indicated that the release of prisoners “will continue” and noted that a reciprocal visit to Stockholm is under consideration, suggesting an effort to sustain momentum following the Swedish foreign minister's trip. At the same time, the case of Dawit Isaak—detained since 2001—remains unresolved, with no indication of a shift despite longstanding international pressure.

Yemane Gebremeskel, in contrast, criticized Sweden's emphasis on Isaak's case, arguing it has come at the expense of broader bilateral relations, though he expressed a more positive tone regarding the recent diplomatic engagement.

Taken together, the episode reflects a wider pattern in which Asmara is incrementally expanding engagement with European actors, while maintaining firm positions on politically sensitive issues that have historically constrained those relationships.

On April 29, the Eritrean embassy in Washington put out a press release criticizing what it dubbed “mischaracterizations” after reports emerged that the United States is considering easing sanctions against Eritrea in an effort to improve relations. The criticism was directed at various strands of critical analysis that followed the news, particularly from U.S. policy circles questioning the rationale behind engagement.

The statement rejected these assessments as biased and politically motivated, arguing that decades of sanctions and isolation have failed to produce results and framing the shift toward engagement as both necessary and increasingly recognized within U.S. policy debates. It reiterated Eritrea's positions on sovereignty, non-interference, and self-reliant development, while dismissing concerns that improved ties could embolden destabilizing behavior and defending sanctions removal as justified.

A report by Agence France-Presse on April 29 highlights patterns that elements within the Tigray People's Liberation Front may be considering renewed engagement with Eritrea. According to an audio recording shared by federal sources, a senior TPLF figure is heard explaining to the possibility of trade with Eritrea and broader alignment against the federal government.

While the official in question did not deny the authenticity of the recording, he rejected its interpretation, maintaining that the TPLF remains committed to peace and stability.

The episode nevertheless points to the continued salience of Eritrea within Ethiopia's

internal dynamics.

On April 20–22, an Eritrean delegation led by Petros Tsegay, Eritrea’s ambassador to Russia, participated in the 16th Euro-Asia Summit held in Yekaterinburg, Russia. The summit, organized in collaboration with Russia’s Ministry of Education and Science, Ural State University of Economics, and the Yekaterinburg city administration, focused on encouraging youth and university engagement while promoting common understanding among students from different countries.

An article published on May 1 in *The Conversation* examines Eritrea’s education system as part of a broader discussion on how authoritarian regimes use education as a political tool.

Focusing on Eritrea, the piece notes that the state has remained under a single ruling party since independence in 1993 and argues that education operates within a tightly controlled political environment. It highlights concerns that curricula and institutional structures are shaped in ways that reinforce state ideology rather than independent critical engagement.

5. Djibouti

This week, Djibouti witnessed a combination of domestic labor reforms and regional institutional initiatives that underscored the government’s effort to consolidate its socio-economic base after the presidential election period. During the official International Workers’ Day celebrations, the Ministry of Labor announced a new initiative centered on the “Djiboutianization” of jobs within the port and logistics sectors in an effort to address persistently high local unemployment and reduce dependence on foreign labor in strategic industries.

In parallel, Djibouti hosted an important Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) meeting in Arta, where member states finalized a regional roadmap to standardize technical and vocational education and training, a move that will allow Djiboutian graduates to have their certifications recognized across the Horn of Africa and thereby facilitate regulated labor mobility and employment access beyond national borders.

Economically and diplomatically, the period was marked by continued expansion of Djibouti’s logistical relevance both in trade and in soft-power diplomacy. The Djibouti Ports & Free Zones Authority formally integrated new digital tracking systems for the Tuwiq 3 livestock carrier to streamline exports to Saudi Arabia during the peak Hajj season, reducing delays for local exporters and strengthening the efficiency of livestock shipments through Djiboutian ports. At the same time, the World Food Programme issued an internal warning from its Djibouti hub over a severe funding shortfall that could affect the humanitarian corridor Djibouti provides for aid shipments into Yemen and Ethiopia, raising concerns that regional relief flows may begin slowing from this month onward.

Diplomatic prestige was further enhanced when official channels confirmed Djibouti's selection as host of the 2028 Conference of Ministers of Education of the Francophonie (CONFEMEN), which the government framed as a major success for its growing strategy of educational diplomacy, while the launch of the first wave of approximately 140 Djiboutian pilgrims from Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport to Medina marked the beginning of a coordinated air bridge expected to transport more than 1,500 citizens for the Hajj pilgrimage.

On the strategic and security front, Djibouti continued to strengthen its role as a maritime and transit hub under increasingly sensitive regional conditions. International maritime agencies renewed the High-Risk Area designation for the waters surrounding Djibouti and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, prompting an internal review by the Djibouti Coast Guard aimed at reinforcing the protection of commercial vessels and maintaining confidence in territorial maritime security.

Simultaneously, the Djibouti-Ethiopia-South Sudan-Uganda (DESSU) Corridor Authority entered its first week of full administrative operations, with internal briefings concentrating on the implementation of One-Stop Border Posts to cut transit times for Djiboutian trucks moving toward landlocked neighboring states. Together, these developments reflected a state simultaneously trying to localize employment, deepen export efficiency, preserve its humanitarian gateway role, and fortify its strategic logistics position at a moment when both Red Sea security and Horn of Africa trade connectivity remained highly fluid.

6. South Sudan

South Sudan remains locked in a fragile and incomplete transition, with political uncertainty, humanitarian distress, and rising international concern reinforcing a trajectory of prolonged instability. Recent developments point to a system under strain, where elite-level maneuvering, weak institutional capacity, and external pressures are converging to stall progress toward a sustainable post-conflict order.

At the political level, President Salva Kiir has initiated another round of cabinet reshuffles, including the dismissal of key ministers such as those responsible for foreign affairs and trade. These changes reflect a continued pattern of centralized control and reactive governance rather than institutional consolidation. At the same time, repeated amendments to the electoral timeline and provisions of the 2018 peace agreement have deepened uncertainty around the transition. Parliamentary endorsement of these changes, alongside ongoing debates over constitutional arrangements, suggests that the political process is increasingly shaped by short-term calculations rather than a coherent roadmap toward elections. International actors, including senior United States officials, have warned that current leadership dynamics risk reversing fragile gains and pushing the country back toward instability.

Security conditions remain volatile despite the absence of full-scale civil war. Localized violence, particularly in Jonglei and Upper Nile, continues to displace civilians and expose the limits of the peace agreement's security arrangements. Armed groups retain fragmented command structures, and the unification of forces remains incomplete. The broader regional environment is compounding these risks. The ongoing war in neighboring Sudan is exerting increasing pressure along border areas, raising concerns about cross-border instability and the potential for conflict spillover. Refugee inflows and disruptions to border communities are further straining already fragile local dynamics, reinforcing the perception that South Sudan remains in a condition of "no war, no peace."

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate sharply. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, millions of people remain in urgent need of assistance, with food insecurity reaching critical levels. A combination of conflict, climate shocks, and global supply chain disruptions has pushed large segments of the population toward acute hunger and malnutrition. The healthcare system is effectively collapsed in many areas, with limited access to basic services, shortages of medical supplies, and overstretched humanitarian operations. These conditions are compounded by ongoing displacement, with both internally displaced persons and returning populations facing severe constraints in accessing food, shelter, and healthcare.

