



# Weekly Geopolitical Report

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

**Coverage Period:** May 11– May 17

**Publication Date:** May 18, 2026



**Issue No. 20 | 2026**

**For analytical and informational purposes only**

# Horn Review: Weekly Report

May 11– May 17, 2026

## 1. Ethiopia

Ethiopia's diplomatic activity during the week reflects a broad and multi-layered foreign policy approach that combines active participation in global summits, deeper bilateral engagements, and sustained advocacy for reforms in international governance. A central moment was Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's participation in the Africa Forward Summit in Nairobi, co-hosted by Kenya and France. The summit brought together African and French heads of state, senior government officials, business leaders, civil society actors, youth representatives, and international institutions, including the African Union, European Union, global financial institutions, and development banks. With more than 2,000 participants, the discussions focused on innovation-driven growth, sustainable development pathways, and strengthening Africa's place in shaping its own future. Ethiopia used the platform to highlight its growing role in green industrialization, emphasizing progress in clean energy development and sustainable industrial policy as part of its broader contribution to Africa's energy transition agenda. The emphasis placed on youth inclusion also aligned with Ethiopia's narrative of long-term structural transformation driven by demographic potential and innovation.

Alongside multilateral engagement, Ethiopia significantly deepened its bilateral relations with major global partners, reflecting a strategy of diversified and balanced diplomacy. Relations with China were reaffirmed through the consolidation of the "all-weather strategic partnership" during high-level talks between Ethiopia's House of People's Representatives and a visiting delegation from China's National People's Congress. Ethiopian officials described the partnership as a long-standing model of development cooperation grounded in mutual trust and sustained political alignment since its upgrade in 2023. Key outcomes and references included major infrastructure achievements under the Belt and Road Initiative, particularly the Addis Ababa–Djibouti Railway, alongside broader Chinese investment in Ethiopia reaching approximately 5 billion USD, supporting over 2,000 projects and generating more than 560,000 jobs. China also remains a major export destination for Ethiopia's agricultural, mineral, and textile sectors. Both sides emphasized strengthening South-South cooperation, expanding legislative exchanges, and enhancing tourism and people-to-people ties.

The Chinese delegation, led by Luo Shugang, praised the deepening relationship and highlighted how coordination between Abiy Ahmed and Xi Jinping has elevated bilateral cooperation across international platforms, while Ethiopian officials also pointed to ongoing domestic reforms focused on digital transformation, improved public service delivery, and expanded democratic participation.

Ethiopia also expanded engagement with the United States through structured high-level consultations held in Washington, D.C. The Ethiopian delegation was led by Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos and included senior officials such as Ambassador Girma Birru and Redwan Hussein, Director General of the National Intelligence and Security Service. The talks with U.S. Department of State officials focused on three core pillars: enhancing trade and investment to support economic growth, strengthening defense and security cooperation, and coordinating efforts to promote regional peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. Both sides emphasized the importance of sustained diplomatic engagement and agreed that the newly established consultation framework would provide a more consistent institutional mechanism to guide the long-standing Ethiopia–U.S. partnership.

In parallel, Ethiopia intensified its engagement with India, reaffirming longstanding historical and strategic ties. During discussions between Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos and Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, both sides emphasized the importance of regular consultation and coordination on bilateral and global issues of shared concern. India expressed strong interest in expanding cooperation across multiple sectors, while also highlighting the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Ethiopia as a symbol of strengthened relations. Both governments reaffirmed their commitment to deepening economic, political, and development cooperation across a wide range of sectors.

At the multilateral level, Ethiopia took an active role in the BRICS Foreign Ministers Meeting in New Delhi, where it advanced a strong position on global governance reform. The Ethiopian delegation called for a more equitable, representative, legitimate, and just international order, stressing the need for structural reform of global institutions. On the issue of United Nations Security Council reform, Ethiopia reaffirmed its alignment with Africa’s common position under the Ezulwini Consensus and Sirte Declaration, emphasizing that Africa itself must determine the modality of its representation. The delegation also called for reforms in global financial systems, including improved debt restructuring mechanisms for developing countries and a more balanced global economic architecture that reflects countries’ actual positions in the world economy.

In addition, Ethiopia highlighted the urgency of reforming World Trade Organization accession processes to make them more inclusive for developing countries, strengthen dispute resolution mechanisms, and protect least developed countries from trade restrictions disguised under environmental regulations. On the sidelines of the BRICS meeting, Foreign Minister Gedion also met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, where he emphasized the need for urgent coordinated multilateral action to address global instability, warning that unresolved crises could trigger widespread economic and social consequences beyond national borders. He further stressed that BRICS should play a

more central role in promoting peace, collective security, and development as foundations for a more stable international system.

At the continental governance level, the African Union Commission Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf renewed Africa's longstanding demand for reform of the United Nations Security Council. He described Africa's exclusion from permanent membership as a historical injustice that must be corrected to reflect contemporary global realities rather than the post-1945 geopolitical order. Speaking under the framework of the Ezulwini Consensus and Sirte Declaration, he reiterated Africa's unified position calling for at least two permanent seats with full privileges, including veto power, along with additional non-permanent seats in an expanded Council. He welcomed support from countries such as France, Kenya, and Sierra Leone, and argued that growing international backing must be translated into concrete institutional reform. He also pointed to the African Union's admission into the G20 as evidence that global governance structures are gradually evolving toward greater inclusivity.

Domestically, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed praised the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission for its professionalism, ethical standards, and steady progress in advancing Ethiopia's national dialogue process. He stressed that fostering a culture of dialogue is essential in a diverse society like Ethiopia, where sustainable peace and civic cohesion depend on continuous engagement and mutual understanding. According to the Prime Minister, the process has gathered input from more than 90 percent of Ethiopians across the country, reflecting broad-based national participation. He noted that the dialogue is now entering a new phase focused on producing concrete outcomes, and he called on all stakeholders to remain committed to peace, national unity, and long-term stability. The emphasis, he stated, is shifting from consultation to implementation, with the expectation that the next stage will generate tangible national results.

Overall, the week demonstrates Ethiopia's expanding role as an active diplomatic actor operating across multiple geopolitical layers. The country simultaneously advanced engagement in global governance reform debates, strengthened strategic partnerships with major powers such as China, the United States, and India, and continued participation in multilateral platforms like BRICS and the Africa Forward Summit. At the same time, domestic political processes centered on dialogue and national cohesion indicate an effort to align external diplomacy with internal stability and institutional consolidation, positioning Ethiopia within a broader trajectory of state-building, international integration, and strategic balancing in a rapidly evolving global order.

## 2. Sudan

Sudan's conflict entered an even more dangerous phase during the week as drone warfare, regional diplomatic escalation, humanitarian collapse, and battlefield realignments collectively deepened the country's fragmentation. Humanitarian agencies warned that Sudan's protection environment has now reached catastrophic levels, with civilians facing systematic violence, displacement, siege conditions, and institutional collapse across Darfur, Kordofan, Khartoum, and Blue Nile. According to assessments cited by the Sudan Protection Cluster, indiscriminate shelling, aerial bombardments, and attacks on civilian infrastructure continue to devastate residential areas, displacement camps, markets, and health facilities. The growing use of drones has fundamentally transformed the conflict's operational landscape. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that drone strikes alone killed roughly 880 civilians between January and April 2026, accounting for the overwhelming majority of documented civilian conflict deaths during that period.

The humanitarian consequences continued to worsen sharply. Acute hunger now affects nearly 20 million people across Sudan, according to IPC findings highlighted by humanitarian organizations and international media. Aid agencies warned that famine risks are spreading across multiple regions as agricultural systems collapse, supply routes remain disrupted, and insecurity prevents consistent humanitarian access. Relief organizations stressed that humanitarian operations themselves are increasingly under threat, with insecurity, looting, movement restrictions, and attacks on aid infrastructure undermining assistance delivery nationwide. The International Committee of the Red Cross announced the deployment of additional aircraft operations from Jeddah to strengthen humanitarian access into Sudan, reflecting growing international concern over access constraints and logistical deterioration.

At the same time, Sudan's civilian protection crisis continued to deepen in ways extending beyond direct battlefield violence. Reports emerged accusing Sudanese authorities of abuses and deportations targeting South Sudanese nationals, adding another layer of instability to already strained regional displacement dynamics. Gender-based violence, child recruitment, ethnic discrimination, looting, and explosive ordnance contamination all continued to spread across conflict-affected regions. Humanitarian agencies warned that the collapse of public services and civilian protection systems is now driving long-term societal breakdown in large parts of the country.

Militarily, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) intensified operations across several fronts, particularly in Blue Nile and Darfur. The army captured additional territory near the Ethiopian border, including the strategically significant Khor Hassan station and nearby areas previously contested by RSF-aligned forces and SPLM-N factions. SAF advances in Blue Nile signaled an effort to reverse recent territorial setbacks and regain momentum

along southeastern corridors bordering Ethiopia. SAF officials and aligned media continued accusing Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates of facilitating drone operations targeting Khartoum and strategic infrastructure. These accusations remained politically charged and largely unverified internationally, though they contributed to rapidly escalating diplomatic tensions between Khartoum and Addis Ababa.

Ethiopia responded cautiously and avoided direct escalation, emphasizing sovereignty, regional stability, and non-interference. From Addis Ababa's perspective, Sudan's accusations increasingly appear tied to the broader military and political frustrations facing the SAF as the conflict becomes more fragmented and internationalized. Ethiopian analysts and regional observers have increasingly framed the allegations as part of a wider attempt by Khartoum to externalize internal battlefield setbacks and mobilize regional pressure amid growing strategic uncertainty.

Meanwhile, the SAF expanded aerial operations against RSF-controlled strongholds in Nyala, South Darfur. The army launched some of its largest drone offensives since the war began, targeting Nyala airport facilities, ammunition depots, fuel infrastructure, and RSF command sites. Nyala has become central to RSF operations, functioning both as a logistical hub and as the political center of the RSF-aligned parallel administration. The strikes caused widespread panic inside the city and triggered intensified RSF internal security measures, including arrests, communications restrictions, and tighter surveillance. The escalation demonstrated how drone warfare is increasingly replacing conventional front-line combat as both sides seek to weaken logistical and command structures rather than pursue costly urban offensives.

