



Weekly Geopolitical Report

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

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Horn Review: Weekly Report

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1. Ethiopia

Ethiopia continued expanding its diplomatic engagement with Gulf powers this week, particularly Saudi Arabia, as Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos held high-level discussions with Saudi Vice Foreign Minister Waleed Elkhereiji on labor migration, regional security, and economic cooperation. Beyond the bilateral dimension, the meeting reflected Addis Ababa’s growing recognition that Gulf actors have become central geopolitical players shaping Red Sea security, labor dynamics, and broader stability across the Horn of Africa.

This broader diplomatic diversification strategy was further reinforced through Ethiopia’s expanding engagement with Qatar. High-level meetings in Doha focused on political cooperation, investment opportunities, and regional developments affecting the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea corridor. The discussions highlighted the increasingly influential role Gulf states now play in African geopolitics, while also underscoring Ethiopia’s effort to carefully balance partnerships across Africa, the Middle East, and emerging global power centers.

Regional cooperation also advanced through the Horn Inter-Elite Dialogue held in Jijjiga under the theme “Strengthening Regional Agency for Durable Peace in the Horn of Africa.” Officials from Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Djibouti emphasized the need for regionally led solutions to conflict, maritime insecurity, and political instability. The dialogue reflected Ethiopia’s continued effort to promote “Horn solutions for Horn problems” while strengthening diplomatic trust among neighboring states.

Economic modernization remained another defining theme this week as Ethiopia highlighted progress in industrial productivity, agricultural modernization, and domestic manufacturing expansion. Officials emphasized that current reforms are designed to reduce import dependency and strengthen local production capacities. The government increasingly presents industrial self-reliance not only as an economic necessity, but also as a strategic requirement for maintaining national sovereignty amid intensifying global economic competition.

Environmental diplomacy also gained visibility as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and Armenia marked the International Day for Biodiversity with renewed calls for local environmental action and stronger community participation. The discussions highlighted how biodiversity loss, climate stress, and environmental degradation are increasingly interconnected with economic vulnerability and regional

instability, particularly in African states facing rapid urbanization and climate-related pressures.

At the center of Ethiopia's technological transformation agenda, Addis Ababa hosted a landmark national conference and exhibition under the theme "Data Sovereignty for Policy Autonomy." Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stated that Ethiopia's ability to generate and manage its own statistical systems is becoming essential for informed policymaking and development planning. The conference reflected the government's wider attempt to reduce reliance on externally generated frameworks and strengthen national policy independence.

The emphasis on sovereignty and domestic ownership extended into Ethiopia's evolving democratic process ahead of the June 2026 general election. Public participation in electoral preparations continued to increase, while civil society organizations prepared to deploy more than 60,000 domestic observers nationwide. Ethiopian officials described the process as evidence of growing democratic confidence and a political culture increasingly shaped by internal civic engagement rather than external pressure.

Regional election observation also became an important diplomatic development after IGAD confirmed preparations to deploy observers from across East Africa to monitor Ethiopia's upcoming election. The initiative demonstrates the organization's growing role in promoting electoral transparency, regional confidence-building, and political dialogue within the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia's willingness to engage regional observers also signals confidence in institutional reform and electoral legitimacy.

Parallel to election preparations, Ethiopia's National Dialogue Commission continued consultations with faith leaders, civil society groups, and community representatives across the country. The process increasingly appears designed not simply as a reconciliation mechanism, but as a long-term framework for building inclusive political consensus. Officials emphasized that sustainable national unity can only emerge through dialogue, negotiation, and broader public participation across Ethiopia's diverse political landscape.

Ethiopia also strengthened its economic diplomacy through the signing of a bilateral accession protocol with India supporting Addis Ababa's bid to join the World Trade Organization. The agreement highlighted Ethiopia's growing engagement with emerging global economies and BRICS-associated partners. This development reflects Addis Ababa's strategy of diversifying economic alliances beyond traditional Western institutions while expanding trade and investment access.

Another major development involved Ethiopia's continued efforts to deepen regional economic integration and connectivity projects across East Africa. Officials stressed that infrastructure, trade corridors, and energy cooperation remain critical for stabilizing the

Horn of Africa's fragmented economic landscape. Ethiopia increasingly views regional integration not only as an economic project, but also as a geopolitical tool capable of reducing conflict and strengthening interdependence.

Migration and mobility issues also generated diplomatic discussion this week after the European Union adopted more restrictive visa measures affecting Ethiopian citizens. The decision raised concerns about the widening gap between Europe's strategic rhetoric toward Africa and its tightening migration policies. Analysts warned that restrictive visa frameworks risk weakening trust with African partners at a time when European states are competing for greater geopolitical influence across the continent.

Continental debates over Africa's representation within global governance structures also gained renewed momentum this week, as policymakers and regional institutions increasingly argued that existing financial and diplomatic systems no longer reflect the continent's rising geopolitical and economic significance. Within this broader push for a more balanced international order, IGAD's role received particular attention as one of the Horn of Africa's most critical regional mechanisms for sustaining dialogue, managing interstate tensions, coordinating drought and migration responses, and supporting conflict prevention efforts. Ethiopian officials emphasized that, despite persistent regional rivalries and fragile political transitions, IGAD remains essential for preserving regional stability and strengthening the Horn's capacity to address its own security and development challenges through cooperative regional frameworks.

2. Sudan

During the week, Sudan's conflict continued to expand geographically and politically with renewed fighting near the Ethiopian border, intensified drone warfare, growing humanitarian distress, and widening diplomatic maneuvering involving Gulf, African, and international actors. The military dimension of the war increasingly intersected with regional geopolitics, particularly around Ethiopia, the UAE, and the wider Horn of Africa security environment.

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) announced that it had captured additional territory near the Ethiopian border following clashes with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), reinforcing the growing strategic importance of the Blue Nile theatre. The military later claimed that it intercepted and shot down a hostile drone near Ed Damazin after it allegedly crossed from Ethiopian territory. Khartoum again accused Addis Ababa of facilitating drone operations linked to the RSF and SPLM-N positions in Blue Nile, particularly around Kurmuk and Geissan. Ethiopia has consistently denied involvement, and no independently verified evidence has publicly confirmed direct Ethiopian operational participation. Nevertheless, the allegations reflect how Sudan's war is increasingly spilling into regional diplomatic relations.

At the same time, many regional observers note that Ethiopia's broader strategic posture appears aimed less at direct intervention and more at preventing prolonged instability along its western frontier. Addis Ababa remains deeply concerned about armed fragmentation in Blue Nile and the possibility that external powers could instrumentalize Sudan's conflict in ways that threaten Ethiopian security interests around the Nile Basin and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). This concern has become increasingly visible as RSF-SPLM-N operations expanded near the Ethiopia-Sudan border corridor.

Fighting in South Kordofan and Blue Nile continued to produce severe civilian consequences. Drone strikes in Dilling destroyed critical medical warehouses and injured civilians, further collapsing healthcare infrastructure already weakened by months of bombardment. Humanitarian organizations reported that repeated attacks on hospitals, aid routes, and civilian infrastructure are becoming systemic features of the conflict rather than isolated incidents.

The humanitarian situation continued deteriorating nationwide. IPC findings warned that nearly 20 million Sudanese are experiencing acute hunger conditions. Aid agencies stressed that food insecurity is being worsened by the destruction of markets, transport corridors, health systems, and agricultural networks. In El Obeid and other frontline areas, civilians fleeing combat zones reportedly died from dehydration and exhaustion while attempting to navigate unsafe escape routes. Relief organizations also warned that humanitarian access remains heavily constrained across Darfur, Kordofan, and parts of Khartoum.

Despite ongoing violence, some returns of displaced Sudanese continued. More than 2,000 Sudanese citizens returned from Egypt during the week through organized voluntary repatriation programs, while additional flights brought returnees from Libya into Port Sudan. The organized returns reflect a complex reality in which some areas of central Sudan, particularly Khartoum, are experiencing cautious stabilization following SAF territorial gains, even as large parts of the country remain engulfed in war. Reports from Khartoum described slow recovery efforts amid extensive infrastructural destruction and economic collapse.

Economically, the war continues reshaping Sudan into a fragmented wartime economy. Reports highlighted how gold exports remain one of the few functioning revenue streams. Sudan exported nearly five tonnes of gold in April and May alone, surpassing total official exports during the first quarter of the year. Artisanal mining continues to dominate production, though much of the sector remains tied to informal wartime networks and areas controlled by armed actors. Parallel reporting also showed how Sudan's monetary system has become deeply fractured by the war, with localized

financial systems and informal economic structures increasingly replacing coherent national governance.

The RSF meanwhile escalated pressure through economic threats. Reports indicated that the group threatened to disrupt oil flows unless SAF drone strikes ceased. Such threats underscore how strategic infrastructure is increasingly being weaponized as part of broader coercive bargaining between the warring sides.

Politically, competing diplomatic tracks gained visibility during the week. Sudanese civilian and armed political groups gathered in Nairobi under the “Sudanese Declaration of Principles Forces for Building a New Homeland.” The talks, involving figures such as former Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and Abdelwahid Mohamed al-Nur, called for a unified anti-war civilian bloc and rejected military solutions to the conflict. The coalition advocated a transition centered on civilian governance, accountability, and integration of armed groups into a unified national military structure. However, divisions remain substantial, especially regarding the role of the UAE and regional mediation structures.

The UAE question remained central throughout the week. Reports suggested Bahrain has attempted to mediate indirect communication between Khartoum and Abu Dhabi amid ongoing Sudanese accusations that the UAE supports the RSF militarily through regional supply networks. Sudan’s Sovereign Council officially denied reports claiming General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan was prepared to open talks with the UAE under specific conditions. Nonetheless, multiple diplomatic sources indicated that exploratory communication efforts are ongoing behind the scenes. The issue reflects a broader regional struggle over influence in Sudan, where Gulf rivalries intersect with Red Sea security competition.