Governance and civic space continue to deteriorate. Media watchdogs report a worsening environment for press freedom, with journalists facing harassment, restrictions, and intimidation. This erosion of civic space undermines prospects for inclusive political dialogue and reduces transparency at a critical moment in the transition. Institutional weaknesses remain pronounced across the board, with limited rule of law, weak accountability mechanisms, and persistent concerns about corruption and administrative capacity. These dynamics contribute to a broader crisis of legitimacy, where state institutions struggle to command public trust.

Economic pressures are intensifying, further complicating the country's outlook. South Sudan's structural dependence on oil exports leaves it highly vulnerable to external shocks, while limited diversification constrains resilience. Recent disruptions along the border with Uganda, including a temporary blockade affecting trade flows, have highlighted the country's exposure to regional dynamics. Global supply chain disruptions are exacerbating shortages of essential goods, driving up prices and deepening humanitarian needs. Without significant reforms or stabilization, the government's ability to manage these pressures remains limited.

International engagement remains active but increasingly characterized by frustration. The United Nations Security Council has extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan for another year, reflecting the continued necessity of external security support and civilian protection. At the same time, international actors, including the United Kingdom, have called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and renewed

commitment to the peace agreement. Diplomatic messaging is becoming more direct, signaling growing concern over delays in implementing key provisions of the transition and the absence of meaningful progress on reforms.

Overall, South Sudan's trajectory reflects a pattern of managed instability rather than sustainable peace. The convergence of delayed political transition, persistent localized violence, deepening humanitarian crisis, and structural economic fragility suggests that the country is drifting without a clear resolution. Without tangible progress on security sector reform, credible electoral preparation, and inclusive governance, South Sudan risks prolonging its transitional limbo while becoming increasingly vulnerable to both internal fragmentation and regional shocks.

7. Somalia and Somaliland

Somalia

In coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia, U.S. Africa Command conducted an airstrike against Al-Shabaab militants approximately 50 kilometers northeast of Kismayo in southern Somalia. The operation was designed to degrade the group's capacity to plan and execute attacks threatening Somali and international interests. This action fits into a sustained pattern of intensified U.S. support for Somali security forces in the ongoing campaign against Al-Shabaab.

Reports also emerged around April 27 highlighting multiple ship hijackings off Somalia's coast over the preceding weekend including merchant vessels, a fuel tanker and cargo ships. This notable resurgence in piracy has been linked by diverted naval attention elsewhere particularly in the Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz. The UK Maritime Trade Operations and other monitoring bodies have raised threat levels accordingly. Further escalation occurred on May 2, when Somali pirates seized an oil tanker in the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Yemen marking an escalation in maritime insecurity. On the same day a cargo vessel carrying cement and flying the flag of St. Kitts and Nevis was hijacked off Somalia's Puntland region.

Somalia's electoral commission postponed Southwest State polls originally scheduled for April 28 for one person one vote local council and parliamentary elections to May 10, 2026. The decision was taken to ensure greater credibility and preparation time reflecting on going internal political and state-building processes. According to the National Electoral Commission's full schedule Southwest State will now hold local and parliamentary votes on May 10 followed by a speaker election on May 18 and the regional presidential vote on May 23. Other states including Hirshabelle and Galmudug are scheduled to follow later.

Following that Ousted Southwest Leader Abdiasis Laftagaren Claims Legitimacy, the ousted Southwest regional state leader removed from power last month in a federal

military operation has forcefully renewed his claim to office. On May 3 he declared that he remains the lawful regional president and is reportedly planning a comeback as federal forces tighten their grip on Baidoa.

On the Political Crisis front and Presidential Mandate Deadline, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud on May 2 invited leaders of the opposition National Future Council to fresh high-level talks scheduled for May 10 focusing on elections, state building, national unity and resolving the political impasse ahead of the May 15 constitutional mandate deadline. However, opposition figures have hardened their stance warning they will no longer recognize the president after May 15 without elections or a consensual solution. On April 28 Puntland President Saeed Abdullahi Deni issued a warning that Somalia's federal government will no longer be considered in existence after May 15. Adding to the sense of crisis Somalia's Minister of Planning, Mohamud Abdirahman Beene Beene warned on April 27 that Mogadishu could face a renewed wave of car bombings as the government opposition rift widens. Meanwhile clan leaders from across Somalia who gathered in Mogadishu for the coronation of the Murursade Ugas have stepped in to mediate the election standoff. Reports also indicate that President Mohamud is confronting a rapid unraveling of his political coalition as key allies abandon his camp.

Somalia's State Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, H.E. Ali Mohamed Omar, met with a delegation from the United Nations Transition Mission in Somalia led by Officer in Charge Mr. Raisedon Zenenga. Discussions focused on the UNTMIS transition process the political and security landscape, Somali-led institution building and aligning international support with national priorities for long-term stability.

On another note, Türkiye Approves 30 million grant agreement for budget support and institutional capacity building in Somalia. The funds are to be disbursed in monthly installments of up to \$2.5 million each following final approval by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The agreement was published in Türkiye's Official Gazette and reflects deepening bilateral ties between the two nations across multiple sectors including finance, defense, security and energy exemplified by on going Turkish offshore drilling efforts off the Somali coast.

Following that Somalia Strengthens Strategic Cooperation with UNDP, The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Hamza Haadow met with UN Assistant Secretary General and Director of the Crisis Bureau at UNDP, Ms. Shoko Noda. Discussions covered development priorities election preparedness, humanitarian response, internal displacement, drought resilience and alignment with national goals. UNDP commended Somalia's roles on the UN Security Council and in the East African Community.

Somaliland

Somaliland's House of Elders (Guurti) has approved a 27-month extension for the mandates of the House of Representatives and local councils. The decision passed with 71 of 72 votes extends terms from July 2026 to October 2028. The Guurti cited delays in the electoral process, security concerns, and technical challenges as justification for the extension. This move is expected to spark significant debate over democratization and political timelines in Somaliland.

Deteriorating Press Freedom and Journalist Arrests: At least three journalists have been arrested in Somaliland since the start of the year. Ahmed Zaki Ibrahim founder of Warrame Media was detained in Hargeisa on February 22 and remains in custody. Abdiqaadir Mohamed known as "Ishqi," was arrested in Borama on March 5 and released days later. Mohamed Saleban Ahmed ("Suute") was arrested in Erigabo on March 4 following a report on drought conditions and continues to face intimidation.

As the international community commemorated World Press Freedom Day, the Somali Journalists Syndicate expressed grave concern over the worsening safety and security of journalists across both Somalia and Somaliland. The ongoing pattern of violations, censorship, and intimidation reflects a shrinking space for press freedom and raises serious concerns about further abuses particularly in the lead up to elections. SJS Secretary General Abdalle Mumin stated that journalists are increasingly targeted for doing their job reporting the truth through arbitrary arrests, threats, and violence, adding that even women journalists were not spared from violent attacks by state security forces. He warned that this growing repression especially in the lead up to elections not only silences the media but also denies the public their fundamental right to information calling on authorities in both Somalia and Somaliland to end these violations and uphold their constitutional obligations to protect freedom of expression.