Political fragmentation inside the RSF also became more visible during the week. Senior commander Ali Rizqallah, commonly known as Savannah, officially defected from the RSF and arrived in Khartoum after publicly criticizing the paramilitary leadership. Savannah had previously commanded influential RSF formations in Darfur and played a significant role in recruiting foreign fighters from neighboring states. His defection was followed by reported RSF arrests targeting members of his faction and clashes involving withdrawing units in Darfur and Kordofan. While the long-term impact remains uncertain, the episode exposed growing internal strains within RSF structures as battlefield pressures intensify.

Sudan's regional entanglements also continued expanding. Kenya faced criticism after reports emerged regarding passports allegedly issued to individuals linked to RSF structures, highlighting broader regional concerns about cross-border political and logistical networks supporting the conflict. Simultaneously, discussions surrounding South Sudan's reported closure of an Egyptian-linked military presence near Pagak further underscored the extent to which Sudan's war is increasingly intertwined with wider Nile Basin and Horn of Africa geopolitical rivalries.

Economically, Sudan continued searching for pathways toward eventual stabilization despite the ongoing war. Finance Minister Gibril Ibrahim held discussions with the United Nations Development Programme on post-war recovery, economic reform, reconstruction planning, renewable energy projects, food security, and digital transformation. However, the scale of destruction remains staggering. Sudan's economy has contracted dramatically since 2023, government revenues have collapsed, and the national currency continues to deteriorate sharply. International projections suggest that even under optimistic conditions, the economy may not recover to pre-war levels for several years.

At the same time, voluntary return movements from neighboring countries continued despite the insecurity. Thousands of Sudanese returned from Egypt and Libya during the week through organized repatriation initiatives. These returns reflect both deteriorating conditions facing refugees abroad and growing perceptions among some Sudanese that portions of central Sudan are becoming relatively safer following recent SAF territorial gains. Nevertheless, humanitarian organizations warn that many returnees are arriving in areas where infrastructure, healthcare systems, and basic services remain devastated.

Overall, the conflict increasingly reflects not only a military confrontation between the SAF and RSF but also a broader struggle shaped by regional competition, economic collapse, humanitarian catastrophe, and competing geopolitical alignments across the Horn of Africa and the Nile Basin.

### **3. Egypt**

The intensive diplomatic and military maneuvers executed by Cairo over the past week are fundamentally driven by severe domestic economic strain, which President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi highlighted during a public address on May 11. Sisi explicitly warned that the expanding Middle East conflict, intensified by global power friction involving Iran, directly threatens international financial stability and has already imposed direct, harsh financial pressures across Egypt's vulnerable domestic markets. This internal economic vulnerability acts as the structural catalyst for Egypt's urgent multi-front strategy, forcing the state to secure vital resource lines and project regional stability to protect its domestic population from war-induced global shocks.

To directly insulate the national economy from these compounding macroeconomic pressures, Cairo has prioritized immediate defensive measures within its agricultural sector. On May 14, the Ministry of Supply enacted an aggressive increase in domestic wheat procurement prices, updating previous baselines to incentivize local production and expand strategic grain reserves, thereby shielding Egypt's vital subsidized bread program from global inflationary pressures generated by the war. Simultaneously, Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty presented a strategic proposal to BRICS member states on May 14, officially requesting the establishment of a joint grain logistics hub in East Port Said. This

initiative seeks to leverage Egypt's geographic location to stabilize vital commodity supply lines disrupted by the ongoing regional conflicts.

Egypt's pursuit of global economic and political leverage to fortify its structural security extends deep into continental diplomacy. This broader ambition culminated on May 11 when President Sisi arrived in Nairobi, Kenya, for the Africa Forward Summit, where he utilized the multilateral forum of thirty African heads of state to demand comprehensive United Nations Security Council reform, forcefully advocating for permanent African representation and voting rights to correct historical imbalances in global governance frameworks. Closer to home, Egypt secured its existential resource interests during high-level water management summits with a Rwandan delegation concluding May 17. Irrigation Minister Hani Sewilam signed a comprehensive technical roadmap establishing joint nature-based flood protection and rainwater harvesting infrastructure, an initiative allowing Cairo to build direct technical partnerships with upstream Nile nations and diplomatically counter upstream hydro-rivals through constructive continental engagement.

While managing these long-term continental frameworks, Cairo has been forced to confront immediate, volatile developments along its physical land borders. Tensions on Egypt's northeastern border spiked following the abrupt consecutive-day closure of the Rafah Border Crossing, which halted humanitarian evacuations before limited aid transits resumed on May 17. The sudden suspension disrupted vital medical extractions and supply lines, underscoring Cairo's delicate balancing act as it manages the immediate fallout of the neighboring conflict while attempting to maintain international humanitarian obligations. This border instability promptly pushed the Egyptian armed forces to launch unannounced live-fire military exercises within the Sinai Peninsula. The scale and immediate proximity of these drills to the border triggered acute alarm among neighboring Israeli communities, serving as a deliberate show of force by Cairo intended to signal its absolute readiness to defend its territorial sovereignty against external spillovers.

Beyond land borders, Egypt faced immediate maritime threats when the oil tanker M/T Eureka, carrying eight Egyptian sailors, was hijacked in Yemeni territorial waters on May 11, forcing Foreign Minister Abdelatty to quickly initiate high-level crisis coordination with Somali officials as the vessel was driven toward Puntland. This maritime instability directly highlights the friction surrounding regional waterways and shapes broader tactical alignments across the Horn of Africa. Specifically, Egypt's high-level diplomatic mission to Asmara on May 16, which rigidly insisted that Red Sea security remains the exclusive domain of littoral states, is a defensive reaction to Ethiopia's quest for maritime access. As a dynamic economic powerhouse of over 130 million people, Ethiopia rightfully deserves a direct gateway to the sea to fully unlock its massive trading potential and shake off the economic constraints of geographic isolation. Its diplomatic efforts to secure a port

agreement in the Horn of Africa represent a natural, forward-looking aspiration for national development and sovereign growth. However, Cairo views this pursuit of progress as a geopolitical threat, prompting Egypt to seek a restrictive alliance with Eritrea. By attempting to box in a rising Ethiopia, Egypt is using maritime diplomacy to protect its own regional influence, actively pushing back against a neighbor that is simply seeking the basic logistical infrastructure necessary to match its rightful status.

This defensive assertion of maritime control closely aligns with intelligence reports from May 11 detailing Egypt's formal integration into a quadrilateral military bloc alongside the UAE, Turkey, and China. This strategic alignment actively backs the Sudanese Armed Forces to secure the western coast of the Red Sea, aiming to guarantee a stable, friendly administration in Sudan to protect Egypt's long-term geopolitical interests. Egypt extended this defensive framework directly into the Gulf by deploying advanced Rafale fighter jets and upgraded Skyguard Amoun air defense systems to the United Arab Emirates. This crucial military assistance aims to expand an anti-Iran air shield amid escalating regional missile threats, underscoring Cairo's commitment to protecting its Gulf allies, who serve as the country's primary economic benefactors.

This strategic air deployment became hyper-critical on May 17 when Foreign Minister Abdelatty held an urgent phone call with Emirati leadership to condemn a missile strike near the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant. Abdelatty reiterated that Gulf sovereignty is an inseparable component of Egyptian national security, a statement signaling that further infrastructure attacks could trigger coordinated military responses from the newly integrated Arab air defense network. By elevating the security of Emirati energy infrastructure to a core national interest, Cairo cements its role as a primary security guarantor in the Gulf to safeguard its financial baseline.

To permanently resolve these multi-front escalations and protect its fragile domestic economy from further shocks, Egypt is simultaneously leveraging high-level diplomatic channels to enforce regional stability. Foreign Minister Abdelatty held a decisive bilateral call with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on May 11, where both ministers strongly advocated for direct US-Iran negotiations leveraging a newly consolidated Arab-Islamic Quartet alongside Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to exert collective political weight to enforce a regional ceasefire. Egypt reinforced this stabilization strategy on May 17 when President Sisi held an urgent phone call with Iraq's new Prime Minister, Ali Falih al-Zaidi, strongly emphasizing the necessity of completely insulating Iraq from broader Middle Eastern conflicts. This diplomatic intervention reflects Cairo's broader geopolitical objective to protect Arab state sovereignty and prevent further expansion of the regional war theater.

## 4. Eritrea

On May 16, Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty and Transport Minister Kamel El Wazir visited Eritrea, where they held talks with President Isaias Afwerki and senior Eritrean officials on expanding economic, transport, and strategic cooperation between the two countries. Egyptian statements issued following the visit reiterated Cairo's position that Red Sea security and governance should remain the responsibility of littoral states, an indirect reference to Ethiopia's continued efforts to secure Red Sea access. The visit reflects Egypt's broader regional strategy of strengthening ties with states surrounding Ethiopia amid continued tensions over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), while also expanding its influence across the Horn of Africa through infrastructure, maritime, and security cooperation.

On May 11, the African Development Bank Group announced the expansion of its cooperation with Eritrea following a high-level mission to the country in April. The Bank framed the partnership in notably positive terms, emphasizing "trust and pragmatism" and highlighting discussions on renewable energy, infrastructure, financial sector modernization, and development planning. The engagement reflects a broader trend of increasing cooperation between Eritrea and international development institutions, potentially signaling improving access to external financing and technical partnerships after years of relative isolation.

An Eritrean delegation led by Ambassador Beyene Russom participated in the "Africa Forward Summit" held from May 11–12, according to Eritrean state reporting. The summit, co-hosted by Kenya's President William Ruto and French President Emmanuel Macron, brought together officials from more than 30 African countries and focused on economic cooperation and Africa–France relations. Eritrea's participation again reflects Asmara's continued efforts to expand diplomatic engagement with international and regional forums following years of relative isolation.

A second round of dialogue under the "Ximdo" or "Tsimdo" initiative was held in Port Sudan, bringing together representatives from several Ethiopian rebel and opposition groups, including figures linked to the Ogaden National Liberation Front. Participants included Awel Seid, a key Eritrean figure behind the Tsimdo initiative, as well as pro-Fano Ethiopian figure Andargachew Tsige.

Presented publicly as a "people-to-people" or peace initiative, Tsimdo functions as a network of alliances and proxy relationships organized by Asmara to challenge Ethiopia's national security environment and expand Eritrean influence among armed and opposition actors. The hosting of the meeting in Port Sudan also points to growing antagonism toward Ethiopia within eastern Sudan under Sudanese Armed Forces control.

On May 11, Kenyan cargo carrier Astral Aviation announced the launch of a weekly

Nairobi–Asmara freighter route aimed at expanding logistics and trade connectivity between Eritrea and regional and international markets. The new service links Asmara to Astral’s broader cargo network through Nairobi, connecting Eritrea to destinations across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. The route reflects Eritrea’s gradual reintegration into regional commercial and transport networks amid increasing engagement with external partners and institutions.