International actors also intensified engagement. The United States continued pushing for humanitarian ceasefire arrangements while warning that Sudan has evolved into a dangerous proxy conflict involving multiple regional powers. France sent its first parliamentary delegation to Sudan since the war began, visiting displacement camps and documenting alleged atrocities. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and Sudan advanced plans to institutionalize bilateral cooperation through a new Strategic Cooperation Council expected to launch after Eid al-Adha. Turkey and Sudan also signed new agreements on agriculture, mining, and reconstruction cooperation in Ankara, demonstrating that external powers continue positioning themselves for influence in Sudan’s eventual post-war recovery phase.

On the military front, internal fragmentation within the RSF also surfaced. Dissident commander Ali Rizqallah “Savannah” defected from the RSF and arrived in Khartoum, where reports indicated he is now coordinating with Sudanese military intelligence. His defection reportedly triggered arrests of fighters associated with his faction inside RSF-controlled territory and may signal growing strains within the paramilitary coalition.

Social tensions and identity politics continued intensifying as well. New anti-racism and anti-hate speech campaigns were launched amid growing concerns over ethnic polarization fueled by wartime propaganda. Human rights organizations also continued documenting abuses against migrants, displaced populations, and ethnic minorities.

Meanwhile, Sudan's airspace and transport infrastructure remained fragile. Khartoum airport resumed limited operations despite repeated drone attacks, while aviation authorities warned about broader security and public health risks linked to resumed regional air traffic. The broader picture reflects a country simultaneously attempting partial state recovery while still deeply trapped inside an expanding multidimensional war.

Overall, the week demonstrated that Sudan's conflict is no longer confined to a domestic struggle between SAF and the RSF. It is increasingly embedded within a wider Horn of Africa geopolitical contest involving Nile security, Red Sea influence, proxy alignments, and regional power competition. Yet despite intensifying rhetoric and mutual accusations, regional actors such as Ethiopia continue signaling a preference for preventing full regional escalation rather than allowing Sudan's war to evolve into a broader interstate confrontation.

3. Egypt

Egypt spent the week trying to widen its diplomatic room while the region remained under heavy strain. Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty pushed for a return to U.S.-Iran negotiations and discussed de-escalation with Massad Boulos, stressing that dialogue was the only durable way to prevent broader regional fallout. Cairo also kept working through regional channels, including coordination with Arab, Gulf, and European counterparts, which shows that Egypt is trying to position itself as a stabilizing broker rather than a bystander in the war's spillover. Fitch's assessment that Egypt's exchange-rate flexibility helped absorb capital outflows reinforces the point that Cairo is already feeling the economic shock of the conflict, even if its policy buffers are still holding.

That diplomatic line was matched by a sharper security posture in the Red Sea. Egypt and Yemen publicly rejected any attempt to "internationalize" or "militarize" the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, arguing that security of the waterway should remain in the hands of the littoral Arab and African states. That message matters because it places Egypt firmly against any extra-regional security architecture that could dilute coastal sovereignty, while also linking Red Sea governance to the wider struggle over shipping routes, energy flows, and wartime leverage. In practice, Cairo is trying to keep the maritime arena under regional control at a moment when every corridor is becoming part of the wider Iran crisis.

Egypt's Middle East posture also extended into symbolism and coalition-building. Cairo joined other Arab and Islamic states in condemning Somaliland's move to open a purported embassy in Jerusalem, calling it illegal and unacceptable and rejecting any unilateral change to Jerusalem's status. That fits a familiar Egyptian line: support for Palestinian claims, insistence on international legality, and resistance to actions that could normalize contested sovereignty claims through diplomacy alone. At the same time, Egypt's first joint committee meeting with Comoros added a softer institutional layer to its Africa policy, with both sides signing cooperation agreements in technical education, higher education, and diplomatic training. The mix is revealing: Egypt is hardening on sovereignty issues while still expanding its network of partnerships across Africa and the Arab world.

The broader picture is that Egypt is trying to do three things at once: reduce the Iran war's spillover, keep the Red Sea under regional control, and preserve its influence across the Horn. That strategy is coherent from Cairo's perspective, but it also deepens friction with Ethiopia, which sees itself as defending a lawful and peaceful path toward sea access against a tightening ring of diplomatic pressure. For an Ethiopian-centered reading, the key point is not that Egypt is simply "against Ethiopia," but that Cairo's current posture is being interpreted in Addis Ababa as an effort to shape the regional balance before Ethiopia's maritime ambitions can translate into leverage.

4. Eritrea

Eritrea celebrated "Independence Day," marking the 35th anniversary since the Eritrean People's Liberation Front achieved military victory over the Derg and formally seceded Eritrea from Ethiopia. The occasion was accompanied by renewed reflection among rights advocates and members of the Eritrean diaspora on the country's post-independence trajectory, including the absence of elections and constitutional implementation, restrictions on political and media freedoms, the dismantling of independent institutions, and the continuation of indefinite national service. Concerns were also raised regarding outmigration, limited higher education opportunities following the closure of University of Asmara, and broader governance conditions under President Isaias Afwerki's regime.

Eritrean state media reported that President Isaias Afwerki received congratulatory messages from a range of international leaders on the country's 35th "Independence Day," including from Russia, Egypt, Germany, the United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, and reportedly U.S. President Donald Trump. However, while Eritrean outlets claimed Trump sent an extensive message praising Eritrea's "steadfast spirit and resilience" and expressing support for peace and prosperity in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea, no corresponding statement appeared on the White House website as of May 24. The discrepancy has drawn attention amid ongoing discussions over a possible "defrosting" of relations between Washington and Asmara, particularly following reports that the U.S. is

considering lifting sanctions on Eritrea.

During a reception hosted by Eritrea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the country's 35th "Independence Day" celebrations, Foreign Minister Osman Saleh reiterated Asmara's longstanding emphasis on sovereignty, "nationally owned solutions," and opposition to "external interference, coercion, or imposition." The remarks also framed Eritrea's foreign policy positions as increasingly gaining international recognition amid shifting regional and global dynamics. The statements nevertheless contrast with Eritrea's long record of involvement in the internal affairs of neighbouring states. Over the past three decades, Asmara has been accused of supporting or hosting a range of armed and political groups across Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Djibouti, often as part of its broader regional security strategy and confrontation with rival governments.

During his visit to Asmara, Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty gave an interview to state media, describing Eritrea as a "pillar of stability" in the Horn of Africa and emphasized the close alignment between Cairo and Asmara on Red Sea security and regional affairs. Abdelatty praised President Isaias Afwerki's approach to regional diplomacy while stressing that governance and security of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden should remain exclusively under the authority of littoral states. The remarks reflect the deepening strategic convergence between Egypt and Eritrea amid tensions with Ethiopia over Addis Ababa's maritime ambitions and the broader geopolitical contest shaping the Horn of Africa and Red Sea region.

Osman Saleh met with Ghanem bin Mohamed Al Maadeed in Asmara on May 21, where the two sides discussed bilateral relations and areas of cooperation between Eritrea and Qatar. The meeting reflects continued diplomatic engagement between Asmara and Gulf states amid Eritrea's broader efforts to expand regional and international partnerships.

An Eritrean delegation led by Beyene Russom participated in the "Africa Forward Summit" held in Nairobi from May 11–12. The summit, jointly hosted by William Ruto and Emmanuel Macron, brought together African leaders and officials to discuss economic cooperation and relations between African states and France. Eritrean state media framed the participation as part of Asmara's ongoing diplomatic engagement with regional and international partners.

Sudan's Badr Airlines launched a new commercial route to Asmara, after it had ceased operation for several years, with Eritrean and Sudanese officials presenting the development as part of broader efforts to strengthen connectivity and bilateral ties. The airline will operate daily flights linking Eritrea with destinations across Africa and the Middle East via Port Sudan. The move also reflects the continued alignment between Asmara and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)-led administration in eastern Sudan amid wider regional realignments.

5. Djibouti

This week, Djibouti experienced major diplomatic, economic, and security developments centered on regional integration, transnational infrastructure expansion, and the consolidation of its strategic role within the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea corridor. The most significant development emerged from the approval by President Ismail Omar Guelleh of a major energy infrastructure proposal jointly advanced by the Dangote Group and Ethiopian Investment Holdings (EIH), outlining the construction of oil and gas pipelines connecting Ethiopia directly to Djiboutian ports. From the perspective of Ethiopian foreign and economic policy, the project represented more than a commercial investment; it reflected Addis Ababa's long-term strategy to secure diversified energy export and import infrastructure through stable regional partnerships while preserving Djibouti as its primary maritime gateway. For Djibouti, the agreement reinforced its ambition to evolve beyond a transit-dependent port economy into a regional energy and logistics hub integrated into East Africa's future industrial supply chains. The initiative also demonstrated the continued political alignment between President Guelleh and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, whose governments increasingly view economic interdependence as central to maintaining strategic stability in the Horn of Africa.

At the diplomatic and institutional level, Djibouti intensified its engagement with regional integration frameworks through the launch of high-level national consultations reviewing the upcoming IGAD Strategic Cycle (2026–2030). Led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the consultations focused on deeper regional integration, economic resilience, and peacebuilding under the broader framework of IGAD Vision 2050. Simultaneously, strategic analyses published during the week highlighted Ethiopia's ongoing "Corridor Imperative," a policy direction aimed at reducing excessive reliance on any single maritime outlet by exploring alternative trade and infrastructure routes alongside Djibouti. Nevertheless, despite Addis Ababa's broader search for diversified access corridors, the analyses acknowledged that Djibouti remains Ethiopia's most functional and politically reliable maritime partner. This evolving dynamic reflects a nuanced relationship rather than a weakening partnership: Ethiopia seeks strategic flexibility, while Djibouti seeks to retain its indispensability through expanded infrastructure, energy integration, and regional diplomacy. Domestically, President Guelleh's administration spent the week consolidating governance structures following his overwhelming electoral victory and recent inauguration, with state institutions focusing on administrative continuity, economic planning, debt management, and strategies to address persistent youth unemployment.