Credible reports and commentary have indicated that two countries may be preparing to formally recognize Somaliland in May 2026. One is reportedly Greece while the other is an unidentified African nation. This potential development builds on Israel's earlier recognition and subsequent ambassadorial appointments raising hopes for a diplomatic breakthrough for Somaliland. Discussions have highlighted growing international interest in Somaliland linked to Red Sea security, the Berbera port and the territory's geostrategic positioning.

Separate reports have suggested that the United Arab Emirates might follow Israel in formally recognizing Somaliland. This speculation is linked to Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi (Irro)'s visit to Dubai where he was reportedly received with elevated diplomatic protocol and hosted at a government facility. Discussions during the visit reportedly focused on trade, investment, development cooperation, logistics, and

regional stability. No official confirmation of recognition has been issued by either side and the status of these discussions remains unverified.

8. Yemen

On May 2, Yemen's coastguard reported that the oil tanker *M/T Eureka* was hijacked off Shabwa province and redirected toward the Gulf of Aden en route to Somalia. The vessel was seized by armed assailants, with the fate of the crew remaining unclear, and Yemeni authorities stated they are coordinating with international partners to attempt recovery.

The incident is the latest in a series of at least four maritime seizures in the region in recent weeks, with officials pointing to a broader uptick in piracy activity along Somali waters. According to the report, reduced naval presence and the diversion of maritime security resources away from the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden—linked to wider regional tensions around the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea shipping routes—have contributed to what some naval assessments describe as a “window of opportunity” for pirate groups.

On May 1, an Iranian parliamentarian, Ali Khezrian, stated that Yemen's Houthi forces have completed preparations to shut the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and could impose a transit fee of up to \$5 million on shipping passing through the corridor.

Khezrian claimed that vessels would either bypass the strait at significant additional cost or pay for passage, framing the move as part of broader efforts to assert control over a key maritime chokepoint linking the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The remarks come amid continued regional maritime tensions linked to the wider Iran–US confrontation, with the Bab el-Mandeb and adjacent sea lanes increasingly positioned as sites of economic and strategic leverage rather than purely military contestation.

On April 27, reporting by Middle East Eye cited unnamed US, Saudi, and Yemeni sources as saying that the UAE has been lobbying Washington to designate Yemen's Islah party as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity.

The report notes that the push, ongoing for several months, reflects Abu Dhabi's broader effort to limit Islah's political role in Yemen, and could further strain differences with Saudi Arabia, which maintains ties with elements of the group within Yemen's political framework.

A report published on May 3 by Iranian media cited Israeli Channel 12 as stating that a senior official in Somaliland has expressed readiness to expand cooperation with Israel, including in the security domain, in the event of disruptions to maritime traffic in the Bab al-Mandeb Strait.

According to the report, the official also indicated that Somaliland's existing partnerships with the US and the UAE could be extended to include Israel, framing the development in

the context of evolving regional alignments around Red Sea security and maritime access routes.

9. Kenya

Kenya had a packed week from April 27 to May 3, 2026. The government used major meetings in Nairobi to present the country as a regional centre for technology, health, trade, and investment. At the same time, floods, wage pressure, teacher protests, tax proposals, and the Gachagua case kept domestic politics tense.

The Connected Africa Summit set the tone early in the week. The summit ran from April 27 to April 30 at the Edge Convention Centre in Nairobi. It brought together government officials, investors, technology firms, and policy experts to discuss Africa's digital future. The agenda covered infrastructure, regulation, skills, innovation, cyber security, and digital trade. The launch of the Connected Africa Secretariat, chaired by Kenya, gave Nairobi a more formal role in continental digital coordination after the summit ended.

Health diplomacy also took place in Nairobi. From April 27 to April 29, the city hosted the World Health Summit Regional Meeting at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. The meeting focused on Africa's health systems, with discussions on chronic disease, infectious disease, health financing, climate and health, digital health, and universal health coverage.

Trade remained active. Kenya and India held the 10th India Kenya Joint Trade Committee meeting in Nairobi on April 27 and 28. The two countries reviewed trade and investment ties, with bilateral trade reaching USD 4.31 billion in the financial year 2025 to 2026. That was a 24.91 percent rise from the previous year. The talks focused on market access and cooperation in areas such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, engineering goods, electronics, manufacturing, and services.

Kenya also strengthened engagement with Japan. On May 3, officials from both countries discussed deeper cooperation in trade, investment, development, infrastructure, agriculture, health, ICT, education, climate action, and maritime security. Kenyan officials also raised the need for better access for Kenyan exports into the Japanese market.

Mining added another economic theme to the week. Kenya hosted the Mining Investment Conference and Exhibition in Nairobi on April 28 and 29. The event was designed to attract investors, showcase Kenya's mineral potential, and bring together government, industry, development partners, and mining communities. President William Ruto used the conference to argue for local processing and value addition instead of exporting raw minerals for others to process abroad.

The week also brought serious hardship from heavy rains. Floods and landslides killed 18 people over the week, according to police reports cited by AP. More than 54,000

households were affected across the country, including about 6,000 in Nairobi. Schools, hospitals, roads, and homes were damaged or disrupted, while residents near the Tana and Athi rivers were warned to move to higher ground as water levels rose.

Political tension continued around former Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua. He returned to court to challenge the impeachment process that removed him from office in 2024. His case goes beyond one political figure. It raises questions about procedure, constitutional safeguards, fair hearing standards, and the balance of power between Parliament and the executive.

Tax policy entered the public debate as well. The Finance Bill 2026 proposed moving the annual tax filing deadline from June 30 to April 30, starting in 2027 if approved. It also proposed stronger powers for the Kenya Revenue Authority to examine transactions that appear designed mainly to reduce tax liability. The debate matters because Kenya needs more revenue, but tax policy remains politically sensitive after earlier public anger over finance bills.

The week showed the two sides of Kenya's current position. Abroad, Nairobi worked to build influence through digital policy, health diplomacy, trade, mining, and investment. At home, the government faced pressure over floods, wages, schools, taxes, and political accountability. Kenya is trying to expand its regional role while managing public frustration inside the country.