## **5. Djibouti**

Between May 11 and May 18, 2026, Djibouti’s political and diplomatic positioning increasingly reflected its dual role as both Ethiopia’s indispensable maritime gateway and a growing strategic node in wider Horn of Africa security governance. A major geopolitical brief published by the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) emphasized the significance of the Djibouti–Ethiopia axis following President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh’s re-election, stressing that political continuity in Djibouti remains essential for the stability of regional trade systems centered around the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. From an Ethiopian strategic perspective, the report reinforced a long-standing reality within Addis Ababa’s foreign policy calculations: Djibouti is not simply a neighboring transit state, but the core logistical artery sustaining Ethiopia’s economic survival and external connectivity.

The analysis highlighted how Djibouti’s control over maritime access routes, port infrastructure, and Red Sea logistics continues to shape the balance of power in the Horn, especially at a time when Ethiopia is simultaneously pursuing diversified sea access while avoiding disruption to its most critical trade corridor. This broader geopolitical alignment was further reflected in Djibouti’s diplomatic participation at the Africa Forward Summit in Nairobi, where Foreign Minister Abdoukader Houssein Omar represented the presidency in high-level discussions co-chaired by the presidents of Kenya and France, using the platform to advocate for United Nations Security Council reform and a stronger African role in global security governance.

At the same time, regional humanitarian and migration pressures exposed the fragile security environment surrounding Djibouti’s strategic importance. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported a sharp rise in trafficking activity along the Eastern Route passing through Djibouti toward the Arabian Peninsula, with smugglers exploiting worsening economic conditions across the Horn and forcing Djiboutian security agencies to intensify patrol and interception operations. This migration pressure was compounded by a growing humanitarian emergency after the World Food Programme confirmed that instability and geopolitical tensions in the Red Sea had disrupted shipments of wheat flour and vegetable oil intended for refugee camps in southern Djibouti, while simultaneously declaring an \$8 million funding gap threatening supply continuity.

These developments illustrated how Djibouti's position at the intersection of Red Sea trade, migration flows, and regional humanitarian corridors increasingly exposes the country to external geopolitical shocks despite its image as a stable regional hub. For Ethiopia as well, such disruptions carry strategic implications, since instability in Djibouti's humanitarian and logistical systems directly affects wider regional trade networks, refugee management structures, and cross-border economic flows linked to Ethiopian transit dependency.

Security and regional mediation efforts also intensified during this period, further reinforcing Djibouti's role as a diplomatic anchor within the Horn of Africa. Operating from its Executive Secretariat in Djibouti City, IGAD formally intervened in Somalia's political deadlock by urging the Federal Government and opposition actors to resume stalled inclusive dialogue in order to protect institutional stability in the region. This intervention aligned closely with the broader Ethiopian security outlook, which views prolonged instability in Somalia as a direct threat to regional integration projects, counterterrorism cooperation, and Red Sea security architecture.

Shortly afterward, IGAD released its Q1 2026 Regional Progress Review from Djibouti City, outlining synchronized regional frameworks on borderland peacebuilding, climate displacement early-warning mechanisms, and youth economic integration across member states. Collectively, these developments reflected a deeper transformation of Djibouti from a narrowly defined port state into an increasingly influential political and institutional center within the Horn of Africa, where maritime security, migration governance, regional diplomacy, and Ethiopia's strategic interests are becoming progressively intertwined.

## **6. South Sudan**

South Sudan continued to face mounting humanitarian, political, and public health pressures during the week, as regional instability and internal governance tensions deepened concerns over the country's fragile transition. Humanitarian agencies warned that nearly eight million people remain at risk of acute hunger, driven by conflict, economic deterioration, displacement, flooding, and disruptions to agricultural production. According to humanitarian updates covering the first half of May, insecurity and access constraints continue to hamper aid delivery across several regions, particularly in Upper Nile, Jonglei, and Unity states. Relief agencies warned that food insecurity is increasingly intersecting with disease outbreaks and displacement patterns, creating compounding humanitarian vulnerabilities across the country.

Public health concerns also intensified after South Sudan issued an Ebola alert following rising cases in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo. Authorities warned that cross-border movement and weak healthcare infrastructure increase the risk of transmission into South Sudan, where medical systems remain overstretched by years of

conflict and underinvestment. The alert reflects broader anxieties surrounding the country's limited epidemic preparedness capacity at a moment when humanitarian services are already under severe strain.

The regional impact of Sudan's civil war continued to spill directly into South Sudanese affairs as reports emerged accusing Sudanese authorities of deportations and abuses targeting South Sudanese nationals inside Sudan. The allegations added further tension to already fragile cross-border relations and highlighted the growing vulnerability of migrant and refugee populations caught between the two crises. Sudan's war continues to exert major pressure on South Sudan through refugee inflows, economic disruption, arms trafficking routes, and instability along shared border regions.

Domestically, political frustrations also became increasingly visible. General Paul Malong's ally, General Buay Rolnyang, stated publicly that South Sudan's independence had been "betrayed" and that the hopes associated with liberation had been hijacked by political elites. His remarks reflected wider public dissatisfaction over governance failures, corruption, insecurity, and the slow implementation of political reforms promised under the peace process. These criticisms emerged alongside increasingly confrontational rhetoric from senior figures within the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement. SPLM Secretary-General Peter Lam Both warned that those opposing the SPLM "will suffer," comments that drew concern among observers already worried about shrinking political space and rising authoritarian tendencies ahead of the delayed transitional process.

The broader structural challenges facing South Sudan also remain deeply tied to its unresolved historical relationship with Sudan. Longstanding disputes over oil revenues, border demarcation, citizenship questions, Abyei, and cross-border security continue to shape South Sudan's political and economic vulnerabilities. Although independence in 2011 marked a historic turning point, many of the structural tensions inherited from the pre-secession era remain unresolved and continue to affect regional stability today.

At the same time, South Sudan's leadership appears increasingly aware of the dangers posed by becoming entangled in wider regional rivalries. Juba has recently shown signs of pursuing a more cautious balancing strategy centered on regional stability, economic connectivity, and limiting exposure to external proxy competition. This remains particularly significant given the growing geopolitical tensions surrounding the Nile Basin, Sudan's civil war, and broader Horn of Africa security dynamics.

## **7. Somalia and Somaliland**

### **Somalia**

Demonstrators rallied across the Somali capital in support of families displaced by a government led home demolitions. Opposition figures who organized the protests alleged that security forces shot and killed one person while attempting to disperse the crowds. The rallies scored rising public discontent with government actions perceived as forced evictions.

The political crisis deepened during this period as President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's term neared its constitutionally prescribed end date of May 15 under the provisional constitution. Disputes intensified over term extensions and the 2026 electoral process with observers warning of a potential constitutional crisis. Opposition groups and several federal member states including Puntland and Jubaland continued to reject government moves setting the stage for a high confrontation.

Following that High negotiations between the Federal Government of Somalia and the opposition Somali Future Council took place from May 13 to May 15 at the Halane compound in Mogadishu. The talks focused on the electoral process including the shift to direct one person, one vote elections, constitutional disputes, politically linked detainees, and the impending term deadline.

The first day of talks May 13 ended without a breakthrough after more than four hours of discussions. The government reportedly attempted to narrow the scope of negotiations by setting aside debates over constitutional amendments, regional state elections, territorial disputes, and term related issues, proposing instead to focus only on the election type, timeline and formation of an electoral committee. The opposition reportedly rejected a government proposal to refer disputed matters to technical committees viewing the move as a potential delay tactic. Another major disagreement emerged when opposition leaders demanded the suspension of ongoing local council and regional elections, particularly in Southwest State, a demand the Federal Government strongly rejected insisting such elections remain a constitutional responsibility.

On May 14, the second day of talks again ended without agreement. Foreign mediators from the United States and the United Kingdom stepped back urging Somali leaders to reach their own compromise. Deep divisions persisted and both sides agreed to further meetings though progress remained elusive. On May 15 the third and final day negotiations collapsed entirely without agreement on elections, constitutional issues or the post May 15 transition.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's four year term under the provisional constitution ended on May 15 without a new election or broad political agreement. In response the

Federal Government declared that Somalia had entered a transition period toward an inclusive democratic system based on universal suffrage. The president later asserted that his mandate along with parliament's extends to May 15, 2027 under the revised constitution. Following the collapse of the Halane talks opposition leaders stated they no longer recognize Mohamud as president after May 15.

During National Youth Day celebrations, President Mohamud announced the official launch and implementation of the revised constitution which had been approved earlier. He declared that the government's term now extends to May 15, 2027 reflecting a shift to a five year presidential term and direct elections. He further stated that the separation of powers between parliament and government would take effect soon. This announcement deepened the political divide with opposition leaders rejecting the president's legitimacy and continuing to assert that his mandate expired on May 15. The opposition had planned a major protest in Mogadishu on May 16 but postponed it to allow space for further dialogue.

On the Regional note Kenya's President William Ruto stated that Somalia's president term is expiring as uncertainty deepens. In a May 14 report Ruto was cited as saying that Somalia is entering a politically uncertain phase as the constitutional terms of both the president and parliament approach their limits.

Additionally on May 16 Turkish Ambassador to Somalia Alper Aktas met President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud at the presidential palace a move that thrust Turkey into the midst of the political crisis. Also on May 16 reports confirmed that Somalia plunged deeper into political uncertainty after President Mohamud declared his presidency would continue while the opposition rejected his legitimacy.

Separately, a May 12 report noted that as Somalia edged toward another political precipice, opposition leaders in Mogadishu announced plans for a fresh wave of demonstrations. The report highlighted growing fear of a return to Somalia's violent political past.

Initial reports indicated that the United States was set to mediate or facilitate talks between the federal government and opposition planned for May 13 at Halane. Subsequent clarifications from US officials including Chargé d'Affaires Justin Davis and embassy statements emphasized that the United States would not dictate outcomes or formally lead mediation but rather encouraged dialogue and observed developments. On May 14 US Chargé d'Affaires Justin Davis stated that direct elections are inevitable for Somalia while noting disagreements on timing, process, and leadership amid the crisis. The US continued to encourage dialogue but clarified it was not directing outcomes.