On the security front, Djibouti maintained a heightened operational posture around the Bab el-Mandeb Strait amid continuing instability across the Red Sea region. Cooperation with foreign military installations hosted in Djibouti including those of the United States, China, France, Italy, and Japan—remained central to safeguarding international maritime

commerce and preserving navigation security through one of the world's most strategically sensitive chokepoints. The Djiboutian government also reaffirmed strong coordination with the European Union's ASPIDES maritime security mission, positioning itself as a key logistical and operational partner in protecting international shipping lanes from emerging regional threats. Alongside hard security operations, Djibouti continued to serve as a critical humanitarian corridor for the wider Horn of Africa, with the World Food Programme utilizing Djiboutian port infrastructure to transfer containerized food supplies and pre-positioned humanitarian stocks through Ethiopian trucking networks despite ongoing funding shortages. These combined developments illustrated Djibouti's increasingly multifaceted strategic role: simultaneously acting as Ethiopia's maritime lifeline, a regional energy connector, a military-security platform for global powers, and a humanitarian gateway linking the Red Sea to the wider Horn of Africa.

6. South Sudan

South Sudan's political and humanitarian crisis deepened further during the week as tensions surrounding the fragile 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement continued to shape both domestic instability and regional concern. Political fragmentation, worsening humanitarian conditions, regional supply chain disruptions, and renewed diplomatic mediation efforts collectively reinforced fears that the country remains vulnerable to a broader relapse into conflict.

Regional and international observers increasingly tied the current instability directly to unresolved disputes within the 2018 peace framework. Reporting emphasized that disagreements over transitional security arrangements, power-sharing implementation, constitutional reforms, and election sequencing continue to undermine trust between President Salva Kiir Mayardit and opposition factions linked to Riek Machar. The prolonged delays in implementing core provisions of the agreement have reinforced fears that South Sudan's transitional process is gradually losing both legitimacy and coherence.

African Union-backed mediation efforts gained renewed attention during the week as opposition consultations continued in Tanzania. The talks are intended to preserve channels for political dialogue amid growing concerns that internal divisions within opposition groups and the governing SPLM establishment could produce new cycles of armed confrontation. Regional actors increasingly appear focused on preventing a total collapse of the transitional framework rather than expecting rapid political breakthroughs.

At the humanitarian level, conditions continued deteriorating sharply, particularly in flood-affected regions such as Unity State. Humanitarian agencies warned that severe flooding, access constraints, displacement, and damaged infrastructure are worsening fragile living conditions. Aid groups stressed that the convergence of conflict, climate shocks, food insecurity, and limited humanitarian access is creating compounding vulnerabilities across large sections of the country.

Public health concerns also intensified following growing fears surrounding Ebola transmission risks linked to outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of Congo. South Sudanese authorities heightened surveillance measures and preparedness efforts amid warnings that porous border movements and weak healthcare systems leave the country highly vulnerable to regional disease spillovers. The situation further highlights the structural fragility of South Sudan's health infrastructure after years of conflict and underinvestment.

Economic pressures and regional disruptions added another layer of instability. Concerns emerged over fuel supply vulnerabilities linked to transport and logistics disruptions in Kenya, a critical trade corridor for both Uganda and South Sudan. Analysts warned that interruptions along regional supply chains could significantly affect fuel prices, food imports, and broader economic activity inside South Sudan, which remains heavily dependent on neighboring transit networks.

The South Sudan Revenue Authority also issued warnings against illegal tax exemptions, reflecting broader government concerns over revenue leakage and weak fiscal management. With oil revenues under pressure and governance systems strained, authorities are increasingly attempting to tighten financial oversight as the state struggles with declining institutional capacity.

Questions surrounding sovereignty and state authority also surfaced through renewed debate over South Sudan's control of its own airspace. Aviation authorities publicly clarified that Juba maintains full sovereign control over national airspace management amid circulating speculation tied to foreign operational involvement and regional security concerns. The clarification reflects broader sensitivities regarding external influence, particularly as regional military alignments and Nile Basin tensions increasingly intersect with South Sudanese territory.

Tourism and aviation sectors meanwhile continued efforts to project an image of gradual normalization and connectivity despite persistent instability. However, such efforts remain constrained by insecurity, weak infrastructure, humanitarian crises, and political uncertainty.

Overall, the week underscored that South Sudan's crisis is no longer simply a domestic political dispute but part of a broader regional security and governance challenge. The country remains caught between unfinished state formation, fragile peace implementation, humanitarian deterioration, and intensifying geopolitical competition across the Horn and Nile Basin regions. While regional diplomacy continues attempting to preserve the peace agreement framework, the underlying structural drivers of instability remain largely unresolved.

7. Somalia and Somaliland

Somalia

Political tensions deepened following growing disputes over Somalia's electoral framework and the Federal Government's perceived unilateral approach toward implementing one person one vote elections ahead of upcoming national polls. International partners convened virtual and in person crisis consultations with opposition leaders and regional administrations over mounting concern over constitutional legitimacy and political disintegration.

On 19 May, diplomats representing Somalia's international partners met opposition figures from the Somali Future Council at the Halane compound in Mogadishu. Participants included former Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire and opposition leader Abdirahman Abdishakur while Puntland President Said Abdullahi Deni and Jubaland President Ahmed Mohamed Islam "Madobe" joined discussions virtually. The consultations followed the collapse of U.S. and U.K. facilitated talks between the Federal Government and opposition stakeholders. International envoys emphasized that Somalia had entered a transitional political phase following the expiry of institutional mandates and scored the necessity of a consensus based electoral process warning against unilateral measures that could further destabilize the political and security environment.

The electoral impasse generated additional concern among international actors. On 19 May the United Nations warned that the collapse of talks between the Federal Government and opposition groups risked undermining Somalia's federal structure and political stability. International partners increasingly signalled opposition to any unilateral electoral arrangements lacking broad political consensus.

Political criticism directed at President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud intensified during the reporting period. Somali academic and political analyst Afyare Elmi publicly warned that the President had crossed a dangerous red line through actions linked to term extension and centralization of power, reflecting broader concerns among opposition figures regarding constitutional governance and democratic legitimacy.

On 23 May Puntland authorities formally announced that they no longer recognized the legitimacy of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's mandate arguing that Somalia had entered a constitutional crisis following the expiration of the federal term. Puntland's position represented one of the most serious institutional ruptures between Mogadishu and a Federal Member State in recent years and scored widening fractures within Somalia's federal structure.

Further controversy emerged after reports that the Federal Government had endorsed a single candidate affiliated with the ruling Justice and Solidarity Party (JSP) for leadership

elections in Galmudug State. Opposition figures and political observers viewed the move as further evidence of increasing federal intervention in regional political processes.

Meanwhile, former National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) chief Fahad Yasin argued publicly that Somalia's long running conflict with Al-Shabaab could not be resolved solely through military means and advocated dialogue as part of a broader strategy to end the insurgency. His remarks contributed to national debate regarding the effectiveness and sustainability of current counterinsurgency policies.

The European Union increased efforts to encourage dialogue after negotiations between the Federal Government and opposition stakeholders failed to produce consensus. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud met European Union Ambassador to Somalia Francesca Di Mauro at Villa Somalia on 18 May to discuss the deteriorating political situation and possible pathways toward renewed negotiations.

Turkey simultaneously expanded its mediation role between the Federal Government and opposition groups. Reports on 21 May indicated that Ankara had intensified diplomatic efforts aimed at facilitating dialogue and reducing tensions between competing Somali political actors. Turkey's involvement reflected its growing political influence in Somalia and broader interests in stability within the Horn of Africa.

China also reinforced diplomatic engagement On 21 May President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud met Chinese Ambassador Wang Yu in Mogadishu to discuss bilateral cooperation, development assistance and diplomatic relations. Somalia reaffirmed its adherence to the One China policy recognizing the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate government of China and reiterating opposition to any form of Taiwanese independence. Villa Somalia further thanked Beijing for continued support toward Somalia's sovereignty, territorial integrity and state- building efforts.

The United States increased direct engagement with Somalia's Federal Member States over growing uncertainty regarding the federal political transition. On 20 and 21 May Puntland President Said Abdullahi Deni hosted a senior U.S. delegation in Garowe led by Acting U.S. Ambassador Justin Davis and accompanied by AFRICOM officers including Colonel Shane Jones. Discussions focused on Somalia's political transition, counterterrorism cooperation, economic investment opportunities in Puntland's oil, fisheries and mineral sectors and development cooperation. U.S. officials praised Puntland's military operations against ISIS-Somalia in the Calmiskaad and Golis mountain ranges. The engagement was widely interpreted as Washington's increasing willingness to engage regional administrations directly over deteriorating relations between Mogadishu and several Federal Member States.

Regional diplomatic tensions intensified following Somaliland's announcement that it would establish an embassy in Jerusalem and formally recognize Jerusalem as the capital

of Israel. Somaliland's move would reportedly make it the second Muslim majority to establish diplomatic representation in Jerusalem. The Federal Government of Somalia strongly condemned the initiative describing it as illegal, provocative and null and void under international law. Mogadishu reaffirmed Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and rejected Somaliland's authority to conduct independent foreign relations.