10. The Gulf Countries

Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia effectively transitioned into a proactive regional stabilizer this week, balancing high-stakes mediation in the Levant with strategic de-escalation across the Gulf. A high-level mission to Beirut led by Prince Yazid bin Farhan delivered firm messages to Lebanon's leadership, asserting that the authority of the Lebanese Prime Minister is a red line and insisting that post-conflict reconstruction must remain strictly within the framework of the Arab Peace Initiative. Riyadh further demanded that the Lebanese Armed Forces re-establish a total monopoly over arms. Simultaneously, Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan maintained a sophisticated backchannel network, holding pivotal discussions with his Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araghchi, and the foreign ministers of Bahrain and Qatar. These efforts focused on reducing friction and exploring long-term peace-building frameworks amid ongoing Iran-US hostilities. As reports circulated regarding a potential "frozen conflict" from Qatar, Riyadh maintained a constructive silence, focusing on immediate off-ramps rather than worst-case projections. By the week's end, the Kingdom publicly reiterated its support for US diplomatic initiatives, including the White House review of a new Iranian proposal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, while Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman engaged in behind-the-

scenes contact with multiple global leaders to prevent a direct conflagration on the Gulf's shores

Saudi Arabia has abandoned its previous reluctance for a forceful activist posture in Northeast Africa, reshaping regional alignments through aggressive trade and security dealmaking. In Nairobi, a Saudi trade delegation secured a free zone for exports, a deal for Kenyan meat imports, and an upcoming 120-company "Kenyan Week" in the Kingdom, while exploring investment in the LAPSSET corridor's Lamu Port. This economic push coincides with a deepening rivalry with the UAE over Red Sea influence. While Riyadh prioritized Somalia's territorial integrity by avoiding Somaliland, reports emerged of a significant military cooperation agreement with the Mogadishu government. Additionally, "listening" diplomacy in Addis Ababa including a working dinner with the AU Peace and Security Council addressed the Sudan and Somalia crises. Collectively, these moves signal Riyadh's intent to consolidate its status as a dominant "Middle Power" projecting influence across both the Arab world and Africa.

United Arab Emirates

The UAE shifted to a "war footing" this week, ending its containment policy toward Tehran. Presidential Adviser Dr. Anwar Gargash called recent Iranian hostilities a "decisive turning point," necessitating a major reassessment and issuing a rare critique of the GCC and Arab League for responses that fell "far short" of the threat of a jab at Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This hawkish stance was backed by joint naval exercises with the U.S. and the high-readiness activation of F-16 squadrons. Financial pressure followed, as Abu Dhabi shocked Islamabad by demanding rapid repayment of \$3.5 billion in loans, penalizing Pakistan's neutral mediation. While Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed discussed "collective action" with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, an envoy sent to Muscat warned Iranian back-channels that further provocations would face a proportionate response.

In the Horn of Africa, the UAE intensified its multi-layered engagement, balancing humanitarian aid with high-stakes "operational diplomacy" that challenges traditional regional borders. Most notably, the reception of Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi Irro in Dubai under "elevated protocol" triggered reports that Abu Dhabi may follow Israel in formally recognizing the Republic of Somaliland. While officially framed as cooperation in trade and logistics centered on the \$442 million DP World investment in the Port of Berbera, analysts view this as a significant shift in Red Sea geopolitics. Simultaneously, the UAE's influence was felt through its sustained support for RSF Commander General "Hemeti" Dagalo, whose recent diplomatic tour of Uganda and Ethiopia underscores Abu Dhabi's role in shaping the Sudanese conflict's external dynamics. The week concluded with a humanitarian gesture as 4,000 tonnes of aid were delivered to Berbera, reinforcing the UAE's long-standing partnership with

Ethiopia and its broader ambition to serve as the primary economic and security anchor for the Horn's maritime corridors.

Qatar

Qatar executed a sophisticated balancing act this week, serving as a vital bridge between Tehran and the West while prioritizing global energy security. Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani used high-level contact with Iran's Abbas Araghchi to advocate for a "unified security approach" targeting the crisis's root causes. While Doha signaled Western alignment by condemning Iranian attacks at the NATO Council, it strategically warned against a "frozen conflict" to build momentum for the White House's review of Tehran's proposal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. The posture turned assertive as reports emerged that 48 vessels were redirected in the Gulf over 20 days. Asserting that freedom of navigation is "non-negotiable," the Prime Minister warned that any restriction would destabilize global supply chains, a position hardened by "shocking" Iranian strikes on Qatari energy infrastructure since February.

Qatar's Horn of Africa engagement remained dormant this week as resources shifted toward the Gulf's maritime and nuclear standoff. While no new bilateral meetings occurred, Doha's influence is sustained by the January 2026 Somalia defense pact and ongoing Ethiopian investment dialogues. Despite the earlier withdrawal of 450 peacekeepers from the Djibouti-Eritrea border, its mediation infrastructure remains "quiet but available." This strategic pause reflects a consolidation of interests as Doha balances its traditional Somali security role against urgent regional competition with Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

11. Africa and The Sahel Region

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Diplomatic engagement proceeded even as the security situation in the east remained fragile. The fifth meeting of the Joint Oversight Committee for the DRC-Rwanda Peace Agreement was held in Washington, D.C., with representatives from the two countries joined by officials from the United States, Qatar, Togo, and the African Union Commission. The committee reviewed progress since the March 17–18 meetings, parties presented updates on their de-escalation efforts, and strong support was expressed for the ongoing Doha negotiations between the DRC and the AFC/M23 rebels. All sides confirmed a "shared commitment to maintaining momentum in the peace process".

On the ground, however, the security picture darkened dramatically. The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution on Friday demanding that M23 rebels immediately cease hostilities and withdraw from seized territories, as thousands of Rwandan-backed fighters continue to advance in the mineral-rich east with scant resistance from the national army. In a major enforcement move, the United States on April 30 sanctioned

former President Joseph Kabila for allegedly giving material support to M23 and its political wing, the Congo River Alliance (AFC), accusing him of “sowing instability” and providing backing for armed conflict. Compounding these tensions, a planned prisoner exchange between the government and the AFC/M23 had expired without implementation after the April 28 deadline.

Mali

Mali was rocked by the most serious insurgent offensive since 2012, shaking the military government and role of Russian military support. On April 25, a jihadist group (JNIM) and Tuareg separatists from the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) launched simultaneous, coordinated attacks across the country, killing Defense Minister Sadio Camara in a suicide truck bombing on his residence in the garrison town of Kati, striking Bamako’s international airport, and capturing the strategic northern city of Kidal after driving out Russian Africa Corps mercenaries. Junta leader Assimi Goïta, who had not appeared publicly since the start of the assault, made his first appearance to meet with the Russian ambassador, vowing that military operations would continue until all armed groups are “completely neutralized”.

The fallout has been swift and multi-dimensional. An investigation was opened by the Bamako Military Tribunal into the attacks, with reports that a military probe is examining links between soldiers, political figures, and the insurgents. The unprecedented collaboration between Islamist militants and Tuareg rebels has raised stark warnings from analysts and international monitors. The International Crisis Group flagged the risk that a collapse in diplomacy could swiftly reignite open hostilities, while the UN Secretary-General called for “coordinated international support to address the evolving threat of violent extremism and terrorism in the Sahel”.

Burkina Faso

Security in Burkina Faso was directly challenged by a major coordinated assault. A suicide car bombing targeted the military headquarters in Ouagadougou, an attack that government and security sources said killed at least 28 people at the military HQ alone; eight members of the security forces were killed in the twin blasts and gunfire that also struck the French embassy, while 80 were wounded. Authorities said the blast may have been aimed at a meeting of the G5 Sahel regional counterterrorism force that was being held at the headquarters. The attacks, for which no immediate claim of responsibility was received but which officials said bore the hallmarks of terrorism, underscored the persistent threat from jihadist insurgents in the country.