The African Union Commission issued a statement on May 16 widely covered on May 17 expressing concern over the failed Halane negotiations. The AU urged all stakeholders to

recommit to inclusive dialogue, mutual compromise, and constitutional order. It reaffirmed support for the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia and called for sustained international engagement to reconcile differences. Broader calls from international partners, including the US, UK, EU, and UN, continued amid the transition uncertainty, emphasizing that Somalis must reach their own compromise.

On another note, On May 11 the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Federal Republic of Somalia H.E. Abdisalam Ali presented H.E. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and the Federal Republic of Somalia at the Africa Forward Summit held as part of the Africa–France Partnership Development Summit in Nairobi, Kenya. The high level summit brought together heads of state, ministers, and senior officials to discuss strengthening multilateral cooperation advancing reforms within global governance institutions and promoting a more inclusive international system that ensures equitable representation for Africa and developing nations.

On May 10, the Federal Government of Somalia and the European Union held a high level Partnership Dialogue under Article 3 of the Samoa Agreement reaffirming their commitment to strengthening cooperation on security, governance, migration, and economic development. The meeting held in Mogadishu brought together senior Somali officials and EU representatives to assess progress and outline shared priorities. The Somali delegation was led by Deputy Prime Minister Salah Ahmed Jama and included the ministers of Defence, Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Internal Security, Finance, Planning, Investment and Economic Development, as well as Commerce and Industry. The EU delegation was headed by Ambassador Francesca Di Mauro, the bloc’s envoy to Somalia joined by ambassadors and representatives from Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden, along with officials from the EU Training Mission and the EU Capacity Building Mission in Somalia.

On May 16, Somalia’s National Intelligence and Security Agency announced that senior Al Shabaab operatives were killed during a coordinated security operation in the Hiiraan region of central Somalia. The operation was carried out in the Buq-Aqable area in coordination with international partners and targeted senior militant figures and logistical sites. At least three senior Al Shabaab operatives were killed including Ali Hussein, described as a senior militia commander operating in central regions, Mowliid Jiis, identified as the group’s representative in Buulo-burde district, and Mohamed Hiiraan, described as Al Shabaab’s representative in Jalalaqsi district. The operation also destroyed five vehicles including three so-called BG vehicles, one of which was reportedly mounted with a DShK heavy machine gun. The agency said the operation formed part of efforts to weaken Al Shabaab’s operational capabilities and disrupt planned attacks. Somali officials briefed international partners including during the EU dialogue on recent military operations against Al-Shabaab and security sector reforms

with broader US/AFRICOM strikes and Somali/AUSSOM efforts continuing in the background.

Senior Somali Commanders Killed in Al-Shabaab Ambush, On May 15 two senior Somali military commanders were killed after Islamist militants ambushed government forces on the outskirts of Baidoa, deepening the crisis in the Southwest state. The ambush highlighted security challenges even as counterterrorism operations continue.

## **Somaliland**

In the lead up to Somaliland's Independence Day celebrations on May 18 officials signaled upcoming international developments or announcements. Following President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdillahi Irro's recent high level visit to the United Arab Emirates, Information Minister Barkhad Jama Batun and other officials hinted at major announcements tied to the Independence Day commemorations. These signals built upon existing partnerships, including DP World's Berbera port investments, as well as recent recognitions and cooperation agreements.

Following that, Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdillahi Irro returned to the country on May 14 following a visit to the United Arab Emirates that began in late April. The Somaliland Presidency confirmed the president's arrival in a brief statement saying he had safely returned home after completing his stay in the UAE. Officials did not immediately disclose details regarding meetings held during the visit or the exact duration of the trip. President Irro departed for Dubai on April 23 with the presidency at the time describing the visit as personal in nature and providing no official agenda or details of scheduled engagements. Despite the limited official information the visit attracted regional attention amid Somaliland's growing diplomatic outreach and deepening engagement with Gulf countries, particularly the UAE.

Red Sea Security Offer and Positioning as a Security Partner Somaliland publicly stated it was ready to work with the international community to enhance security in the Red Sea positioning itself as a stable and reliable partner amid regional maritime challenges. Somaliland emphasized its readiness to contribute to regional and international efforts against maritime threats in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden leveraging its stable environment and strategic location.

On another note, Somaliland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has appointed Dimitrios Tourikis as Special Envoy to the Hellenic Republic of Greece as Somaliland seeks to deepen diplomatic engagement in Europe. Tourikis confirmed the appointment in a statement posted on X on May 11, expressing deep honour for the appointment. The appointment comes at a sensitive regional moment as Turkey continues expanding its influence in Somalia while openly campaigning against Somaliland's international recognition efforts particularly following Israel's recognition of Somaliland.

Somaliland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 14 highlighted growing ties between the Republic of Somaliland and Israel after Somaliland's representative to the United States, Ambassador Bashir Goth attended Israel's Independence Day celebrations in Washington. In a statement posted on social media the ministry said the event reflected the warm friendship and growing relations between Somaliland and the State of Israel. The ministry also expressed appreciation for the hospitality extended to Somaliland's representative during the celebration hosted by Israel's embassy in the United States. Ambassador Bashir Goth who represented Somaliland at the event said he was honored to attend the celebration and thanked Israel's Ambassador to the United States, Yechiel Leiter for the reception. Former U.S. Special Envoy for the Sahel J. Peter Pham also attended the event alongside Ambassador Goth and Ambassador Leiter.

Ambassador Allen C. Lou of the Taiwan Representative Office in the Republic of Somaliland called for greater international inclusion in global health systems while praising Somaliland nurses and expanding healthcare cooperation during International Nurses Day celebrations in Hargeisa on May 12. Speaking at the event attended by health officials, medical professionals, and students Lou highlighted the role nurses play in strengthening healthcare delivery, emergency preparedness, and disease management across Somaliland. The ambassador said Taiwan's medical cooperation with Somaliland focuses on key areas including emergency response, health information systems, HIV care, non-communicable diseases, surgical care, and intensive care services.

## **8. Yemen**

On May 14, Yemen's internationally recognized government and the Houthis agreed to release more than 1,600 prisoners in what would constitute the largest prisoner exchange since the conflict began. According to Al Jazeera, the agreement was reached during negotiations facilitated by the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The development reflects continued efforts to sustain limited confidence-building measures between the two sides despite the absence of broader progress toward a political settlement.

International and local humanitarian organizations have warned of a worsening food security crisis in Yemen, cautioning that parts of the country could move toward famine conditions amid continued conflict, economic deterioration, and funding shortages. According to reports cited by Asharq Al-Awsat, aid agencies highlighted rising malnutrition rates, declining humanitarian assistance, and the collapse of basic services as key drivers of the crisis, with vulnerable populations in both government- and Houthi-controlled areas increasingly affected.

The Houthis warned on 14 May that any renewed U.S. or Israeli military action against Iran would drag the wider region into a conflict "whose flames would hit everyone," with implications for regional stability, global trade, and energy markets. The warning,

delivered by acting Houthi foreign minister Abdulwahid Abu Ras in a message to Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, comes amid continued concerns over Red Sea security and the possibility of renewed escalation involving Iranian-aligned groups across the region.

Middle East Eye published a report examining the growing prominence of Saudi-backed Salafi commanders within Yemen's anti-Houthi camp, arguing that the trend reflects broader shifts in the balance of influence among factions aligned with the internationally recognized government. The report highlights the expanding role of Salafi armed formations in frontline operations and local governance structures, particularly in southern and western Yemen, while also pointing to the complex relationship between Saudi Arabia, the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council, and other anti-Houthi actors. The piece frames the development as part of an evolving competition over influence within Yemen's fragmented anti-Houthi coalition.

## **9. Kenya**

Kenya just had one of those weeks that showed both the strength and the weakness of its current position. On the outside, Nairobi looked confident, diplomatic, and increasingly important. It hosted major international meetings, attracted attention from France, and presented itself as a serious African voice in global politics. But beneath that image, Kenya was also dealing with pressure from fuel prices, regional insecurity, the war in Sudan, and criticism over its role in Haiti. In other words, Kenya looked powerful internationally, but still vulnerable at home and in the region.

The biggest event of the week was the Africa Forward Summit, held in Nairobi from May 11 to May 12. The summit was co hosted by President William Ruto and French President Emmanuel Macron. It brought together African leaders, investors, and international institutions to discuss investment, financial reform, energy, agriculture, technology, and Africa's place in the global economy. This was not just another conference. Politically, it was a statement. Kenya was telling the world that Nairobi is not just a regional capital, but a continental diplomatic stage.

For France, the summit was also very important. France has lost influence in parts of West Africa, especially after military governments in countries like Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso pushed back against French influence. By coming to Kenya, Macron was trying to show that France still wants a major role in Africa, but through a different language: investment, partnership, and economic cooperation. Kenya gave France a new platform in English speaking Africa, while France gave Kenya more international attention.

For President Ruto, the message was clear. Africa should not be treated as a charity case. He pushed the idea that African countries want investment, trade, and equal partnership,

not only aid and promises. That tone is politically important because it matches a wider African argument: the continent has resources, markets, people, and strategic value, but it has often been treated as dependent. Ruto used the summit to challenge that old relationship and present Kenya as part of a more confident Africa.

Macron announced a large investment package of about €23 billion, around \$27 billion, for Africa. The money was linked to sectors like energy, artificial intelligence, agriculture, infrastructure, and industry. For Kenya, this was useful not only because of possible investment, but because it strengthened Nairobi's image as a gateway into Africa. Kenya wants to be the place where outside powers, investors, and institutions come when they want access to the continent.

Another major issue during the week was global financial reform. African leaders used the summit to argue that Africa is often unfairly judged by global financial systems. Many African countries are seen as high risk, which makes borrowing more expensive and reduces investment. This matters because it affects development, infrastructure, and government budgets. Kenya hosting this conversation placed Nairobi at the center of a major political debate about who controls global finance and who benefits from it.

By May 17, Kenya was also being discussed as one of the countries that could help carry African concerns into the G7 conversation. This gave Kenya a bigger diplomatic role. It was no longer just hosting meetings for itself. It was being positioned as a voice that could help present African economic concerns to powerful Western countries. That is a major step for Kenya's foreign policy, because it shows Nairobi trying to move from regional influence to continental representation.

But the same week also showed Kenya's weaknesses. On May 14, Kenya raised retail fuel prices sharply. Some prices increased by more than 20 percent. This was linked to global crude oil pressure and the conflict involving Iran. That issue showed how connected Kenya's domestic economy is to global instability. When conflict affects energy markets far away, ordinary Kenyans can feel it through transport costs, food prices, business expenses, and the general cost of living.