The issue generated broader regional and international reactions. On 24 May Somalia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed a joint statement issued by several Arab and Islamic countries including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Türkiye, and Pakistan condemning Somaliland's proposed diplomatic presence in Jerusalem. The statement characterized the move as a violation of international law and relevant resolutions concerning occupied Palestinian territories. Somalia reiterated its position that Somaliland's actions lacked legal validity and reaffirmed support for Palestinian rights and international legal frameworks governing Jerusalem.

Counterterrorism operations against Al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia continued throughout the reporting period with support from international partners. On 21 May Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency announced that joint operations conducted in the Hiiraan region had killed 26 Al-Shabaab militants. The raids targeted militant positions in Mahaas, Mukayle and Shaw districts, destroying safe houses, weapons storage facilities and vehicles reportedly used for mobilization and attacks against civilians. Somali authorities stated that the operations were carried out with support from international partners although independent verification of casualty figures remained unavailable.

Meanwhile Puntland authorities continued operations against ISIS-Somalia militants operating in the Calmiskaad and Golis mountain areas. International partners, particularly the United States, publicly praised Puntland's security operations and highlighted the importance of continued cooperation against extremist organizations operating in northeastern Somalia.

In the energy and maritime security domain, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced on 23 May that Turkey aimed to complete its first overseas deep sea oil exploration project off Somalia's coast within nine months. The announcement scored Turkey's expanding strategic and economic involvement in Somalia particularly in the energy sector and highlighted the growing geopolitical significance of Somalia's offshore resources.

Somaliland

Somaliland marked the 35th anniversary of its 1991 declaration restoring sovereignty from Somalia with extensive nationwide celebrations centered in Hargeisa on 18 May. Thousands of citizens participated in military parades, cultural performances, traditional dances and political gatherings organized across the capital and other major towns. Streets throughout Hargeisa were decorated in Somaliland's national colors of green, white, and red, while major public venues including Freedom Park, hosted large crowds and official ceremonies.

President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi commonly known as Irro, addressed the nation during the commemorations highlighting Somaliland's achievements in peace building, democratic governance, stability, and institutional state building over the past three and a half decades. The President emphasized Somaliland's record of conducting elections, maintaining internal security and building functioning political institutions in contrast to broader instability in the Horn of Africa.

As part of Somaliland's broader statehood campaign, President Irro inaugurated the Somaliland Recognition and Independence Institute in Hargeisa. The newly established institution is intended to document Somaliland's historical case for sovereignty and strengthen international advocacy efforts aimed at securing diplomatic recognition. The institute is chaired by British politician Gavin Williamson a long time supporter of Somaliland's recognition campaign signalling continued outreach toward influential political figures in the United Kingdom and Western countries.

President Irro also used the reporting period to intensify Somaliland's diplomatic appeal to the United Kingdom. In an interview published on or around 24 May, he urged London to formally recognize Somaliland as an independent state. The President argued that Somaliland had fulfilled the essential criteria for statehood and international legitimacy through its democratic governance, functioning parliament, successful elections, and relative stability. He further highlighted Somaliland's importance including the Berbera port, natural resources and its role in counterterrorism and regional maritime security. President Irro additionally warned that a lack of Western political support could create opportunities for rival powers, particularly China, to expand influence in the region.

Somaliland expanded diplomatic engagement with Israel on 18 May, Israeli President Isaac Herzog formally received Somaliland's representative to Israel, Mohamed Hagi during a credential presentation ceremony held in Jerusalem. The ceremony represented a major diplomatic milestone in the evolving relationship between Somaliland and Israel and followed increasing contacts between the two sides in recent months.

Subsequently, Somaliland's representative to Israel announced that Somaliland would soon open an embassy in Jerusalem while Israel was expected to reciprocate by opening

an embassy in Hargeisa. Somaliland officials characterized the planned mutual diplomatic representation as part of a broader partnership encompassing security cooperation, economic collaboration, and Red Sea geopolitical interests. Somaliland authorities also framed the relationship with Israel as an opportunity to strengthen international visibility and diversify diplomatic partnerships. The developments followed Israel's reported recognition of Somaliland, which Somaliland officials described as historic and unprecedented among United Nations member states.

Regional Affairs and External Reactions

Somaliland's plans to establish diplomatic representation in Jerusalem generated strong condemnation from Somalia's Federal Government, regional organizations, and multiple Arab and Muslim majority countries. Around 20–21 May, Somalia's Federal Government issued statements rejecting Somaliland's diplomatic initiatives with Israel describing the proposed Jerusalem embassy as legally null and void and a provocation against the Arab and Islamic worlds. Mogadishu reaffirmed Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and maintained that Somaliland possessed no legal authority to conduct independent foreign relations.

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and several Muslim majority states including Egypt, issued formal condemnations of Somaliland's planned diplomatic presence in Jerusalem. These statements characterized the initiative as a violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions concerning the status of Jerusalem and occupied Palestinian territories. Egypt strongly condemned the inauguration and planned opening of a Somaliland diplomatic mission in Jerusalem, describing the move as illegal, unacceptable, and inconsistent with international legal frameworks governing the status of the city.

Despite the criticism Somaliland officials largely dismissed the international backlash and continued to portray relations with Israel as a strategic partnership intended to enhance security cooperation, economic development, and Somaliland's geopolitical position along the Red Sea corridor. Authorities in Hargeisa maintained that the relationship represented a sovereign diplomatic decision aligned with Somaliland's long term national interests and international recognition objectives.

8. Yemen

According to Turkish media outlet Anadolu Ajansı, the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) center reported that a products tanker operating roughly 200 nautical miles west of Yemen's Socotra Island was approached by a small craft carrying five individuals. According to the agency, the vessel's armed security team was deployed, after which the small craft altered course and moved away. The incident follows another maritime security report issued by UKMTO a day earlier involving a tanker north of

Socotra, underscoring continued security concerns in waters surrounding Yemen amid broader regional tensions.

According to Turkish media outlet Anadolu Ajansı, local Yemeni media reported that the Houthis shot down a US MQ-9 Reaper drone in Yemen's Marib governorate. Reports said residents heard explosions over Marib city following the launch of an air defense missile from the Sarwah area, while images circulating online purportedly showed debris believed to belong to the drone and remnants of AGM-114R9X "Ninja" missiles. Neither the Houthis nor the US military issued an official statement on the incident.

Mahdi al-Mashat, a senior political figure within Yemen's Houthi movement and head of the administration governing Houthi-controlled areas, criticized moves toward normalization between Somaliland and Israel, which have been moving to establish embassies, describing them as a threat to Yemen and regional stability. Speaking on the anniversary of Yemeni unification, al-Mashat warned against further US or Israeli military action in the region and reiterated Houthi support for Palestine, Lebanon, and Iran. He also stated that the Houthis would continue fighting until all Yemeni territory is "liberated," while rejecting partition efforts and accusing external actors, including the United States and Saudi Arabia, of attempting to divide Yemen through military and political pressure.

9. Kenya

This past week, Kenya experienced a tense political and economic week centered on rising fuel prices and the public response that followed. What began as a fuel pricing issue quickly became a wider national concern, affecting transport, daily movement, business activity, and public confidence. The events of the week also showed how external geopolitical pressures, especially instability in global energy markets, can quickly enter domestic politics in countries that depend heavily on imported fuel.

The immediate trigger was a sharp increase in fuel prices. Diesel reportedly rose by 23.5 percent, while gasoline increased by 8 percent. The rise was linked to pressure on global energy supplies caused by the Iran war and wider disruption in the Middle East. For Kenya, this external shock was felt almost immediately at home. Higher fuel prices affected public transport operators, commuters, traders, schools, and ordinary households, since transport costs influence the price of many goods and services.

On May 18, the issue escalated into a nationwide public transport strike. Many commuters were left stranded, and protests broke out in Nairobi, Mombasa, and other towns. Roads were blocked, tires were burned, and clashes between protesters and police were reported. Four people were killed and more than 30 others were injured during the unrest. The government described some of the demonstrations as violent and illegal, while many

citizens and transport operators viewed them as a reaction to rising costs and the pressure placed on daily life.

The strike carried strong political weight because public transport is deeply tied to Kenya's economy. Matatus, buses, and other public service vehicles are not just transport businesses. They are part of the everyday system that allows workers, students, traders, and families to move. When that system stops, the effect spreads quickly across cities and towns. This is why the fuel price issue became more than a debate over energy costs. It became a question of economic continuity, public order, and the government's ability to respond to pressure without worsening the country's financial position.

The Kenyan government chose negotiation as the main response. After talks with transport associations, the strike was first suspended for one week to allow further consultation. The government agreed to reduce diesel prices by 10 Kenyan shillings per litre, although transport operators had demanded a much larger reduction. This showed the difficult balance the government was trying to maintain. On one side, citizens and transport operators needed relief from rising costs. On the other side, the state had to consider revenue, debt obligations, and the wider budget.

By May 22, the situation had eased further after President William Ruto met public transport operators and announced another planned reduction in diesel prices for the June to July pricing cycle. After this commitment, transport operators called off the planned continuation of the strike. The direct involvement of the presidency helped reduce the risk of a longer national disruption. At the same time, the government avoided deeper fuel tax cuts, arguing that larger reductions would create serious revenue losses.

The fiscal side of the crisis is important because fuel relief is never free for the state. Subsidies and price reductions can calm public pressure, but they also create budgetary strain. Kenya had already spent a large amount subsidizing fuel between April and June, while debt servicing continued to take up a major share of government revenue. This placed the government in a tight position. It had to respond to public hardship while avoiding decisions that could create deeper financial pressure later.

The week also revealed Kenya's exposure to external geopolitical shocks. A conflict in the Middle East affected global energy supplies, which then influenced fuel costs in Kenya. Those fuel costs affected transport fares, public movement, and eventually political pressure. In this sense, the crisis was not only a local pricing dispute. It showed how international events can move through global markets and appear in the everyday life of citizens, especially in countries dependent on imported energy.