Diplomatic tensions with France continued to intensify. The military government expelled three French diplomats, accusing them of subversive activities, a charge Paris denied, marking yet another low point in relations since Captain Ibrahim Traoré seized power and

intensified a pivot toward Russia. Amid this friction, the military government has deepened security partnerships elsewhere, officially designating Togo as a “brother country” to enhance intelligence-sharing, air operations, and field-level military coordination. On the political front, Traoré drew international attention by bluntly rejecting democracy in a state television interview, saying it “kills” and calling on citizens to abandon Western democratic models.

Niger

Niger’s military rulers demonstrated a dual-track approach of defiance and cautious diplomacy. The military government announced a general mobilization to prepare for what a senior military official described as a war with France, accusing France of backing terrorist groups and alleging French involvement in a January attack on Niamey Airport, claims French military officials rejected as “information warfare”. The mobilization decree, adopted earlier but publicly emphasized at a rally, reflected the regime’s ongoing narrative of foreign destabilization and its push for full sovereign control over security policy.

At the same time, Niger opened a narrow window for regional diplomatic engagement. In a meeting with a delegation of senior Nigerian Islamic scholars dispatched with ECOWAS Chairman Bola Tinubu’s approval, leader General Abdourahamane Tchiani said Niger’s “doors were open to explore diplomacy and peace in resolving the matter” and stressed that Niger and Nigeria were not simply neighbors but “brothers and sisters who should resolve issues amicably”. While ECOWAS has kept its standby force option on the table, the bloc is currently pursuing further negotiations. Concurrently, the United States has begun the withdrawal of its 1,000 troops from Niger, with a mandated deadline of September 15, as Niger’s prime minister publicly blamed Washington’s “threats” and inaction against terrorists for the rupture of military ties.

Chad

The week was marked by a surge in deadly communal violence over dwindling resources. Clashes between rival groups in the eastern Wadi Fira province near the Sudanese border left at least 42 people dead. following a confrontation at a water point that spiraled into a cycle of reprisals. The deputy prime minister confirmed the situation had been contained by the military and announced the launch of a customary mediation process alongside judicial proceedings. Eastern Chad continues to suffer from immense pressure on security and basic services as it hosts hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the war in Sudan, a crisis that has prompted the government to close its border to limit spillover violence.

On the diplomatic front, Chad signaled a major recalibration of its international alliances. President Mahamat Idriss Déby canceled the country’s military cooperation agreement with France, a move that struck a major blow to France’s remaining military footprint in

the region. At the same time, Chad deepened ties with Algeria, bilateral agreements aimed at boosting cooperation on security, border control, and counterterrorism, while both nations pledged to give their relations new momentum. In a separate large-scale international deployment, Chad is sending 1,500 troops to Haiti as part of the UN-mandated, Kenyan-led security mission to combat gang violence, a 12-month assignment beginning this month.

Equatorial Guinea

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo's government engaged in active international diplomacy, with significant agreements concluded this week. Obiang met with Nigerian President Bola Tinubu in Malabo on Wednesday evening, where the two leaders signed a major bilateral agreement on the Gulf of Guinea Pipeline Project, a landmark deal that both sides hailed as an affirmation of partnership for mutual development and a contribution to regional energy stability. President Tinubu emphasized that peace, stability, and democratic governance were essential to Africa's progress during the talks.

Equatorial Guinea also participated in the large-scale maritime security exercise Obangame Express 2026, hosted by Cameroon and involving 30 nations, which ran from April 13 to May 1 and was announced on April 27. The exercise focused on joint maritime law enforcement, VBSS operations, and interoperability between U.S., African, and multinational forces, with the U.S. Embassy in Dakar emphasizing that African maritime security is a "shared interest" requiring combined effort. Against this backdrop, diplomacy with the Vatican also remained active, as official media highlighted Pope Leo XIV's regional tour, with analysts noting that the papal visit could offer a neutral platform to advance dialogue on governance and human rights.

12. North Africa

Algeria

Algeria's latest message on Mali was less about taking sides than about shaping the path out of a fast-moving crisis. In remarks reported by SANA and Algeria's official APS, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said Algiers is ready to help de-escalate the situation in Mali, but only if that support is requested and only in a way that respects Mali's sovereignty. He repeated Algeria's long-standing rejection of foreign interference and argued that military solutions will not end the crisis, saying dialogue with the Malian people is the more credible route.

The timing matters: the appeal came as Mali was still reeling from coordinated insurgent attacks that killed the defense minister and triggered a tense security response from the junta. It is also reported that Assimi Goïta later vowed to neutralize those responsible, underscoring how fragile the situation remained when Tebboune spoke. Taken together,

Algeria's position presents it as a regional stabilizer: willing to assist, but insisting that political dialogue, not outside intervention or force, is the only sustainable way to restore order in Mali.

Libya

Libya's regional cooperation agenda moved forward this week with a Tripoli agreement between Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria on shared groundwater. The three countries created a consultation mechanism for the northern Sahara aquifer, adopted internal rules, set annual contributions, and gave Algeria the current chairmanship, signaling a more coordinated response to water stress across the Maghreb.

That resource diplomacy was echoed in Washington, where a Tripoli delegation met US Department of Energy officials to discuss Libya's oil and gas sector, higher production efficiency, gas expansion, and the Trans-Saharan Gas Line project. The talks framed energy cooperation as both an economic lever and a broader regional integration effort.

Security cooperation also remained visible, with Libya's eastern and western forces taking part together in Turkey's EFES-2026 exercise for the first time. Turkish officials said 331 personnel from the east and 177 from the west joined the drill, alongside the Libyan naval attack boat LNS Shafak. The joint participation was presented as a modest but meaningful step toward a unified military framework.

Against that backdrop, UNSMIL's World Press Freedom Day message underscored the political conditions needed for lasting stability. The mission urged all Libyan parties to protect free expression, keep journalists and civil society safe from intimidation, arrest, and reprisals, and avoid using cybercrime or terrorism laws to suppress legitimate speech. Its warning links civic space directly to credibility and trust.

13. Middle East

Iran-Israel conflict

The week began with diplomacy still in motion. On April 27, Trump discussed Iran's latest proposal with national security aides, but Tehran wanted the nuclear file postponed until the war and shipping disputes were resolved, which Washington rejected. That set the tone for a week in which talks survived, but only barely.

The battlefield then pressed the issue. Israeli strikes hit eastern Lebanon for the first time since the U.S.-brokered ceasefire, widening the campaign against Hezbollah despite lower overall attack levels. The Bekaa Valley strikes showed the truce had reduced, but not ended, cross-border fighting, and that Lebanon remained a live front in the wider war.

At sea, pressure rose in tandem. Six tankers carrying Iranian oil had been forced back by the U.S. blockade, while only a handful of vessels were crossing the Strait of Hormuz.

With traffic reduced to a trickle and export routes disrupted, the maritime standoff became the conflict's main economic choke point.

U.S. intelligence was already looking beyond the battlefield. Agencies were studying how Iran would react if Trump declared unilateral victory, including whether a drawdown would be read in Tehran as a win or as a bluff. The question mattered because any quick exit might ease domestic pressure on Trump but leave a stronger Iran behind.