The fuel issue was politically dangerous for Ruto's government. Kenya is already sensitive to cost-of-living pressure, and fuel prices affect almost everything. Even before the larger public anger became visible after the May 11 to May 17 timeline, the price increase itself was already a warning sign. A government can host major summits and speak strongly on global platforms, but if citizens feel economic pain at home, that international image becomes harder to defend.

Security was another major part of the week. Kenya kept the border with Somalia closed because of insecurity and instability inside Somalia. Ruto defended this decision by pointing to the risks coming from Somalia's internal tensions, especially around Jubaland

and Somali federal forces. This matters because Kenya's northern border has always been connected to Somalia's political situation and the threat of al Shabaab. Kenya wants trade with Somalia, but it also has to think about armed groups, refugees, and cross border violence.

The Somalia issue shows the difficulty of Kenya's regional position. Kenya wants to be a diplomatic and economic leader in East Africa, but it is also directly exposed to instability from its neighbors. A weak or divided Somalia creates security problems for Kenya. So while Nairobi speaks the language of regional cooperation, it also has to make hard security decisions that can slow down trade and movement.

Sudan was another sensitive issue. During the week, Ruto rejected claims that Kenya was supporting the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan's war. He said Kenya was not backing one side and that the focus should be on peace efforts. This denial matters because Kenya wants to be seen as a neutral mediator. If Sudanese actors or other countries believe Kenya is taking sides, it damages Nairobi's credibility. For a country trying to become a diplomatic hub, neutrality is not just a moral position. It is a political asset.

Haiti also remained connected to Kenya's global image. Kenya's role in the security mission there has brought international attention, but also criticism. The mission made Kenya look like a country willing to take responsibility beyond Africa. At the same time, it raised questions about whether Kenya was being used to carry out a difficult security project that stronger powers did not want to handle directly. This is a real foreign policy risk for Ruto: global visibility can increase Kenya's reputation, but it can also expose the country to blame when missions struggle.

Overall, the week from May 11 to May 17 showed Kenya standing at a complicated crossroads. Internationally, the country looked ambitious. It hosted the Africa Forward Summit, strengthened its relationship with France, pushed African financial concerns, and positioned Nairobi as a serious diplomatic center. Regionally, it was dealing with Somalia and Sudan. Globally, it was still tied to Haiti. Domestically, fuel prices reminded everyone that global politics eventually becomes local pain.

## **10. The Gulf Countries**

### **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia is executing a sophisticated dual-track strategy to reshape Middle Eastern security, balancing robust defensive readiness with a transformative diplomatic vision. In response to recent regional provocations including a drone strike near the UAE's Barakah Nuclear Power Plant and the interception of three hostile drones from Iraq the Council of Ministers, chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, reaffirmed the Kingdom's unwavering commitment to Gulf solidarity. Simultaneously, Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan engaged in multi-lateral discussions with counterparts in Jordan, Qatar,

and the UAE to coordinate security responses, while also meeting with US Special Envoy Tom Barrack in Riyadh to align on economic and political recovery frameworks for post-Assad Syria.

The foundational shift lies in Riyadh's pursuit of structural regional stability to reduce reliance on volatile external security umbrellas. The Kingdom has floated a regional non-aggression pact with Iran modeled after the 1975 Helsinki Accords to establish mutual security guarantees and formalize borders, a proposal gaining significant traction in European capitals. This diplomatic pivot is reinforced by an aggressive push for defense autonomy and global realignment; Riyadh has increasingly distanced itself from Washington's military orbit, strictly limiting the use of its airspace for offensive Western maneuvers while deepening deep-tier defense and economic cooperation frameworks with middle powers including Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt, and Ukraine.

## **UAE**

On the diplomatic front, senior presidential advisor Anwar Gargash reaffirmed Abu Dhabi's strategic commitment to political solutions, while simultaneously asserting the nation's right to self-defense after bearing the brunt of Iranian missile and drone strikes. This posture was reinforced through direct, top-level consultations, with UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed engaging US President Donald Trump on bilateral strategic cooperation and coordinating closely with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to align Gulf stabilization efforts. However, the diplomatic temperature boiled over at the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi, where UAE Minister of State Khalifa bin Shaheen Al-Marar categorically rejected Iranian attempts to justify "terrorist attacks" against Gulf infrastructure, forcing the summit to collapse without a joint statement.

This diplomatic gridlock directly mirrors an escalating gray-zone conflict in the surrounding waters and airspace. Grounding its fierce rhetoric in hard data, the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs revealed that its air defenses have intercepted roughly 3,000 Iranian drones and missiles aimed at civilian facilities including a recent strike targeting the perimeter of the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant. This cross-border threat environment has intensified at sea, highlighted by the recent boarding and seizure of a vessel off the coast of Fujairah by Iranian personnel, alongside a separate attack on an Indian ship off the coast of Oman. In response to these escalating threats to the Strait of Hormuz, Abu Dhabi has launched urgent regional maritime consultations, explicitly reserving all military and legal rights to neutralize hostile acts and protect its sovereign infrastructure.

## **Qatar**

Qatar has assumed a pivotal, high-stakes mediation role to avert a breakdown of the fragile post-war regional equilibrium, pairing its diplomatic blitz with strict warnings against any renewed escalation. Standing alongside Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan

Fidan in Doha, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani strongly cautioned that a resumption of hostilities would inflict catastrophic consequences on global energy security and the world economy. In an explicit push for structural deterrence, both leaders threw their diplomatic weight behind Pakistan-led mediation efforts and categorically rejected Iran's use of the Strait of Hormuz as a strategic bargaining chip, demanding guaranteed, unhindered freedom of navigation through the vital international waterway.

This diplomatic assertiveness is directly linked to an escalating gray-zone threat environment, highlighted by a recent drone strike that targeted a commercial cargo vessel transiting Qatari waters. In response to this maritime provocation, Doha has sustained an exhaustive, multi-lateral diplomatic offensive to isolate the crisis. The Prime Minister maintained an open, continuous line of communication with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan to coordinate comprehensive de-escalation strategies, while similarly engaging with the Kuwaiti leadership to build a unified regional front. Throughout these intensive consultations, Qatar has consistently hammered home a single core directive: regional stability cannot be secured through stopgap measures, requiring all parties to positively engage with mediation frameworks to address the root causes of the US-Iran conflict before the window for lasting peace permanently closes.

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

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

The eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remains trapped in a volatile cycle of tactical military shifts and high-level diplomatic maneuvers, set against a deepening humanitarian crisis. In South Kivu, Rwandan-backed M23 rebels executed a unilateral withdrawal from the geostrategic Ruzizi Plain, vacating key towns like Sange to allow Congolese government forces (FARDC) and allied Wazalendo militias to reoccupy the Bukavu-Uvira commercial corridor. However, defense analysts caution that this pullback is highly deceptive rather than a genuine step toward peace. The rebel movement has simply repositioned its forces and heavy weaponry further north near Kamanyola and the Bugarama hills, leaving underlying regional tensions entirely unresolved in the absence of a verified ceasefire or credible security guarantees.

Simultaneously, the political track under the Luanda framework continues to stall, shifting immediate focus toward long-term strategic and economic alignments. Angolan President João Lourenço, acting as the African Union's primary mediator, received a senior envoy from DRC President Félix Tshisekedi to salvage the peace process an engagement that paired with a major bilateral agreement to construct over 1,400 kilometers of cross-border power transmission lines. Yet, these structural initiatives stand in stark contrast to the acute civilian protection gap on the ground. Following the phased withdrawal of MONUSCO, South Kivu has been plunged into a severe security vacuum, leaving over

1.2 million displaced people directly exposed to local militias and proxy warfare as the UN mission's remaining capacity declines under financial constraints and Kinshasa's exit mandates.

## **Mali**

Mali is navigating an existential security crisis by pairing a hardline, non-negotiation stance against insurgent forces with an intensified reliance on its Russian defense partnership. Following highly coordinated late-April offensives by Tuareg separatists and al-Qaeda-linked factions which struck the Kati garrison, killed the Defense Minister, and targeted the transitional leadership Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop framed the escalation as a foreign-backed "hybrid war." This resolve is heavily backed by Moscow; the Russian Ambassador confirmed that Malian forces, reinforced by the Russian Defense Ministry's Africa Corps, are actively counter-attacking. Concurrently, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) is shifting into an integrated military bloc, anchored by Moscow's commitment to deliver advanced weaponry and standardized tactical training for the joint regional force.

However, the ground reality remains highly volatile and tightly contested. While the ruling junta utilizes Russian air support and mercenary auxiliaries to secure Bamako and launch retaliatory airstrikes on northern hubs like Kidal, insurgent networks are aggressively moving to throttle critical food supply routes to the capital. This operational friction and the rising human toll have triggered acute international alarm. The UN Security Council's strong condemnation of the initial late-April attacks underscores the fragility of the Sahel's emerging security architecture, highlighting the deep structural challenges Bamako faces in translating tactical Russian military support into long-term regional stability.

## **Burkina Faso**

Burkina Faso is aggressively driving the legal and institutional consolidation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), systematically transforming the mutual defense pact into an integrated confederation alongside Mali and Niger. The geostrategic shift was codified by the Transitional Legislative Assembly in Ouagadougou, which voted unanimously to ratify four foundational protocols to the AES treaty. This legislative surge provides a legal anchor for the triumvirate, binding the three nations across unified diplomatic, economic, and mutual defense lines. Most critically, the architecture mandates that any kinetic attack or sovereign violation against one member state automatically constitutes an act of aggression against the entire confederation, allowing the Sahelian states to present a united front against external pressure and regional isolation.

However, this rigid institutionalization creates a stark diplomatic polarization within West Africa. While Foreign Minister Karamoko Jean Marie Traoré emphasized that these

protocols allow the AES to neutralize Western proxy dynamics and secure sovereign independence, regional security analysts caution that the bloc has effectively passed the point of casual reconciliation with traditional bodies. Any future rapprochement or reintegration with ECOWAS can no longer rely on historical ties or regional sentiment. Instead, the emergence of the AES forces a permanent restructuring of West African diplomacy, requiring any future engagements to be negotiated from scratch on a foundation of mutual recognition, verified security guarantees, and a respect for this newly established Sahelian sovereignty architecture.