Kenya's regional role added another layer to the issue. The country is an important transport and import hub in East Africa, and its roads, ports, and fuel distribution systems matter beyond its own borders. Even though the strike was a domestic event, serious

disruption in Kenya's transport sector can raise concern for regional trade and supply chains. This made the week geopolitically relevant, not because it became a regional crisis, but because Kenya's internal stability has wider economic importance.

Another external angle was Kenya's fuel supply diplomacy. President Ruto stated that Kenya had avoided major fuel shortages partly because of government-to-government fuel deals with Middle Eastern countries secured in 2023. This suggests that Kenya was not only reacting to the crisis internally. It was also relying on foreign partnerships to protect fuel availability during a period of global energy uncertainty.

Inside Kenya, the week showed how politically sensitive the cost of living remains. Opposition figures used the fuel issue to question the pricing structure and the role of domestic costs in fuel prices. However, the situation can also be read as a difficult policy challenge rather than a simple political confrontation. The government was dealing with external energy pressure, public hardship, and limited fiscal space at the same time. The main question was how to protect citizens from rising costs while keeping transport moving and maintaining financial stability.

By the end of the week, Kenya had avoided a longer transport shutdown. The strike was called off, the government promised further diesel price relief, and transport operators stepped back from immediate escalation. Still, the deeper issues did not disappear. Kenya remains exposed to imported fuel dependence, high transport costs, debt pressure, and public expectations for relief during difficult economic periods.

In conclusion, the events were about more than fuel prices. They tested Kenya's economic management, public transport system, political responsiveness, and regional importance. The government had to respond to citizens and transport operators while also protecting revenue and fuel supply. At the same time, the crisis showed how global geopolitical events, especially conflict in the Middle East, can quickly affect domestic politics through energy prices. Kenya ended the week with a negotiated deescalation, but the episode made clear that fuel remains one of the country's most sensitive political and economic issues because it connects global events directly to daily life.

10. The Gulf Countries

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's national security strategy has entered a phase of intense, high-stakes realignment, balancing volatile cross-border threats with macro-level diplomacy. Despite a fragile regional ceasefire, the persistent challenge of gray-zone warfare was driven home by the successful interception of three Iraqi-launched drones breaching Saudi airspace, prompting Riyadh to assert its sovereign right to respond while coordinating a massive multilateral de-escalation call with Washington and key regional powers. Simultaneously, the Kingdom executed a profound pivot in its broader foreign policy,

choosing to sideline a long-sought, comprehensive US defense treaty and conditional normalization with Israel in order to maintain an unyielding stance on Palestinian self-determination, opting instead for more targeted, sovereign defense arrangements.

This strategic recalibration is playing out with matching intensity across the Red Sea, where Riyadh is aggressively projecting its power to anchor the Horn of Africa within its security orbit. Capitalizing on Somalia's recent split from Abu Dhabi, the Kingdom formalized a sweeping defense agreement to train, equip, and provide technical assistance to the Somali National Armed Forces. Far from a simple bilateral gesture, this partnership is the cornerstone of a much broader Saudi-led initiative to forge a new trilateral military bloc with Egypt and Somalia. By anchoring this maritime coalition, Riyadh is moving decisively to dominate Red Sea security, crowd out rival Gulf influence, and position itself as the undisputed guarantor of the world's most critical trading corridors.

UAE

A recent drone strike targeting the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant in Abu Dhabi's Al Dhafra region has triggered a profound regional crisis, marking the first time the UAE's sole nuclear facility has been targeted. Although the resulting fire was contained to an external electrical generator without causing radiological leaks or injuries, the attack drew sharp international condemnation, with UN Secretary-General António Guterres and IAEA Director Rafael Grossi labeling the military threat to nuclear safety unacceptable. Emirati officials swiftly condemned the incident as a dangerous terrorist escalation launched from the "western border," asserting their full right to respond. In the aftermath, the UAE mobilized its diplomatic machinery, coordinating closely with Gulf allies and western partners, including the UK, to address the broader implications of these drone strikes on regional stability, international shipping lanes, and global energy markets.

Simultaneously, the UAE continues to aggressively advance its long-term strategic footprint in the Horn of Africa as part of its economic diversification goals. Speculation surrounding the UAE's potential diplomatic recognition of Somaliland has intensified following official statements indicating such a move could happen "sooner or later." This diplomatic shift would solidify Abu Dhabi's massive existing investments in the territory which include DP World's \$442 million development of the Berbera Port and a local military base securing the UAE a critical foothold for geopolitical influence along this highly strategic maritime passageway.

Qatar

Qatar has significantly accelerated its high-stakes diplomatic engagement, positioning itself as a central mediator amidst escalating regional volatility. Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani spearheaded a flurry of high-level communications with Gulf neighbors, Egypt, and the UK, focusing heavily on regional

de-escalation and the protection of global commerce. In a critical exchange with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, Doha drew a firm line on maritime security, explicitly warning that any attempts to disrupt the Strait of Hormuz or use it as a geopolitical leverage would fundamentally threaten regional interests. Demonstrating strong Gulf alignment, Qatar also issued a swift, forceful condemnation of recent drone attacks targeting Saudi Arabia, framing the incident as a direct violation of collective regional sovereignty.

Simultaneously, Doha is aggressively expanding its security footprint in East Africa, capitalizing on shifting alignments to become a primary institutional anchor for Somalia. Following Mogadishu's high-profile split from the UAE over sovereignty concerns, Qatar rapidly finalized a comprehensive bilateral defense agreement at the DIMDEX 2026 exhibition, taking over critical military training, capacity-building, and tactical support for Somali forces. This defense partnership is closely mirrored by unyielding diplomatic backing; at the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, Doha vigorously condemned any external recognition of Somaliland, reinforcing its absolute commitment to Somalia's territorial integrity. Through this dual strategy of defense cooperation and sovereign defense, Qatar is effectively checking rival Gulf influence and securing a vital role along the strategic maritime corridors of the Horn of Africa.

11. Africa and The Sahel Region

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The eastern DRC erupted into fresh violence this week as the M23 rebel group, widely believed to be backed by Rwanda, launched a lightning offensive in North Kivu. On May 22, the group seized the strategic town of Kanyabayonga, severing a key supply route to the provincial capital, Goma. The Congolese army (FARDC) confirmed the loss and accused Kigali of providing direct artillery support, a charge Rwanda denied. The UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) reported that at least 40 civilians had been killed in the fighting, and more than 80,000 people fled towards Lubero.

The UN Security Council convened an emergency session on May 23, where the Congolese Foreign Minister called for targeted sanctions against Rwandan officials. The session ended in a familiar stalemate, with no concrete action taken. Regionally, Angola's President João Lourenço, the designated mediator, spoke by phone with Presidents Félix Tshisekedi and Paul Kagame, urging an immediate ceasefire, but no date has been set for new talks.

Mali

Mali's defense and foreign policy architecture has pivoted sharply into survival mode following the late-April assault that killed Defense Minister Sadio Camara and exposed

deep systemic vulnerabilities. In response, Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop convened an emergency session of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in Bamako with his counterparts from Burkina Faso and Niger. Moving beyond their standard mutual defense pact, the alliance issued a joint communiqué announcing the creation of a unified AES rapid reaction force to be headquartered in Gao, framing the security crisis as an existential threat to regional sovereignty. This pooling of military resources comes as the state's actual administrative authority has contracted to a tight radius around Bamako, while expansive northern and eastern regions like Taoudeni, Timbuktu, and Ménaka remain under the heavy influence of insurgent forces.

The tactical complexity of the conflict was starkly highlighted when Tuareg rebels from the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) shot down a Russian-made Shahed-136 attack drone near Kidal. This engagement marks the first confirmed operational deployment of this long-range loitering munition type within the Sahel, with component analysis revealing a heavy reliance on dual-use commercial Chinese microchips and relays. Adding to the central government's challenges, a significant diplomatic fracture occurred along Mali's western border when Mauritania summoned the Malian ambassador to vehemently protest a violation of its embassy's sovereignty in Bamako by unidentified armed men. While Bamako has promised a full investigation, the incident introduces a delicate diplomatic strain with a crucial neighbor at a time when the transitional government is actively trying to stabilize its borders and counter expansive territorial losses.

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso's transitional administration is balancing a sweeping domestic crackdown on independent institutions against severe territorial and security pressures. The government intensified its campaign against international media by suspending the French-language broadcaster TV5Monde over allegations of persistent disinformation, raising the total number of banned international outlets to six. This restriction on information flow coincides with an aggressive regulatory contraction of civil society; the state dissolved an additional 14 non-governmental organizations, primarily human rights groups, under accusations of supporting terrorism. While the administration frames these measures as necessary tools to maintain narrative control during a national crisis, the moves reflect an increasingly hyper-securitized governance model operating under acute stress.

This institutional tightening takes place against a highly volatile operational backdrop, with updated conflict-mapping data indicating that over 90 percent of Burkina Faso's territory is either under insurgent control or actively contested, limiting the central government's administrative reach primarily to Ouagadougou and select southern urban centers. In response to these persistent kinetic threats, authorities announced the arrest of eight suspects linked to recent coordinated attacks on the army headquarters and the

French Embassy, aiming to signal administrative resilience. However, the regime's broader regional security strategy faces external skepticism; the UN Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel publicly warned that the Alliance of Sahel States' (AES) newly formed rapid reaction force risks compounding civilian suffering if it deploys without clear human rights safeguards, highlighting the delicate balance the transitional government must strike between aggressive counterinsurgency and international legitimacy.