Regional anxiety surfaced next in Saudi Arabia. Gulf Cooperation Council leaders met in Jeddah under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman; the agenda was Iranian attacks on GCC states and damage to energy and civilian infrastructure. The summit showed the Gulf states were treating the war less as a distant contest and more as a direct threat to their own security.

Tehran answered with defiance rather than concession. Iran's defense ministry spokesman said Washington was no longer in a position to dictate policy to independent nations and should abandon its illegal demands. The message paired diplomatic resistance with an effort to frame Iran as standing up to pressure, not seeking relief.

Those statements quickly fed into markets. Brent crude hit \$126.41 a barrel, the highest since March 2022, before retreating, as traders priced in a prolonged Middle East supply shock. The spike underlined how the war's consequences now extended far beyond the region, with inflation and growth risks spreading through the global economy.

Iran then reinforced the same message at sea. Its navy chief said a new weapon would soon be unveiled and insisted the country could still hurt adversaries in the Gulf. Even without a detailed technical claim, the signal was clear: Tehran wanted Washington and its allies to assume that naval deterrence remained intact despite U.S. pressure.

The blockade itself also continued to bite. the U.S. naval cordon had shrunk Iranian exports, filled tankers with unsold crude, and pushed storage sites toward capacity. It also noted that the closure of Hormuz was curtailing exports from other Gulf producers, showing that the blockade had become a regional disruption, not just an Iranian problem.

Iran responded by warning of escalation if the pressure continued. Tehran would meet any renewed U.S. attack with long and painful strikes on U.S. positions and that the strait would stay closed while the blockade persisted. The warning complicated Washington's hope of building a coalition to reopen Hormuz and exposed how narrow the space for compromise had become.

Still, analysts suggested Iran was less brittle than it looked. the economy faced long-term damage, but also had enough internal supply, neighborly trade, and financial buffers to endure the standoff for now. That resilience matters politically: the longer Tehran can absorb the pain, the less leverage Washington gains from economic coercion alone.

On May 1, Trump tried to turn stalemate into closure. He declared the ceasefire had terminated hostilities and told Congress the 60-day war-powers clock should not force him to seek authorization. The move let him claim the conflict was over for legal purposes, even as lawmakers argued the ceasefire was not the same as peace.

The same day, Trump rejected Iran's latest diplomatic opening. Tehran had sent a new proposal through Pakistani mediators, but Trump swiftly turned it down, while Al Jazeera reported the plan would postpone the nuclear issue and focus first on ending the war and reopening Hormuz. That mismatch showed why negotiations were still stalled.

By May 2, the White House was still keeping military pressure alive. Reuters quoted Trump saying there was a possibility the United States could restart strikes on Iran, a reminder that terminated in Washington did not mean permanently settled. The comment helped sustain deterrence, but it also kept oil markets and regional capitals on edge.

analysts warned that the deadlock could leave Trump politically worse off than before the war. They noted that Iran retained leverage through Hormuz, while the president faced rising prices, an unpopular conflict, and no clear exit. In that sense, the standoff was no longer just a foreign-policy test; it had become a domestic political liability.

Diplomacy, however, did not stop completely. On May 3, Iran had received Washington's response to its 14-point proposal via Pakistan and was reviewing it. The exchange kept a narrow channel open, but the gap remained wide: Tehran wanted sanctions relief and an end to the blockade, while Washington still demanded tougher terms.

Taken together, the week ended with the same pattern that defined its start: pressure on the ground, pressure at sea, and pressure in negotiations. Lebanon, Hormuz, oil markets, and Washington's war-powers debate were all feeding the same strategic standoff, which is described as a frozen conflict that could last unless one side accepted a compromise.

Turkey

In Turkey, the clearest economic-political signal of the week was Ankara's new tax incentive package, which cuts taxes sharply for export-oriented services and manufacturing. The government framed it as a competitiveness play, but the timing mattered: officials also tied it to a tougher regional environment, hoping to keep foreign capital moving into Istanbul despite war risk and higher inflation.

That same package also showed how Turkey is trying to turn geopolitics into an investment pitch. The Istanbul Financial Center is being positioned as a low-tax hub for transit trade, while officials said the measures were designed before the latest regional shock. The subtext is that Ankara wants to attract companies searching for safer logistics routes and more predictable operating conditions.

Turkey also used the week to underline a cautious but personal channel with Washington. On April 27, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan phoned Donald Trump after the White House dinner shooting and offered support, calling it an attack on democracy and press freedom. The gesture was small in form but important politically, because it reinforced the still-useful Erdogan-Trump line at a moment of broader regional strain.

The biggest domestic-security story remained Turkey's Kurdish peace track. On April 28, the pro-Kurdish DEM Party accused the government of moving too slowly and warned that hesitation could waste a rare opening created by the PKK's disarmament pledge. That criticism mattered because it showed the process was no longer just a state project; it had become a test of whether Ankara can convert armed de-escalation into credible political reform.

A day later, Erdogan pushed back and said the process was moving in a "positive atmosphere." He argued that Turkey had reached a more sensitive phase after a parliamentary commission approved a roadmap for legal reforms, and said the ruling bloc wanted broader political support. His message was that the state will proceed, but only on its own pace and after verifying disarmament.

The PKK side answered on April 30 that the talks were effectively frozen. A senior commander said Ankara had not delivered the reforms the movement expected after declaring a ceasefire and ending its armed struggle. That report sharpened the picture: the state says the process is advancing, while militants say it is stalled. Both sides are now fighting over credibility as much as substance.

The week also showed the economic cost of the Iran war on Turkey. On April 30 that tourism operators were already seeing weaker bookings, lower pricing, and a difficult second quarter as travelers hesitated. Because tourism is a major foreign-exchange earner, the effect is not just commercial; it feeds directly into Turkey's external balance and broader sense of national vulnerability.

That tourism story also captured a wider geopolitical pattern: Turkey is increasingly trying to insulate its economy from regional shocks. Hotel owners and industry figures said they were discounting heavily to keep business moving, while officials worried that the annual revenue target could be missed. In other words, the Iran conflict was not only a security issue; it was already shaping Turkey's domestic economic planning.

Another important Turkish thread was the government's effort to keep regional diplomacy alive even while managing domestic tensions. The reporting on Erdogan's peace push made clear that the ruling coalition wants to present itself as the force that can contain Kurdish violence, keep the state unified, and avoid a return to the insurgency cycles that have repeatedly drawn in neighboring Iraq and Syria.

The week's reporting also hinted at a more pragmatic Turkish foreign-policy posture. Erdogan's call to Trump, the investment push, and the emphasis on disciplined sequencing in the Kurdish peace process all pointed to a leadership trying to project control. The message was that Turkey wants room to maneuver with Washington, domestic Kurdish actors, and regional markets without appearing dependent on any one side.

At the same time, the Kurdish file showed how fragile that balancing act remains. DEM's complaint was not just about timing; it was about trust, and the absence of visible legislative follow-through. That makes the peace process politically useful for Erdogan, but also risky: a stalled initiative could harden mistrust among Kurdish voters and raise security pressure again in Turkey's southeast.