## **Niger**

Niger is steering a complex geopolitical course by balancing tactical regional diplomacy with a comprehensive, structural overhaul of its foreign policy. On the regional front, junta leader General Abdourahamane Tchiani signaled a willingness to defuse the long-standing standoff with ECOWAS, framing Niger's relationship with Nigeria as an amicable brotherhood that must be resolved through peaceful dialogue. However, this cooperative rhetoric serves as a pragmatic buffer for an aggressive global realignment. Foreign Minister Bakary Yaou Sangaré delivered a robust defense of Niamey's definitive break from Western dependence specifically targeting France characterizing the shift as a non-negotiable reclamation of national sovereignty while explicitly elevating Russia, Türkiye, and fellow Alliance of Sahel States (AES) members to the status of comprehensive strategic allies.

Yet, this rapid pivot toward a multipolar framework comes with distinct domestic and international hurdles. To operationalize its new sovereignty and bypass the administrative blockades imposed by its fractured relations with Paris, Niamey is attempting to rapidly diversify its diplomatic and economic footprint. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced plans to open a new embassy in Spain and establish strategic consulates in Libya to better manage its regional diaspora and cross-border security flows. Simultaneously, the transitional government is actively seeking new partnerships with non-traditional actors like Belarus, Serbia, and key Gulf states to diversify its mining and oil development expertise. While the junta enforces a strict policy of diplomatic reciprocity to secure permanent institutional autonomy, regional analysts caution that completely severing Western security and economic ties remains a high-stakes gamble that could exacerbate Niger's long-term economic isolation if these new alliances fail to deliver immediate material support.

## **Chad**

Chad is aggressively confronting a volatile domestic and regional threat landscape by pairing an intense counter-terrorism campaign with high-level regional diplomacy. In response to recent devastating Boko Haram ambushes that killed dozens of Chadian soldiers including two high-ranking generals N'Djamena has executed Operation

Haskanite, a large-scale military offensive combining intensive air strikes and ground assaults in the Lake Chad Basin. While the operations successfully forced jihadist factions to flee their strategic island encampments, the bombardments triggered severe international scrutiny following reports that dozens of Nigerian fishermen were caught in the crossfire. Although the Chadian government has firmly denied intentionally targeting civilians and indicated a readiness to establish a formal inquiry, the United Nations human rights chief has stepped in to demand an independent investigation into the civilian casualties.

Simultaneously, Chad is actively anchoring its domestic security operations within a broader framework of continental stability. On the sidelines of the Africa–France Summit in Nairobi, President Mahamat Idriss Déby held pivotal bilateral consultations with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to address the compounding regional fallout of the Sudan crisis. Recognizing that the stability of the Sahel and the Nile Valley are deeply intertwined, the two leaders coordinated on strategic mechanisms to contain the conflict next door, reinforcing a unified stance on the necessity of resolving regional crises through peaceful, institutional means that strictly safeguard state sovereignty and prevent further state fragmentation.

### **Equatorial Guinea**

Equatorial Guinea is navigating sharp international condemnation over its human rights record while aggressively restructuring its security architecture through deeper North African alliances. The regime has faced intense pressure from United Nations human rights experts following an urgent appeal to halt the imminent deportation of at least nine asylum seekers. These individuals are part of a broader group transferred to Malabo under a controversial \$7.5 million externalization agreement tied to a United States deportation campaign. Human rights advocates warn that forcing these vulnerable migrants back to their home countries constitutes unlawful refoulement and abuses arbitrary, prison-like detentions to outsource Western border enforcement without viable legal safeguards.

To counter this multi-lateral pushback and insulate its internal infrastructure, Malabo is systematically diversifying its strategic defense networks, most notably by anchoring its security sector to Cairo. Under a new matrix of bilateral agreements, Equatorial Guinea has secured critical Egyptian commitments to upgrade and train its national internal security systems, alongside parallel development pacts spanning trade, healthcare, and infrastructure. This operational alignment was recently synchronized during direct consultations between the two nations' foreign ministers ahead of the upcoming El Alamein-Africa Forum. While the regime attempts to solidify its sovereign control and elevate its standing within joint African security architectures, regional analysts note that embedding domestic capacity-building within Egypt's framework is a calculated move to balance out severe international isolation over its domestic rights record.

## **12. North Africa**

### **Morocco**

Joint United States and Moroccan military operations shifted to a somber recovery mission along the North African coast on May 11 following a tragic accident during the annual "African Lion" training exercises. Search teams successfully recovered the remains of 1st Lt. Kendrick Lamont Key Jr., an American air defense artillery officer who vanished after falling from a coastal cliff into the Atlantic Ocean. Specialized naval and aerial rescue units continue to scour the surrounding shoreline for a second missing service member.

This major multinational exercise underscores Morocco's institutional resilience and its deliberate positioning as a proactive middle power bridging European and African security architectures. While managing these complex logistical deployments, Rabat also maintained its steady domestic governance schedule. The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs officially announced on May 17 that the national celebration of Eid Al Adha will commence on May 27, establishing a unified cultural timeline across the kingdom.

### **Algeria**

France and Algeria initiated a significant diplomatic thaw following a prolonged dispute over North African regional sovereignty. French Justice Minister Gérald Darmanin announced a high-profile mission to Algiers to inaugurate a new chapter in bilateral judicial cooperation. A primary focus of these upcoming discussions is the fate of detained French journalist Christophe Gleizes. This ministerial engagement reflects a coordinated attempt by Paris and Algiers to repair fractured institutional ties.

Complementing these judicial overtures, security frameworks between the two governments are also experiencing a progressive restoration. French Interior Minister Laurent Nuñez confirmed that Algerian Interior Minister Saïd Sayoud is scheduled to visit Paris to formalize joint law enforcement strategies. Their upcoming discussions will center on rebuilding a coordinated bilateral response to cross-border drug trafficking networks. This security alignment marks a crucial phase in stabilizing broader Mediterranean security architecture.

While repairing international partnerships, Algeria focused heavily on its long-term domestic economic infrastructure during a Council of Ministers meeting chaired by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune on May 17. The executive session prioritized accelerating structural public works projects, specifically the multi-kilometer Eastern Mining Line. This strategic railway network connects the Bled El Hadba phosphate

deposit directly to the expanding Port of Annaba, laying the groundwork for diversified export capabilities.

This infrastructure push directly supports Algiers' broader strategy to establish an integrated national industrial base in petrochemical production. During the same ministerial review, President Tebboune urged officials to double processing investments to transform Algeria into a leading regional manufacturer of industrial raw materials. By combining deep maritime expansion with domestic resource processing, the government aims to systematically shield its economy from the volatility of global hydrocarbon markets.

## **Libya**

Libya's energy infrastructure stabilized on May 10 when the strategic Zawiya oil refinery fully resumed operations following emergency repairs. A violent security breakdown on May 8 had forced a complete plant shutdown and tanker evacuations due to heavy artillery shelling. While fuel lines to Tripoli were successfully protected, the volatile incident underscores the continuous vulnerability of critical energy assets to localized factional warfare.

To address the volatile security fallout from the Zawiya clashes, United Nations Special Representative Hanna Tetteh held an urgent strategy session with Presidential Council Deputy Abdullah Al-Lafi on May 16. Their high-profile meeting focused heavily on mitigating militia warfare in western Libya while advancing the UN-facilitated political roadmap. The consultations sought to insulate fragile national tracks from localized armed groups that continue to threaten municipal and economic stability.

This push for stability framed the latest United Nations Support Mission session of the four-plus-four "mini-table" committee convened in Tunis on May 12. Bringing together rival representatives from the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity and the eastern-based Libyan National Army, the talks focused on designing a viable constitutional framework for national elections. The session ultimately concluded without a legislative breakthrough, deferring subsequent reconciliation talks to early June.

While political talks stalled in Tunis, a rare parallel security convergence emerged in mid-May during an international defense exhibition in Turkey. Libyan National Army Deputy Commander Saddam Haftar held direct consultations with the Tripoli government's Deputy Defense Minister, Abdulsalam al-Zoubi. Facilitated by Turkish intelligence and defense chiefs, the high-level engagement focused on a unified framework to merge parallel military commands, signaling an unexpected pragmatic shift in security relations.

This security push occurred alongside aggressive external diplomacy at the United Nations Security Council, where member states evaluated a proposal to levy targeted personal sanctions against five prominent Libyan elites. The recommended list targets

influential actors, particularly within the energy sector, accused of illicit petroleum exports and diverting sovereign wealth. Simultaneously, the council prepared to renew the critical maritime arms inspection mandate ahead of its May 25 expiration.

Complementing these international diplomatic measures, Human Rights Watch announced a landmark international justice milestone on May 13 regarding the International Criminal Court's Libya investigation. Pre-trial judges scheduled a critical confirmation of charges hearing for Khaled Mohamed Ali El Hishri, a former senior commander within the al-Radaa militia. Accused of crimes against humanity at Tripoli's Mitiga Prison, El Hishri represents the first suspect brought directly before the court in fifteen years.

## **13. Middle East**

### **Iran-Israel Conflict**

On May 11, the fragile regional truce faced a severe diplomatic test when the United States characterized Iran's peace proposal as unacceptable. Asserting that the ceasefire was on life support, Washington rejected Tehran's demands for an immediate end to the naval blockade and extensive sanctions relief. This friction underscored how both nations continue to utilize the paused hostilities as strategic leverage rather than a baseline for genuine compromise.

This diplomatic gridlock directly impacted critical maritime corridors, most notably the Strait of Hormuz, where Iran asserted its authority to regulate vessel transit and potentially impose transit tolls. In response, international powers, including the United States and China, emphasized that freedom of navigation must be maintained without unilateral restrictions. The dispute illustrates how local geographic access is continually converted into critical bargaining chips for broader geopolitical negotiations.

Despite these broad maritime and diplomatic challenges, regional negotiators achieved a brief reprieve on May 15 when the United States announced a 45-day extension of the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire. This temporary prolongation, secured through intense diplomatic efforts in Washington, aims to establish a structured framework for subsequent security and political discussions. While the agreement successfully deferred immediate escalation, the underlying security environment along the shared border remains intensely fragile.

The fragility of that border agreement was vividly illustrated on May 12 when an explosive Hezbollah drone detonated near Margaliot, triggering localized fires in northern Israel. The Israel Defense Forces engaged several inbound aerial threats, highlighting the operational challenge posed by low-cost, fiber-optic drone technologies. These persistent cross-border incidents underscore that military readiness and defensive operations continue despite the diplomatic frameworks currently being negotiated in Washington.

The security challenges linked to regional proxy networks extended beyond immediate borders on May 15, when United States authorities formally indicted a senior Kataib Hezbollah commander. Mohammad Baqer Saad Dawoud al-Saadi was charged with orchestrating complex plots targeting civilian populations across North America and Europe. This legal development emphasizes the expansive, extra-regional reach of Iranian-backed groups, even during periods of reduced kinetic operations within the Middle East theater.