Niger

Niger's military leadership is balancing aggressive domestic defense measures against an increasingly fragile intelligence and security architecture. In an effort to prioritize sovereignty, the government terminated long-standing intelligence-sharing agreements with Russia and Turkey, citing the inadequate performance of foreign surveillance systems and telephone interception equipment. When a subsequent contract with a Moroccan cyber-surveillance firm was hastily dissolved due to its indirect ties to France, the state was left with a significant digital intelligence deficit. To manage this vacuum and prevent urban unrest, the Presidential Guard stepped in to provide physical security via extensive night patrols in sensitive sectors of Niamey, stabilizing the capital even as the loss of advanced monitoring capabilities complicates broader counterinsurgency efforts.

This intelligence shortfall coincides with intense kinetic pressure on the regime's forces along the rural periphery. While major urban centers like Zinder and Maradi remain secure, insurgent forces have capitalized on blind spots to mount deadly incursions in the Diffa and Agadez regions, highlighted by an ambush on a military supply convoy near Bilma that resulted in the deaths of at least 14 soldiers. Faced with these parallel tactical and information challenges, the transitional government has increasingly prioritized narrative control in the capital, executing targeted arrests of civil society members and media personnel under the umbrella of preserving military morale. While these crackdowns have drawn fierce condemnation from international press freedom organizations, regional analysts view the measures as a direct response to a hyper-securitized environment where managing public perception is treated as a core component of national survival.

Chad

Chad's military leadership is balancing an intensive kinetic campaign against Boko Haram with aggressive diplomatic lobbying to secure its volatile border regions. Following the devastating insurgent attack on the Barka Tolorom island base that killed 23 soldiers, the state of emergency in the Lake Province remains firmly in place. In a decisive push to restore troop morale and stabilize the perimeter, President Mahamat Idriss Déby visited the frontline hub of Bol, pledging a relentless counteroffensive. Backed by French aerial surveillance assets operating under a renegotiated bilateral

framework, the Chadian air force launched targeted airstrikes against insurgent strongholds in the Lake Chad marshlands. This robust military deployment has brought a period of relative tactical calm to the immediate theater, following a highly disruptive ambush that claimed the lives of two generals earlier in the month.

On the diplomatic stage, N'Djamena is actively working to translate this frontline pressure into expanded multilateral backing. Foreign Minister Abderaman Koulamallah met with the African Union Peace and Security Council in Addis Ababa to formally request advanced logistical and material support for the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). While the Council formally affirmed its solidarity with Chad's security plight, it refrained from authorizing new troop deployments, choosing instead to pressure member states to honor their existing defense and financial commitments. This diplomatic bottleneck coincides with an escalating humanitarian emergency on the ground, where ongoing containment operations and regional insecurity have displaced more than 120,000 civilians around Lake Chad, testing the transitional government's capacity to simultaneously manage regional defense projection and a growing domestic displacement crisis.

Equatorial Guinea

Equatorial Guinea's administration is balancing aggressive state security measures against sharpening diplomatic friction following a claimed destabilization attempt. The government announced it had successfully thwarted a "mercenary plot" aimed at targeting presidential infrastructure, broadcasting televised footage of seven detained South African and Zimbabwean nationals. Vice President Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue explicitly attributed the conspiracy to unidentified foreign powers hostile to the nation's sovereign advancement. In tandem with the announcement, security forces launched an extensive domestic sweep, detaining at least 30 political opposition activists across the key hubs of Malabo and Bata as a preventative measure to maintain internal order.

This domestic security operation has triggered a sharp diplomatic dispute between Malabo and Madrid. Following public criticisms from Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares regarding the legality of the roundups, Equatorial Guinea's Foreign Ministry promptly summoned the Spanish ambassador to forcefully reject the statements as colonial interference. The fast-moving situation has also re-engaged international oversight bodies, with the UN Human Rights Office pressing Malabo to grant immediate consular and legal access to the detainees. While the administration views swift security and diplomatic pushback as a necessary defense of state sovereignty, international analysts warn that the sweeping scale of the domestic crackdowns' risks compounding the country's existing diplomatic isolation.

12. North Africa

Morocco

Morocco spent the week projecting domestic control through security pageantry and institutional messaging. DGSN's seventh Open Days in Rabat opened on 18 May and ran through 22 May, marking the force's 70th anniversary and showcasing equipment, public-order capabilities, and modernization efforts aimed at reinforcing citizen trust. The timing helped frame internal security as a pillar of state legitimacy.

That security narrative was complicated by the continuing politics of cross-border crime. On 24 May, Algeria's APS highlighted a Spanish police operation against a cannabis-smuggling network linked to Moroccan shores, presenting it as proof of a wider corridor for trafficking into Europe. The episode underscored how drug enforcement, maritime routes, and hostile regional media narratives remain entwined in Morocco's neighborhood.

Diplomatically, Rabat deepened its alignment with Paris. On 20 May, Moroccan and French foreign ministers said they were preparing a landmark treaty to reinforce bilateral ties, with security, defense, and aerospace cooperation at the center of the agenda. Reuters noted that the move builds on France's 2024 recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, while also sharpening the contrast with Algeria's position.

Western Sahara remained a parallel pressure point. On 21 May, UN Committee against Torture findings, echoed by APS, said Morocco had violated the rights of Sahrawi detainees tied to the Gdeim Izik case, keeping the issue alive in international rights forums. Even without a major diplomatic rupture, the criticism fed a steady campaign over detainees, legality, and sovereignty claims.

Rabat also used a humanitarian gesture to smooth a sensitive bilateral relationship with Senegal. On 23 May, King Mohammed VI pardoned 18 Senegalese football fans jailed after the chaotic Africa Cup of Nations final earlier in the year. AP and Reuters said the pardon was framed as a humanitarian act and a signal of enduring ties, turning a security incident into a diplomacy reset.

At the same time, Morocco leaned on soft power to reinforce its image as a safe international host. The 50th Hassan II Golf Trophy and Lalla Meryem Cup ran in Rabat from 18 to 24 May, while CAF's U-17 Africa Cup of Nations continued at the Mohammed VI Football Complex, with Morocco advancing through the knockout rounds. Together, the events projected stability, organization, and continental reach.

Algeria

Algeria's week began with a dual message from state institutions: Azouz Nasri said Algeria remains a key driver of regional and international peace and security, while the presidency's communication directorate rejected social-media rumors about dismissals and new appointments. Taken together, the statements aim to project control, discipline, and continuity at a time when the surrounding region remains unsettled.

That security narrative was reinforced on May 21, when General Saïd Chanegriha oversaw the "Al-Ahd 2026" live-fire tactical exercise in Amdoukal. Officially framed as force-preparation training, the drill also signaled deterrence and readiness, underscoring how Algeria continues to anchor its domestic legitimacy in military professionalism while neighboring crises keep the strategic environment tense.

Diplomatically, Ahmed Attaf traveled to Cairo on May 21 for the Tripartite Neighboring Countries Mechanism on Libya with Egypt and Tunisia. The meeting kept the Libyan file at the center of North African coordination, with the three states focusing on border security, political stabilization, and support for a negotiated process rather than escalatory unilateral moves.

Energy cooperation with Niger advanced in parallel and gave Algeria another lever of influence in the Sahel. A Nigerien petroleum delegation was in Algeria from May 9 to 18, and on May 22 Naftal said it was exploring butane gas filling centers with Sonidep. The sequence suggests Algeria is using hydrocarbons cooperation not just for commerce, but also to deepen dependence and shape regional alignment.

The continental track was equally visible around Africa Day. On May 20, Brahim Boughali received Pan-African Parliament president Fateh Boutbig in Algiers, and by May 24 Boutbig was describing Algeria as faithful to its historic mission of supporting African unity and development. Attaf, in a separate Africa Day message the same day, reaffirmed Algeria's commitment to joint African action.

Beyond Africa's immediate neighborhood, Algeria also kept a cautious opening with France. On May 18, French Justice Minister Gérald Darmanin met President Abdelmadjid Tebboune in Algiers to revive judicial and security cooperation after nearly two years of strain. The visit did not erase the Western Sahara rift, but it showed Algiers balancing selective détente with wider geopolitical competition.

Libya

Libya's week of 18–24 May was still shaped by the Tripoli football-fan violence that damaged the Government of National Unity headquarters on 15 May. Against that backdrop, UNSMIL's mine-action partners met on 21 May and warned that explosive-

ordnance contamination remains a civilian threat, showing how urban unrest, weak policing, and war leftovers keep feeding one another.

Accountability moved closer to the center of the Libyan file on 19 May, when Khaled Mohamed Ali al-Hishri appeared before the ICC in The Hague on 17 war-crimes and crimes-against-humanity counts tied to Mitiga prison. On 22 May, UN Security Council coverage framed the case as a major step toward justice in Libya, even as defense lawyers challenged the court's jurisdiction.

The same multilateral track kept sanctions leverage alive. Security Council reporting said the then-current Libya authorization was due to expire on 25 May, while the Council's 22 May agenda dedicated space to ICC-Libya. That combination kept the sanctions regime's arms embargo, asset-freeze, and travel-ban machinery relevant, leaving spoilers under pressure even as the broader political stalemate persisted.

Regionally, Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria tried to pull the political track back from armed competition. After meeting in Cairo on 21 May, their joint statement on 22 May called for a UN-backed, Libyan-led process, simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections, and rejection of foreign interference. The message reflected a shared worry that stalemate is hardening into partition across Libya's rival institutions.

That diplomatic push was complicated by Libya's eastern military alignment. Around the same broader arc, Saddam Haftar went to Moscow at the Russian defense ministry's invitation for talks on military cooperation, while Reuters' April reporting showed Haftar's forces adding new combat drones despite the UN embargo. Together, those moves suggest that external patrons remain central to Libya's security balance.