The broader regional context made the week even more sensitive. Turkey was trying to preserve a state image of order while the Middle East remained unstable, and Reuters' coverage repeatedly placed Ankara's domestic choices beside the Iran war and the movement of trade and money across the region. That made Turkey's internal security debate feel inseparable from its external diplomatic posture.

One more consequence of the peace debate was political: Erdogan's insistence that the process is moving forward "as it should" was aimed not only at Kurdish critics but also at the wider governing coalition. The parliamentary commission report became a marker of state seriousness, and the week's coverage suggested that Ankara is trying to keep the process under executive control rather than letting it drift into open-ended bargaining.

Taken together, the Turkish week was about one central question: can Ankara keep domestic Kurdish politics, economic resilience, and regional diplomacy moving in the same direction? The reporting suggested a government trying to project confidence while quietly defending itself against slow peace progress, war-driven economic strain, and the possibility that regional shocks will spill back across Turkey's borders.

Syria

Across the border in Syria, the strongest theme was repositioning. Syria is selling itself as a neutral safe corridor while regional conflict disrupts the area, reopening crossings with Iraq and pushing trade routes through its territory toward Europe. That is a major geopolitical shift: Damascus is trying to convert wartime calm into diplomatic relevance and transit value.

That repositioning is not just symbolic. Syria's interim government under Ahmad al-Sharaa is presenting itself as non-aligned while regional powers scramble for safer overland routes. In practical terms, Damascus is trying to become useful to neighbors and Europeans again by turning geography into leverage, even though the country remains economically fragile.

The hard-power side of that picture is Syria's continued dependence on Russian oil despite its political pivot toward the West. Russian shipments reportedly rose 75 percent to about 60,000 barrels per day, making Moscow Syria's main crude supplier. That dependence shows how limited Damascus's options remain, even after formal sanctions relief and diplomatic opening.

The same energy picture underscores the scale of Syria's weakness. Domestic output is far below demand, and the country's global financial isolation still limits diversification. So even as the government courts new partners, it remains tied to sanctioned or high-risk supply chains. That makes energy policy a geopolitical vulnerability, not just an economic one.

Security pressures were visible in the arrest of a missing German journalist. Syrian authorities confirmed they were holding Eva Maria Michelmann and said legal proceedings had begun, while rights groups demanded her release. The case matters because it shows the new Syrian state still treating information control as a security issue, even as it seeks legitimacy abroad.

The journalist case also exposed the transitional government's lack of transparency. The pair had been detained during the takeover of Raqqa, and the German Foreign Office had been in contact but offered little public detail. That combination of secrecy, law-enforcement language, and diplomatic sensitivity suggests that Syria's new rulers are still tightening control over politically sensitive narratives.

Another security flashpoint came with the killing of a Shiite cleric in a grenade attack near Damascus, close to the Sayyida Zeinab shrine. The shrine has long been a sectarian pressure point, and the attack prompted an investigation and a security surge. Even in a relatively calmer Syria, the regime's ability to protect symbolic sites remains under strain.

The Sayyida Zeinab attack matters beyond the immediate victim because it taps into the wider regional fear of extremist violence and sectarian retaliation. The shrine had already been a magnet for conflict during the civil war, and the latest killing shows that Syria's transition still sits on top of unresolved communal fault lines.

Justice and legitimacy were another major theme. Syria held the first public trial of former Assad-era officials in Damascus, including Atef Najib, a cousin of Bashar al-Assad. That trial is politically significant because it signals that the new authorities want to claim the language of accountability, not just regime change. It is also a test of whether transitional justice can become institutional rather than symbolic.

The trial also connects to Syria's broader effort to recast itself internationally. By publicly prosecuting an Assad-era figure, the government is trying to reassure both domestic audiences and foreign partners that it is breaking with the previous system. But because

the trial is still early and procedural, the real question is whether it leads to broader prosecutions or remains a one-off political gesture.

Security beyond Syria's borders also remained in play through the Islamic State camp issue. A group of Australian women and children who had left a Syria camp tied to alleged IS families were blocked from returning home, leaving them stranded in Syria. That story matters because it shows the continuing international burden of Syria's detention-camp system and the unresolved risk of extremist fallout.

Taken together, Syria's week was about a government trying to project neutrality and usefulness while still wrestling with detention, sectarian violence, oil dependence, and transitional justice. The picture is one of a country gaining diplomatic room, but not yet converting that room into stable institutions or fully credible security control.

14. European Countries

German authorities detained a suspected Russian-linked intelligence asset accused of transferring sensitive data related to European defense and drone technologies. The case reflects an intensification of counterintelligence operations across Europe targeting Russian hybrid networks embedded in logistics, research, and defense supply chains.

The United Kingdom experienced one of its most significant internal security shifts in recent weeks when the national terrorism threat level was raised from "substantial" to "severe", meaning an attack is now considered highly likely.

The decision was made by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre following a combination of factors, including a stabbing incident in Golders Green and a broader intelligence assessment of rising extremist risks from both Islamist and far-right networks. The UK's domestic intelligence service emphasized that the change reflects a structural increase in threat levels rather than a single event. Following the downgrade in security environment, the United States Embassy in London issued an advisory warning American citizens to exercise increased caution, avoid predictable travel routes, and remain alert in public spaces such as transport hubs, schools, and religious sites.

In parallel, the UK deepened its maritime security response posture toward Russia, particularly in the North Atlantic and northern maritime approaches. The Royal Navy is moving toward a new structured force model—often described as a "northern navies" framework—built with European partners to counter Russian submarine activity and protect undersea infrastructure. A complementary development is the formalization of a Joint Expeditionary Force expansion, involving nine European states, aimed at increasing rapid maritime deployment capacity and deterrence in northern waters.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio is scheduled to visit Rome and the Vatican for high-level diplomatic meetings aimed at stabilizing strained U.S.–Italy–Vatican relations. The visit is framed as an attempt to "thaw" tensions after President Trump's criticism of

European leaders and especially after his public attacks on Pope Leo XIV, who has been critical of the Iran war and U.S. military escalation. Rubio is expected to meet Vatican officials and Italian foreign policy leadership, with discussions also touching on broader transatlantic friction and troop deployment tensions in Europe.

Germany's defense leadership, particularly Boris Pistorius, has been engaged in intensified discussions on European security autonomy following U.S. signals of force posture changes.

The core issue is the increasing expectation that Europe must assume greater responsibility for its own defense as Washington re-evaluates troop deployments. The debate is directly linked to broader NATO burden-sharing tensions and uncertainty over U.S. commitment levels in Europe during the ongoing Iran-related geopolitical crisis.

The Pentagon, under Defense leadership involving Pete Hegseth, confirmed the withdrawal of approximately 5,000 U.S. troops from Germany, representing a significant adjustment in NATO force posture.

The decision follows political tensions between Washington and Berlin, particularly after German leadership publicly criticized U.S. handling of the Iran war. The withdrawal is part of a broader force posture review and is expected to be implemented over several months. European allies interpret it as both a strategic recalibration and a political signal of reduced U.S. engagement in continental defense.