Regional security anxieties reached an unprecedented peak on May 17 when a drone strike targeted the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant complex in the United Arab Emirates. Although air defenses intercepted two incoming drones, a third struck an external electrical generator, causing a fire without impacting radiological safety or core operations. The incident represents a significant escalation, signaling that critical infrastructure remains highly vulnerable to sophisticated aerial incursions.

As external proxy operations and infrastructure strikes intensified, Iran focused on securing its domestic front by executing an individual convicted of espionage on May 13. The judiciary carried out the sentence against Ehsan Afrashteh, who was accused of collecting and transmitting highly sensitive intelligence to Israeli security agencies. This high-profile execution emphasizes Tehran's intensified wartime counterintelligence campaign to deter internal dissent and mitigate external espionage threats.

The broader regional friction culminated on May 17 as localized operations continued in the Gaza Strip, with targeted strikes occurring near Khan Younis and Deir al-Balah. Despite active mediation efforts, local security operations persisted as forces engaged immediate tactical threats. These events serve as a reminder that regional stability remains complex and multi-layered, with individual theaters heavily influencing the overarching peace process.

## **Turkey**

Turkey marked a historic shift in regional logistics on May 12 by officially reopening the Akçakale border crossing with Syria, ending a twelve-year civilian closure. This major step reflects an accelerating normalization between Ankara and the new administration in Damascus. By restoring direct passenger and passport controls, Turkey aims to stabilize its immediate southern border while cultivating deep, post-conflict commercial ties across the Levant.

This template of economic pragmatism extended eastward on May 13 when the Foreign Ministry announced the removal of decades-old customs restrictions against Armenia. Effective May 11, the new regulatory mechanism allows bilateral goods to be formally documented with their true country of origin rather than being obscured through third-

party re-exporters. The policy marks a significant breakthrough in South Caucasus economic connectivity and ongoing normalization talks.

The momentum toward regional reconciliation was further emphasized at the United Nations Security Council on May 15. Turkey's permanent representative, Ahmet Yıldız, affirmed that Syria is steadily advancing toward sustainable stability. In an unexpected strategic pivot, Ambassador Yıldız advocated for the comprehensive execution of the Damascus-SDF agreement, declaring that a unified Syrian state requires the total integration of parallel military structures into a single national system.

Beyond its immediate neighborhood, Ankara aggressively pursued its continental security alignment during a high-profile economic mission in Istanbul on May 11. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hosted Belgium's Queen Mathilde for a closed-door summit at the Vahdettin Mansion. Turkish leadership utilized the bilateral engagement to reaffirm that comprehensive European security and industrial frameworks remain fundamentally incomplete without Turkey's active, autonomous integration and advanced tech cooperation.

This insistence on strategic autonomy took a concrete legislative form in mid-May as parliament prepared to debate a unified "Blue Homeland" bill. Publicly introduced by maritime law experts on May 12, the draft legislation seeks to formally codify Turkey's contested maritime jurisdiction across the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. By institutionalizing these expansive claims, Ankara aims to establish a permanent, rule-setting presence in critical energy corridors.

Securing these waters is directly tied to Turkey's broader ambitions to dominate Eurasian transit, highlighted by mid-May assessments of the Iraq-Turkey Development Road. This infrastructure project seeks to connect the Persian Gulf directly to European rail networks via Iraqi territory. By positioning its geography as a viable alternative to rival trade corridors, Ankara is attempting to capture vital global financial and cargo flows.

Turkey's maritime infrastructure also facilitated civil activism on May 14, when the Global Sumud Flotilla departed from Marmaris. Comprising dozens of vessels and international activists, the convoy launched a new attempt to deliver humanitarian aid and breach the naval blockade of Gaza. The deployment highlights how civil organizations continue utilizing Turkish ports to draw global attention back to the Palestinian enclave.

However, Turkey's expansive financial and logistical networks also attracted severe international scrutiny on May 14. A newly unsealed United States federal indictment exposed a covert Iranian weapons-trafficking ring that utilized loosely regulated Turkish currency exchanges to finance illicit hardware shipments to Sudan. The legal exposure underscores enduring vulnerabilities within Turkey's regulatory framework, which external actors continue to exploit to circumvent global sanctions.

These external security pressures coincide with a highly polarized domestic environment. While some initial reporting suggested a formal investigation into opposition leader Özgür Özel for wiretapping, the reality is a bit different: Özel actually condemned what he called an escalating campaign of judicial intimidation against the political opposition. He pointed to systemic government pressure while highlighting bizarre allegations regarding unauthorized surveillance among top officials.

This domestic friction is mirrored in the continuous judicial fallout affecting opposition-run municipalities in Istanbul and Antalya, where anti-corruption probes have led to numerous detentions. The tightening political environment was formally captured in the 2026 World Press Freedom Index, which documented Turkey's drop to 163rd place globally. The index emphasized that systematic regulatory constraints and media consolidation continue to restrict the country's independent journalistic space.

## Syria

The European Union officially launched the first EU-Syria High-Level Political Dialogue in Brussels on May 11, marking a major milestone in global diplomacy. Co-chaired by EU High Representative Kaja Kallas and Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani, the session focused on long-term partnership strategies. The historic move signaled an international pivot toward supporting Syria's transitional administration, emphasizing comprehensive economic recovery and sustainable post-conflict stabilization.

Connected to this diplomatic re-engagement, senior Syrian officials on May 13 outlined plans for an expansive Euro-Mediterranean integration strategy. The transitional administration is actively seeking robust economic partnerships alongside a comprehensive security agreement with European allies. This proposed framework aims to formalize long-term counterterrorism cooperation, establish streamlined police training programs, and create mutual trade mechanisms that solidify Damascus's alignment with Western security architectures.

This Western diplomatic momentum extended directly to Damascus on May 16, when transitional President Ahmed al-Sharaa hosted United States Special Envoy Thomas Barrack. The bilateral discussions focused heavily on enhancing economic cooperation and managing critical internal security shifts. Following the review, Envoy Barrack publicly praised Syria's demonstrable transition progress, emphasizing that the dismantling of illicit networks presents significant, promising reform opportunities for international stabilization.

In tandem with rising Western confidence, U.N. Special Envoy Geir Pedersen announced on May 15 a strategic relocation of key United Nations operational staff directly from Geneva to Damascus. Concurrently, a U.N. Security Council briefing acknowledged real but fragile political progress across the country. While celebrating these institutional

milestones, international diplomats warned that significant structural and economic obstacles remain to be resolved during this transitional phase.

To address these persistent structural challenges, the transitional government rolled out comprehensive new civic guidelines on May 13 to guarantee equal rights and robust protections for all religious and ethnic minorities. This domestic reform effort was reinforced on May 17, when Syria's primary election official announced a major structural shift for upcoming legislative contests. Future parliamentary selection will prioritize professional qualifications and merit over traditional fractional alignments.

These legal and political overhauls are unfolding alongside a rapid revitalization of vital cross-border logistics. On May 12, the strategic Bab al-Hawa border crossing formally transitioned to facilitate regular commercial traffic, re-establishing direct economic transit between Aleppo and southern Turkey. This reopening follows extensive technical rehabilitation and modernization projects designed to expand trade capacity, optimize cargo processing speeds, and restore the Levant's historic mercantile connectivity.

The revitalization of northern trade routes is directly tied to Damascus actively enforcing central authority over former Syrian Democratic Forces territory. Internal security updates from May 15 confirmed ongoing implementation of the central integration agreement. This consolidation proved critical on May 16, as intelligence briefings revealed that the Syrian military has intensified targeted counterterrorism operations to prevent remnant ISIL cells from exploiting transitional vulnerabilities.

While domestic stabilization efforts advanced, regional military commands warned on May 17 that localized border friction continues to present distinct security challenges. Intensified cross-border incidents near the Lebanese frontier highlight the persistent vulnerability of the broader regional ceasefire. Despite active Western diplomatic interventions, these localized flare-ups serve as a reminder that external proxy dynamics remain interconnected with Syria's delicate, multi-front stabilization process.

## **14. Global Powers**

During the past week, United States foreign policy operated under conditions of simultaneous strain across three interconnected arenas: the Iran crisis and maritime insecurity in the Gulf, the high-stakes Trump–Xi summit in Beijing, and residual diplomatic management of the Ukraine–Russia truce environment. The week was defined less by breakthroughs than by stabilization attempts under structural pressure, where Washington sought to prevent concurrent escalation in multiple theaters while maintaining credibility across alliances and adversaries.

At the center of the week was the deterioration of the Iran ceasefire framework. On May 11, President Donald Trump publicly rejected Tehran's response to a U.S. 14-point ceasefire proposal, describing it as "totally unacceptable" and characterizing the April 8

ceasefire as being on “life support.” The United States maintained a robust naval posture in and around the Strait of Hormuz, where intermittent maritime incidents and drone-related threats continued to sustain a high-alert operational environment. Iran, for its part, insisted that sanctions relief and broader political concessions were preconditions for any durable arrangement and accused Washington of continuing coercive pressure through its naval presence and sanctions regime. Mediation efforts involving Qatar and other regional interlocutors produced no meaningful breakthrough, and the diplomatic channel remained largely stalled.

Throughout this period, Washington maintained a dual-track approach combining coercive pressure with limited diplomatic signaling. Trump repeatedly stated that the United States did not require external mediation, including from China, to resolve the Iran issue, while also emphasizing that outcomes could be achieved through either negotiation or force if necessary. Senior officials including Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio engaged indirectly with regional mediators, but the structural gap between U.S. demands and Iranian conditions remained wide. Energy market sensitivity to Hormuz disruption also began influencing domestic policy considerations in Washington, particularly regarding fuel price stability and broader inflation concerns linked to maritime insecurity.

Parallel to the Iran crisis, U.S. diplomacy was heavily absorbed by preparations for and execution of the Trump–Xi summit in Beijing, which took place from approximately May 13 to 15. The summit became the most consequential diplomatic engagement of the week, not only because of bilateral U.S.–China tensions, but because it directly intersected with the Iran crisis, maritime security, and global energy flows. Trump traveled with a delegation that included senior business leaders from major American firms, reflecting the degree to which economic diplomacy and strategic statecraft were fused in this engagement.