13. Middle East

Iran-Israel Conflict

The week's dominant development was a narrowing window for diplomacy between Washington and Tehran, but it never fully escaped the logic of coercion. Donald Trump described the odds of a deal as "solid 50/50," said he would review the latest draft with advisers, and kept the option of renewed strikes on the table if the package failed to meet U.S. terms. At the same time, JD Vance said the talks had made meaningful progress, while Marco Rubio signaled that Washington would still "find another way" if diplomacy failed. That combination matters: the negotiations are advancing, but they are still being conducted under threat of force rather than in a stable diplomatic environment.

The emerging framework appears to revolve around a 60-day ceasefire, the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, and staged sanctions relief, including the unfreezing of Iranian assets. In return, Iran is being pressed to reduce or remove its stockpile of highly enriched uranium, while the United States would relax its blockade on Iranian ports and allow

maritime flows to resume. Open reporting also points to a package in which mines would be cleared from the strait and tolls on shipping abandoned, but the hardest issue remains the nuclear question and how any uranium disposition would be verified. Israel's position has stayed uncompromising: Netanyahu and Trump agreed that any final deal must eliminate Iran's nuclear threat, which makes the draft politically fragile even if it is moving forward.

Mediation has become almost as important as the substance of the deal itself. Pakistan has positioned itself as the key convenor of the next round, while Egyptian and Turkish officials have been drawn into the effort to fine-tune a memorandum of understanding. Egypt's foreign minister said such a memorandum could set the terms for later talks, and Türkiye has emphasized preserving the ceasefire and navigational safety in the Strait of Hormuz. The regional dimension is widening further because Trump also pressed Arab and Muslim leaders to normalize ties with Israel if a deal is reached, which suggests Washington sees the Iran file as a gateway to a broader regional reset rather than a standalone crisis.

Even so, the security backdrop kept pulling the region back toward escalation. Netanyahu's call with Trump focused on Israel's freedom of action against threats, especially in Lebanon, and Israeli officials remained uneasy that a deal might give Iran and its partners time to recover economically and militarily. On the ground, Hezbollah continued launching drones and missiles while Israeli strikes in southern Lebanon persisted despite the truce extension, showing that the Lebanon front remains tightly bound to the Iran negotiations. Inside Iran, one U.S. intelligence-based account said the supreme leader was operating from a secret location through messengers, while Tehran also continued executions on security and protest-related charges; that combination points to a leadership environment that is defensive, opaque, and under sustained pressure.

The military atmosphere was reinforced by reciprocal claims and precautionary moves. Iran claimed to have downed an Israeli surveillance drone, though the IDF said it was not familiar with the incident, while Israeli and U.S. planners continued preparing for the possibility that the negotiations could collapse. The broader effect is to keep the crisis in a suspended state: diplomacy is active, but both sides are still behaving as though a return to force remains plausible.

Domestic politics in Washington and Jerusalem remained deeply entangled with the war. House Republican leaders canceled a planned vote on a war powers resolution after it appeared vulnerable, while the Senate advanced a measure aimed at curbing Trump's authority over the Iran war, exposing real but uneven bipartisan unease. In Israel, the High Court pressed the justice minister over judicial vacancies, President Herzog denounced "brutish" settler violence while also appearing to criticize Ben-Gvir over prisoner abuse, and Arab parties renewed efforts to rebuild a Joint List with Ra'am urged to join. Those

are not separate side stories; they are part of the same political strain generated by a prolonged security crisis and the sense that institutions are being tested by war.

The spillover beyond the core battlefield was also visible. The drone strike near the UAE's Barakah nuclear plant briefly knocked one reactor onto backup power before external electricity was restored and radiation levels stayed normal, underscoring how vulnerable civilian nuclear infrastructure becomes in a regional war. Iran's football federation then moved its 2026 World Cup base from Arizona to Tijuana and demanded guarantees from the United States, Mexico, and Canada, showing how even sport is being pulled into the geopolitical dispute. At the same time, the Gaza flotilla controversy triggered protests and police clashes in Bilbao, while Arab and Islamic foreign ministers condemned Ben-Gvir's public humiliation of detainees as a violation of human dignity and international law. Finally, Israel's continuing direct dialogue with Syria keeps a quieter diplomatic track alive; the talks remain focused on security and border management, but they carry the longer-term possibility of normalization if regional conditions continue to shift.

Turkey

Turkey's week began with a regional-security message: Erdoğan told Trump that the U.S.-Iran ceasefire could be extended, said the disputed issues could still be resolved, and linked the call to Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, and preparations for the July NATO summit in Ankara. The exchange cast Turkey as a mediator while keeping its diplomacy anchored in the wider war environment.

That diplomatic posture was reinforced by hard security needs. Germany said it would send a Patriot system to southeastern Turkey for six months starting in June, replacing one of NATO's additional batteries deployed amid the Iran war. Reuters noted that Turkey still lacks comprehensive air defenses, which helps explain why Ankara continues to rely on allied missiles even while seeking greater autonomy.

At the alliance level, Marco Rubio told NATO ministers in Helsingborg that the alliance has to work for all members and said the July leaders' summit in Ankara should build on that discussion. He also said any Iranian tolling system in the Strait of Hormuz would be unacceptable, showing Washington framing NATO unity through the same regional crisis Turkey is using to justify its relevance.

Inside Turkey, the political temperature rose further when a court annulled the CHP's 2023 congress, reinstated Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, and then riot police used tear gas to evict the ousted leadership from headquarters. The episode moved beyond a party dispute and became a broader test of judicial independence, opposition space, and institutional resilience, while also unsettling financial markets.

Against that domestic turmoil, Ankara kept projecting operational reach in Syria. MIT captured 10 suspected Islamic State militants there and brought them back to Turkey, according to security sources reported by Anadolu and Reuters. The episode underlines that Syria remains for Ankara not just a negotiating track, but an active counterterrorism theater tied directly to homeland security.

Turkey then shifted back to the Gaza front, joining seven other Arab-Islamic states in condemning Itamar Ben-Gvir over his treatment of detained Gaza flotilla activists. The joint statement described the humiliation as a violation of international law, reinforcing Ankara's tendency to pair security policy with symbolic pro-Palestinian politics whenever the Gaza conflict spills into regional diplomacy.

Syria

Syria's most consequential move during the week was diplomatic rather than military. On May 18, the European Union extended sanctions on figures tied to the former Assad order through June 1, 2027, but removed seven entities, including the defense and interior ministries, from the blacklist, a sign that Brussels is trying to keep pressure on regime-linked networks while giving the new authorities space to build state capacity. In the same policy shift, Syria was brought into a closed-door G7 finance session in Paris, and later reporting said President Ahmed al-Sharaa was expected to attend the G7 summit in France in June. Taken together, these steps show Syria edging back into high-level international economic diplomacy, with reconstruction, financial reintegration, and institutional legitimacy now moving to the center of the transition.

That diplomatic opening sat beside a much rougher security landscape. The strongest logistics story around Syria was the use of overland routes through Iraqi-Syrian crossings as an alternative to disrupted Gulf shipping, especially after Iraq reopened the Rabia border crossing to move fuel oil via Syria; that development predates the May 18–24 window, but it explains why Syria is increasingly being treated as a strategic corridor rather than only a postwar frontier. Even so, the ground remained dangerous: the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented civilian deaths from landmine explosions on May 18 and May 19, while Turkey's MIT said on May 23 that it had captured 10 suspected Islamic State militants inside Syria. The pattern is clear: regional actors are trying to normalize transit and counterterrorism coordination, but Syria is still operating in a security environment defined by mines, armed remnants, and cross-border enforcement operations.

Politically, the week ended with a sign that Damascus is trying to turn military control into administrative authority in the northeast. On May 24, Syria held follow-up legislative elections in Hasakah, Ain al-Arab, and Qamishli, areas that had recently been reintegrated under government control after years of Kurdish-led administration. The vote is important less as a fully representative national election than as a test of whether the new political

order can consolidate state presence in formerly contested territory without reopening fragmentation along ethnic, regional, or security lines.

14. Global Powers

The past week saw continued movement toward a fragile U.S.-Iran de-escalation framework centered on the Strait of Hormuz, with Washington and Tehran reportedly reaching preliminary understandings on reopening maritime routes and advancing indirect negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated during his India visit that "significant progress" had been made in negotiations, though major disagreements remain unresolved. Reports indicated that Iran may accept, "in principle," limits related to its enriched uranium stockpile in exchange for sanctions relief and the easing of U.S. naval pressure in the Gulf, while the Trump administration insisted no relief would come before verification measures. At the same time, both sides maintained contradictory public messaging over control of the Strait of Hormuz, reflecting deep mistrust despite diplomatic momentum. Oil prices fell sharply this week amid expectations of a possible deal, while regional mediation efforts involving Oman, Pakistan, and Gulf states intensified behind the scenes.

Trump announced an additional 5,000 US troops to Poland around May 21–22, citing strong ties with newly elected Polish President Karol Nawrocki (whom he endorsed). This came days after the Pentagon (under Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth) halted a planned deployment/rotation of ~4,000 troops as part of a broader European force posture review/reduction. The Trump administration's shifting position on U.S. troop deployments in Poland created fresh concern inside NATO after conflicting signals emerged over whether Washington was reducing, delaying, or expanding its military presence on the alliance's eastern flank. European officials reportedly expressed frustration over the lack of policy clarity, while debates over European strategic autonomy and independent defense planning intensified in response.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio began a major diplomatic visit to India from May 23–26, traveling through Kolkata, Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur in an effort to repair tensions caused by tariffs, trade disputes, and wider strategic mistrust between Washington and New Delhi. Discussions focused heavily on maritime security, critical minerals, AI cooperation, supply chains, and Indo-Pacific coordination against China.