15. Global Powers

The United States maintained a coercive posture toward Iran throughout the week, anchored in its ongoing naval blockade and pressure-based diplomacy. On April 29, maritime disruption reached a critical level, with shipping traffic through the Strait of Hormuz collapsing to a fraction of normal volumes amid the U.S.–Iran standoff. Only a handful of vessels were able to transit the strait, reflecting the combined effect of Iran's restrictions and the U.S. blockade of Iranian ports.

On April 30, the conflict remained in a deadlocked phase despite the existing ceasefire framework. Iran signaled it would continue disrupting maritime traffic as long as it faced pressure, while U.S. officials reviewed options for renewed military strikes to compel negotiations. The strategic environment was therefore already shifting from ceasefire management toward potential re-escalation.

By May 1, the United States escalated its economic warfare component. The Treasury formally warned global shipping actors against paying any form of tolls or financial transfers to Iran for passage through the strait, explicitly linking such actions to sanctions exposure. This move reinforced the blockade as both a military and financial instrument and targeted Iran's emerging attempt to monetize control over maritime transit.

Simultaneously, diplomatic efforts showed limited traction. Iran confirmed it had received a U.S. response to its 14-point proposal—transmitted via Pakistan—but there was no indication of convergence, as Washington remained dissatisfied with the terms and sequencing of concessions.

Also on May 2, it became clear that the United States had effectively rejected the Iranian proposal, particularly its demand to postpone nuclear discussions until after de-escalation. This confirmed that Washington would not trade immediate leverage for phased commitments, reinforcing a pressure-first negotiation doctrine.

In parallel, the operational dimension of the blockade intensified. U.S. enforcement actions continued to severely constrain Iran’s oil exports, forcing crude into floating storage and limiting Tehran’s ability to generate revenue. This demonstrated that the blockade was not symbolic but materially degrading Iran’s economic capacity.

On May 3, the security environment escalated at the tactical level. A commercial cargo vessel was attacked by small craft near the Strait of Hormuz, marking a renewed phase of maritime harassment and underscoring Iran’s continued ability to disrupt shipping through asymmetric means.

The same day, U.S. officials emphasized that the economic pressure campaign was having severe effects on Iran, describing it as “suffocating,” with oil export constraints and financial restrictions pushing Iran toward structural economic strain.

By May 4, the United States introduced a significant operational adjustment. President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. would begin assisting and guiding stranded commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz while maintaining the blockade on Iran. This marked a shift from pure denial to partial management of maritime flows, aimed at stabilizing global trade without easing pressure on Tehran.

Market reactions reflected the strategic uncertainty. Oil prices remained elevated—hovering around or above \$100 per barrel—due to continued disruption in one of the world’s most critical energy chokepoints and the absence of a credible diplomatic breakthrough.

China conducted combat-readiness naval and air patrols near Scarborough Shoal in direct response to the ongoing Balikatan 2026 military exercises involving the United States, Philippines, Australia, Japan, and other partners. Beijing framed the patrols as necessary to defend sovereignty claims, while Manila rejected China’s assertions and maintained that the exercises are defensive in nature. The situation reflects a sustained military signaling loop in the South China Sea, where exercises and counter-patrols are becoming structurally synchronized.

Taiwan emerged as the central diplomatic fault line in the anticipated U.S.–China summit agenda, with Beijing pushing for stronger U.S. language opposing Taiwanese

independence. Washington reaffirmed its “One China policy” but simultaneously maintained arms support and unofficial security ties with Taipei. The diplomatic positioning indicates tightening structural competition over Taiwan’s international space and long-term status.

The United States publicly reaffirmed Taiwan as a “trusted and capable partner” during diplomatic developments involving Taiwan’s limited African recognition network, particularly Eswatini. China criticized such engagements as politically provocative, reinforcing its long-standing opposition to Taiwan’s international participation. This reflects continued contestation over Taiwan’s diplomatic survival space, especially in Africa.

A geopolitical friction point emerged involving China, the United States, and Panama over control of strategic port infrastructure linked to the Panama Canal. After Panama asserted control over ports previously managed by a Hong Kong-linked firm, China reportedly detained Panama-flagged vessels, triggering U.S. accusations of coercive behavior. Beijing rejected the allegations and accused Washington of hypocrisy and interference.

16. International and Regional Organizations

United Nation

The Ongoing frameworks included humanitarian coordination, climate-peace-security webinars (Somalia series running into 2026), and support aligned with AU/IGAD efforts. The Tadjourah Call to Action links to the upcoming IMRF at UN Headquarters.

Africa Union

AU activities centered on ongoing support for Somalia via AUSSOM and broader continental engagements with relevance to the Horn. Field-level coordination continued, building on prior weeks (e.g., engagements in Barawe). AUSSOM maintained operational focus amid Al-Shabaab threats, with emphasis on coordination with Somali authorities and troop-contributing countries.

AUSSOM operations progressed with field engagements and capacity-building. On or around late April, troops in Jowhar completed drone training for enhanced surveillance. Engagements with local officials and partners (e.g., Burundi) underscored logistical, funding, and operational needs. Broader funding challenges persisted despite prior EU contributions, with ongoing calls for sustainable support.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

IGAD focused on migration management, mediation, and strategic partnerships this week. From April 27–30, 2026, in Tadjoura, Djibouti, the Government of Djibouti, IGAD, IOM,

EU, JICA, Sida, INTERPOL and partners held a High-Level Technical Experts Meeting on Irregular Migration and Migration Management along the Eastern Route (Red Sea Route Crisis).

The meeting addressed one of the world’s most dangerous migration corridors, with over 500,000 movements recorded in 2025 and 922 migrant deaths or disappearances that year. A field visit on April 28 in Obock-Godoria observed over 500 migrants awaiting Red Sea crossings. The meeting concluded with the adoption of the Tadjourah Call to Action, emphasizing strengthened regional cooperation against irregular migration, trafficking, and smuggling rights-based governance , maritime security, protection mechanisms and data systems. It serves as IGAD’s contribution to the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) in New York.

On April 28–29, IGAD held a Mediation Reflection Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, themed “Reimagining Mediation in a Fragmented World The Challenge to African Multilateral Leadership,” as part of its 40th anniversary. IGAD Executive Secretary Workneh Gebeyehu warned of the Horn of Africa at a “dangerous crossroads” with interconnected conflicts. Participants, including Kenyan officials and AU representatives, discussed commercialization of peace, geopolitical shifts and the need for African-led mediation reforms.

On May 3, IGAD hosted an EU delegation led by Ioana Albulescu to discuss cooperation in peace, climate resilience, and economic integration. IGAD and development partners also engaged in dialogue on the IGAD Strategy 2026–2030, focusing on resilience, stability and regional integration.

European Union (EU)

The EU issued a statement on April 30, 2026, expressing great concern over latest developments in Ethiopia’s Tigray Regional State. Spokesperson Anouar El Anouni called for immediate de-escalation, avoidance of actions jeopardizing the 2022 Pretoria Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. and resolution of differences through political dialogue. “It is imperative that another devastating conflict is avoided,” the statement emphasized.

The EU continued support for regional initiatives, including participation in the IGAD migration meeting in Tadjoura and broader peace/climate dialogues with IGAD. Prior funding (e.g., €75 million EPF for AUSSOM) provided continuity for security efforts in Somalia.



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