The agenda in Beijing extended across multiple layers of strategic competition. Discussions included trade imbalances, tariff structures, artificial intelligence governance, rare earth supply chains, Taiwan, and the Iran crisis, particularly the question of Chinese oil imports from Iran and Beijing’s potential leverage over Tehran. The United States sought Chinese cooperation in limiting Iranian escalation and maintaining open maritime routes through Hormuz, while China maintained a cautious position, emphasizing stability and avoiding explicit alignment with U.S. coercive measures.

The summit concluded with both sides publicly emphasizing “strategic stability” and limited economic deliverables. These included expanded Chinese commitments to purchase American agricultural products, renewed aviation-related commercial discussions including Boeing aircraft sales, and the establishment of new bilateral economic coordination mechanisms. However, the outcomes remained largely

incremental. On core strategic issues such as Iran, Taiwan, and technological competition, no substantive convergence was achieved. The United States did not secure Chinese agreement to pressure Iran in a meaningful way, while China avoided any commitments that would constrain its energy relationship with Tehran or alter its strategic autonomy.

A notable feature of the summit was the asymmetry between economic progress and geopolitical stagnation. While trade-related agreements provided a narrative of cooperation, the underlying strategic competition remained intact. Taiwan was handled cautiously in public communications, with limited official emphasis despite its reported significance in closed-door discussions. This reflected Washington's attempt to prioritize immediate stabilization with China in the context of concurrent Middle East instability.

Beyond the summit itself, a broader structural development was the gradual shift in U.S. China strategy toward what increasingly resembles managed competition rather than full-scale economic decoupling. The presence of major American corporate executives in Beijing, alongside renewed discussions on aviation, agriculture, and selected technology flows, indicated a pragmatic recalibration. Washington appears increasingly focused on controlling inflationary pressures, stabilizing supply chains, and managing technological competition within defined boundaries rather than pursuing systemic separation.

At the same time, maritime security emerged as an overarching framework connecting multiple U.S. theaters of concern. The Strait of Hormuz remained the central flashpoint, but the strategic lens expanded to include the Red Sea, Yemen, and broader Indo-Pacific sea lanes. Washington increasingly viewed these corridors as interconnected nodes of vulnerability affecting global energy markets, shipping insurance costs, and allied economic stability. This reflected a shift toward treating maritime insecurity not as isolated regional crises but as a unified strategic domain intersecting with great power competition.

On May 12, President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia plans to deploy the RS-28 Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile system into operational service by the end of 2026. He described it as the most powerful strategic missile in Russia's arsenal and emphasized its ability to carry multiple nuclear warheads and bypass existing missile defense systems. The announcement followed a recent test launch and was framed explicitly as part of Russia's broader nuclear modernization effort.

The Kremlin officially announced that Putin would pay a state visit to China on May 19–20, 2026, at Xi Jinping's invitation, with preparations already completed and the visit framed around strengthening strategic cooperation between Russia and China.

Around the same period, reporting indicated continued expansion of Russia-linked defense cooperation with aligned states and partners. One notable development was a reported arms transfer arrangement involving Cuba acquiring more than 300 drones from

Russia and Iran, reflecting the widening diffusion of drone warfare technologies through informal and semi-aligned networks.

During the past week, Chinese foreign policy focused on balancing strategic autonomy with pragmatic stabilization amid overlapping global pressures. Beijing navigated the ongoing Iran crisis and Hormuz maritime tensions, hosted the high-level Trump–Xi summit, and prepared for President Vladimir Putin’s upcoming state visit. The approach emphasized “strategic stability,” economic pragmatism, and positioning China as a responsible stakeholder in global energy security and multipolar diplomacy, without making binding alignments that could compromise its core interests.

The Iran crisis and Strait of Hormuz instability remained a top priority for Beijing due to China’s heavy reliance on seaborne energy imports. China is Iran’s largest oil buyer (accounting for the vast majority of Tehran’s exports, often via shadow fleet mechanisms), while a significant portion of its crude imports transits the Strait. Disruptions raised concerns over supply security, price volatility, and inflationary risks. Beijing maintained its long-standing ties with Tehran, stressing the need for sanctions relief and diplomatic solutions rather than coercive pressure. Chinese officials urged restraint from all parties through quiet channels and public calls for de-escalation.

The Trump–Xi summit in Beijing (May 13–15) dominated the diplomatic calendar and served as the week’s central event. President Trump arrived with a delegation including U.S. business leaders, reflecting intertwined economic and strategic agendas. Discussions covered trade imbalances, tariffs, agricultural purchases, aviation (e.g., Boeing), rare earths, AI governance, Taiwan, and the Iran/Hormuz situation—particularly Chinese oil imports from Iran and potential leverage over Tehran.

Outcomes were incremental and framed publicly around “strategic stability.” Deliverables included expanded Chinese commitments to U.S. agricultural products, renewed commercial talks on aviation, and new bilateral economic coordination mechanisms. However, no breakthroughs occurred on core geopolitical issues: China avoided commitments to meaningfully pressure Iran or alter its energy ties with Tehran, while maintaining its positions on Taiwan and technological competition. The summit highlighted an asymmetry—modest economic progress alongside persistent strategic divergence—signaling a shift toward managed competition. Beijing appeared to prioritize supply chain stability, inflation control, and selective openness to U.S. business engagement over full decoupling.

China projected a calm, confident posture, with Xi emphasizing mutual respect and win-win outcomes. The hosting of the summit amid Middle East volatility underscored Beijing’s diplomatic centrality and its preference for dialogue over confrontation. Taiwan received cautious handling in public statements despite its importance in private talks.

Russia-China ties advanced steadily in parallel. Preparations intensified for Putin's state visit to China on May 19–20, framed around the 25th anniversary of the 2001 Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation. The visit is expected to strengthen strategic coordination, economic ties, and joint positioning on international issues.

## 15. European Countries

A major diplomatic development occurred in Nairobi, where France repositioned its Africa policy through a large-scale investment and partnership summit co-hosted with Kenya. On May 12, President Emmanuel Macron announced a €23 billion (approximately \$27 billion) investment package aimed at Africa, covering sectors including energy, artificial intelligence, agriculture, infrastructure, and industrial development. The initiative was jointly structured through both French corporate investment and African co-financing, reflecting a shift from aid-based relations toward co-investment and “partnership of equals.” The summit also symbolized France's strategic attempt to rebuild influence in Africa after declining presence in parts of the Sahel and West Africa, while expanding engagement with Anglophone African states such as Kenya.

President Emmanuel Macron also visited Egypt and Ethiopia as part of an African tour aimed at reinforcing France's role in regional security and diplomacy; in Egypt he discussed maritime security, energy stability, and Red Sea–Mediterranean risks with President Sisi, while in Ethiopia he met Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and African Union leaders, focusing on governance reform, UN Security Council restructuring, and economic cooperation within France's broader Africa investment push.

Parallel to its economic diplomacy, France also moved into a more explicit security posture in relation to Middle Eastern maritime instability. Reports indicated that France deployed its aircraft carrier strike group, centered on the *Charles de Gaulle*, toward the wider Gulf and Indian Ocean operational theatre as part of a European-led maritime security initiative linked to the Strait of Hormuz crisis. The deployment was framed as defensive and focused on ensuring freedom of navigation amid rising regional instability affecting global energy flows. This move signaled a more active European naval role in protecting maritime trade routes, even while avoiding direct confrontation with Iran.

The United Kingdom has committed military assets, including jets, drones, and a naval vessel, to a coordinated maritime security effort aimed at protecting shipping routes in the Strait of Hormuz and wider Gulf waters. The move is framed as defensive, focused on safeguarding freedom of navigation and stabilizing energy and trade routes amid rising regional tensions involving Iran and ongoing disruption risks to global shipping.

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

### **United Nation**

UN frameworks supported AU/IGAD efforts on Somalia and regional issues. The AU-UN annual conference (around May 13) discussed the Horn of Africa, stressing full implementation of the Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) and preventive action against interstate tensions.

Ongoing humanitarian coordination, climate-peace-security linkages, and migration efforts linking to the International Migration Review Forum/IMRF continued. AUSSOM mandate support and political facilitation in Somalia were highlighted.

### **Africa Union**

The AU focused on political stability in Somalia. On May 16, 2026, the African Union Commission issued a statement expressing concern over the lack of consensus in the May 13–15 high-level negotiations in Mogadishu between the Federal Government of Somalia led by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and the Somali Future Council opposition. The Commission commended the willingness to engage in dialogue but cautioned against entrenchment of positions, urging all stakeholders to recommit to inclusive negotiations, mutual compromise and adherence to constitutional order.

The AU reaffirmed its commitment to Somalia through the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) and praised facilitation efforts by the UN, AU, and bilateral partners.

### **African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM)**

AUSSOM maintained operational tempo amid ongoing threats from Al-Shabaab. Recent activities included joint operations with Somali National Armed Forces (SNAF), such as defensive actions in areas like Mubarak, with reports of militants neutralized in prior engagements around mid-May. The mission continued capacity-building, coordination with troop-contributing countries, and efforts to consolidate security gains while supporting stabilization. Funding and sustainability challenges persisted as a key concern, despite mandate renewal to December 31, 2026.

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

IGAD advanced climate resilience and water security initiatives this week, with a strong emphasis on practical implementation for communities facing climate shocks. On May 13, 2026, in Nairobi, Kenya, IGAD convened a three-day regional workshop under the Horn of Africa Groundwater for Resilience (HoA GW4R) Programme. The workshop, themed “Strengthening Project Impact Unblocking Bottlenecks to Accelerate Country Implementation brought together Member States and partners to review progress on

feasibility studies for transboundary aquifers, National Groundwater Centres, the Groundwater Information System, and capacity building.

IGAD Executive Secretary Workneh Gebeyehu's office highlighted groundwater's strategic role in climate resilience, water security, food systems, and regional stability. Participants focused on governance, data sharing, procurement challenges, and expanding the Groundwater Information System for drought monitoring and irrigation planning. Kenya emphasized stronger regional cooperation amid population growth and rising demand.

IGAD also engaged on Somalia's political situation. The Secretariat called for continued dialogue following stalled high-level negotiations between the Federal Government of Somalia and the Somali Future Council held May 13–15. This aligns with broader regional efforts to support inclusive political processes.

Earlier context included IGAD's participation in the Africa Forward Summit (around May 12) in Nairobi, where Deputy Executive Secretary Mohamed Abdi Ware advanced the region's agenda on resilience, investment, industrialization, and sustainable development.



# **HORN** **REVIEW**

**IDEAS CONNECTIONS SYNERGY**

**Ideas | Connections | Synergy**

---