The United States intensified pressure on Cuba after the Justice Department announced criminal charges against former Cuban leader Raúl Castro linked to the 1996 Brothers to the Rescue aircraft incident. The move came alongside expanded sanctions targeting Cuba's energy, defense, and financial sectors, signaling a broader escalation in Washington's pressure campaign against Havana.

Washington and Tehran continued indirect negotiations over maritime security and Iran's nuclear program, with U.S. officials claiming progress toward reducing tensions around the Strait of Hormuz. Reports indicated discussions centered on sanctions relief, verification mechanisms, and limits on Iran's uranium stockpile, though both sides maintained publicly confrontational rhetoric despite ongoing mediation efforts by regional actors.

The Quad partnership involving the United States, India, Japan, and Australia gained renewed momentum this week as preparations advanced for high-level meetings focused on maritime security, critical minerals, semiconductors, AI governance, and regional deterrence against China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Reports published this week also highlighted increasing dysfunction inside the U.S. diplomatic system under the Trump administration, including understaffed embassies, reduced reliance on career diplomats, and growing dependence on informal political intermediaries. The developments raised concerns among allies about the consistency and institutional reliability of U.S. foreign policy decision-making.

China spent the past week balancing confrontation with strategic stabilization in its relations with the United States and regional rivals. Beijing and Washington continued managing tensions following the Trump–Xi summit in Beijing, where both sides attempted to prevent further deterioration in ties despite ongoing disputes over Taiwan, tariffs, semiconductors, and the South China Sea. Chinese officials reportedly warned the United States against expanding arms sales to Taiwan after President Trump suggested such sales could be used as a “negotiating chip” in broader U.S.-China talks, raising alarm in Taipei and among regional allies.

China also intensified military and maritime pressure around Taiwan this week after a tense standoff near the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands, where Chinese and Taiwanese coast guard vessels exchanged warnings before the Chinese ship withdrew. Taiwan simultaneously reported increased Chinese naval activity across the first island chain, including surveillance drones and research vessels operating near sensitive waters, reinforcing concerns in Taipei about growing gray-zone pressure tactics by Beijing.

Beijing deepened strategic coordination with Moscow during Xi Jinping's summit with Vladimir Putin on May 20, where both leaders criticized what they described as “irresponsible” U.S. foreign policy and warned against growing American missile defense and alliance expansion. The meeting highlighted continued China-Russia alignment on energy, geopolitical coordination, and opposition to U.S.-led global influence, although reports indicated unresolved disagreements over the proposed Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline.

China's tensions with Japan also escalated after Xi Jinping reportedly criticized Tokyo's "remilitarization" during discussions linked to the Trump visit, reflecting Beijing's growing concern over Japan's military expansion, Taiwan-related security planning, and strengthening defense cooperation with the United States. Japanese officials, meanwhile, continued describing China as their primary strategic threat amid expanding Chinese military activity in the East China Sea and around Taiwan

Russia's diplomacy this week centered on its deepening strategic alignment with China following President Vladimir Putin's two-day state visit to Beijing (May 19–20), where both sides signed roughly 20–40 cooperation documents covering energy, trade, technology, transport, and military coordination. The two leaders issued a joint declaration framing their relationship as a foundation for a "multipolar world," explicitly rejecting Western "hegemonism" and expanding coordination in international forums, while also extending their long-standing friendship treaty.

Although energy cooperation advanced through expanded oil, gas, and settlement-in-national-currency arrangements, a major breakthrough on the Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline remained unresolved, indicating limits in economic alignment despite political closeness. Putin also emphasized growing visa-free travel and people-to-people exchanges, while Moscow highlighted China as a stabilizing partner amid Western sanctions pressure and Russia's continued reliance on Chinese industrial and dual-use inputs. Parallel diplomatic messaging stressed Russia's readiness to deepen military cooperation with China, reinforcing a broader strategic bloc formation dynamic in response to U.S. and NATO pressure.

15. Europe

The UK's foreign and security policy this week was shaped by a widening debate over national resilience and supply chain vulnerability, after a National Preparedness Commission report warned that Britain remains structurally unprepared for major geopolitical shocks, including war, due to weak strategic stockpiling of food, medicine, and critical industrial inputs. The report explicitly linked these vulnerabilities to broader global instability, including tensions involving Russia, China, and disruptions in maritime chokepoints, arguing that the UK's current resilience model is outpaced by emerging systemic risks.

In economic diplomacy, the UK concluded a major £3.7 billion trade agreement with the six Gulf Cooperation Council states, eliminating tariffs on most British exports and expanding UK access to Gulf markets across services, defence, aerospace, and luxury goods sectors. The deal strengthens London's post-Brexit economic reorientation toward the Gulf, but has triggered criticism over the absence of human rights conditionality, highlighting an ongoing tension in UK foreign policy between commercial expansion and normative diplomacy.

On global security and development policy, UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper warned that the disruption of fertiliser flows linked to instability in the Strait of Hormuz risks triggering a wider global food crisis, particularly affecting food-import dependent states and vulnerable regions. The statement framed maritime security in the Gulf as a direct UK national security concern, tying Middle East instability to domestic food inflation and global humanitarian risk.

France this week moved further toward institutionalizing its role as the core European driver of “strategic autonomy,” with expanded bilateral defense and industrial coordination with Greece becoming a key pillar of Paris’s broader Mediterranean security architecture, including cooperation on missile systems, defense production, and joint industrial programs aimed at reducing dependence on U.S. military supply chains while strengthening EU defense capacity. At the same time, internal French political debate sharpened over NATO alignment after far-right leader Marine Le Pen reiterated her proposal for France to exit NATO’s integrated military command structure, arguing it would restore sovereign strategic freedom, a position strongly rejected by Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot, who instead pushed for deeper “Europeanization” of NATO as U.S. reliability comes under question.

Germany this week advanced a more institutional and EU-centered approach to European security and diplomacy, with Chancellor Friedrich Merz proposing “associate membership” for Ukraine in the European Union as an interim mechanism to deepen integration without full accession, while simultaneously advocating renewed diplomatic channels with Russia as part of a broader European-led attempt to shape a post-war settlement framework amid fluctuating U.S. engagement. The proposal reflects Berlin’s effort to stabilize the EU enlargement process while maintaining deterrence against Russia, as Germany also supported stronger European defense coordination and faster integration of Ukraine into EU political and security structures despite internal divisions among member states.

16. International and Regional Organizations

United Nation

The UN continued to support AU/IGAD efforts on Somalia’s political dialogue and regional stability. On or around May 18, 2026, the UN Secretary-General’s spokesperson highlighted ongoing monitoring of developments in Somalia, welcoming the willingness of the Federal Government and Somali Future Council to engage in dialogue on elections and related issues, while encouraging continued talks toward agreement.

Humanitarian coordination, climate-peace-security linkages and support for AUSSOM’s mandate and political facilitation were ongoing priorities.

Africa Union

The AU remained deeply engaged on Somalia's political crisis. On May 16, 2026 the African Union Commission issued a statement expressing concern over the lack of consensus from the May 13-15 high-level negotiations in Mogadishu between the Federal Government led by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and the Somali Future Council opposition. The Commission commended the willingness to engage but urged stakeholders to avoid entrenchment, recommit to inclusive negotiations, mutual compromise and adherence to constitutional order.

The AU reaffirmed its support for Somalia via AUSSOM and praised facilitation by the UN, AU, and bilateral partners. Political tensions around mandate expirations, constitutional amendments, and election preparations continued to dominate, with risks of further fragmentation.

African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM)

AUSSOM sustained operational activities amid Al-Shabaab threats and capacity-building efforts. On May 18, 2026, AUSSOM police led a training programme for Somali Police instructors to strengthen security sector capacity in Mogadishu. Joint operations and coordination with Somali National Armed Forces continued focusing on consolidating security gains and supporting stabilization.

Funding and sustainability challenges persisted as a key concern, despite the mandate renewal to December 31, 2026. Operational tempo remained high with ongoing capacity-building and troop-contributing country coordination.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

IGAD continued to monitor and respond to the political situation in Somalia while advancing practical regional cooperation initiatives. On or around May 16, 2026, the IGAD Secretariat called for continued dialogue following the stalled high-level negotiations between the Federal Government of Somalia and the Somali Future Council held May 13-15. This echoed broader regional support for inclusive political processes amid ongoing tensions over elections and constitutional issues.

A major highlight during the reporting week was IGAD Executive Secretary Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu's participation in the high-level Horn Inter-Elite Dialogue Jigjiga Forum, held in Jigjiga, Ethiopia, from May 17-19, 2026. Dr. Workneh addressed the forum under the theme "Strengthening Regional Agency for Strategic Autonomy and Durable Peace in the Horn of Africa, emphasizing stronger regional unity, Horn-led solutions, inclusive elite dialogue and African-owned approaches to peace amidst global geopolitical shifts. He called for mutual recognition and cooperation among Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Djibouti to build trust and reduce conflict.

The forum adopted the Jigjiga Declaration, formally establishing the Jigjiga Forum as a permanent platform for inter-elite dialogue, peacebuilding, coordination and regional cooperation. Its headquarters and secretariat will be based in Jigjiga, Ethiopia. This initiative complements IGAD's ongoing efforts on Somalia's political dialogue and broader resilience programming, including work on transboundary wildlife conservation and groundwater resilience building on the earlier May 13 Nairobi workshop under the HoA GW4R Programme.

IGAD announced preparations to deploy regional election observers for Ethiopia's general election scheduled for June 1, 2026. Commander Abebe Muluneh, IGAD Peace and Security Division Director, stated on May 19 that experts from Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda have been invited to observe the process following an invitation from the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The mission aims to assess whether polling-day procedures and ballot counting meet regional and international standards, supporting transparent and credible elections.



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