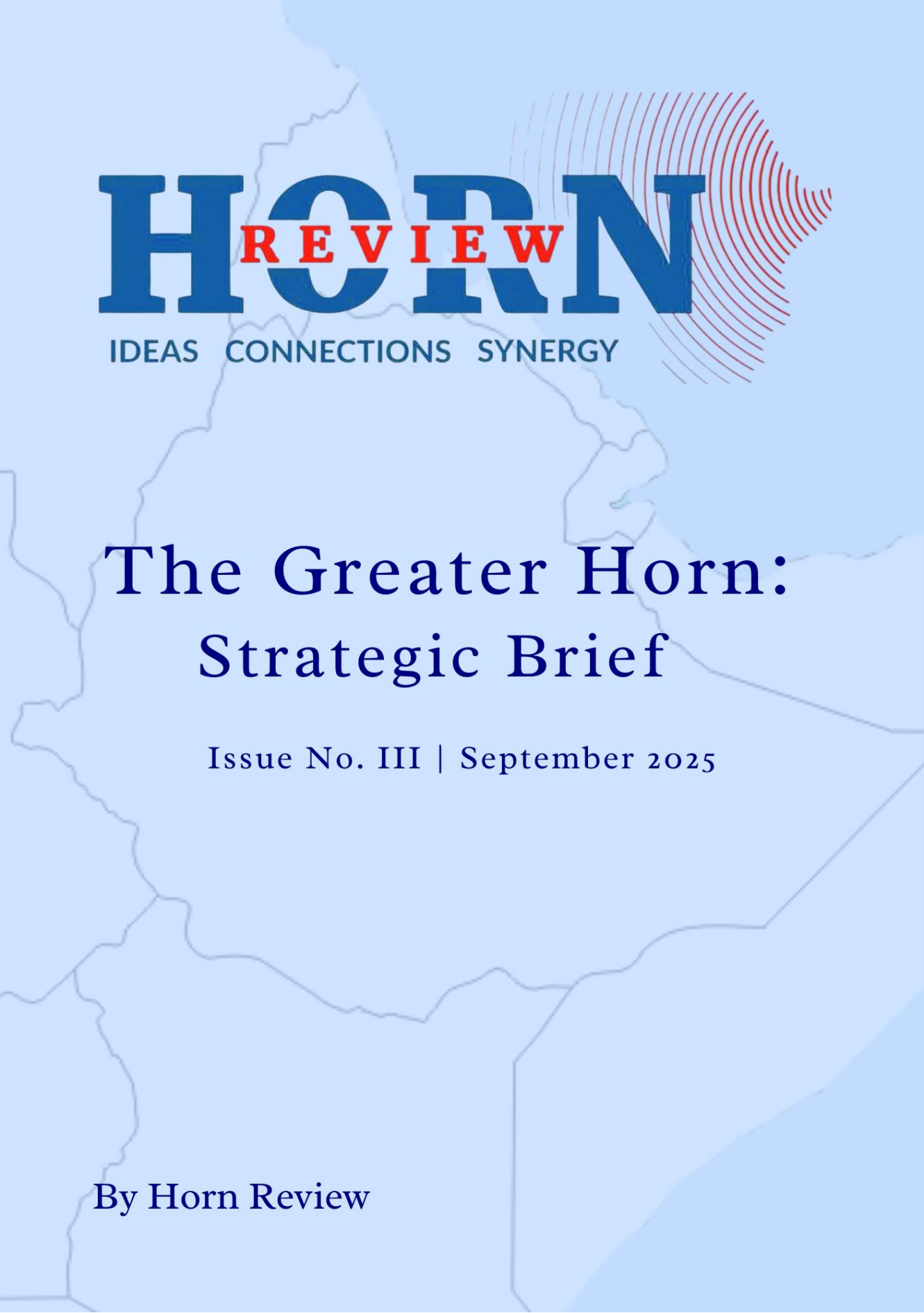




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The Horn in September: Escalation, Diplomacy, and Shifting Orders

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Foreword

“The Greater Horn” Strategic Brief offers a monthly synthesis of key diplomatic and security trends in one of the world’s most volatile yet consequential geopolitical theatres. This edition, covering developments from September 2025, draws on open-source intelligence, strategic assessments, policy briefings, and regional commentary to deliver nuanced, non-partisan, and research-driven insights into strategic complexities, internal vulnerabilities, emerging partnerships, and geopolitical recalibrations shaping the region’s trajectory. Intended to inform regional policymakers, analysts, and stakeholders, the briefing is produced by independent experts committed to regional stability, cooperative security, and evidence-based policymaking.

Blen Mamo,
Executive Director & Editor-in-Chief,
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The Horn in September: Escalation, Diplomacy, and Shifting Orders

Executive Summary

September 2025 reflected a month of simultaneous escalation, diplomacy, and shifting orders across the Greater Horn region.

Ethiopia consolidated its national security while elevating its diplomatic profile through the inauguration of the GERD, the launch of a nuclear energy program, new financial stabilization measures, and hosting three high-level international summits in Addis Ababa. Its defense pact with Kenya reinforced regional security ties, though internal fragility persists in Oromia, Amhara, and Tigray.

Eritrea sought to re-emerge from isolation with greater diplomatic visibility, especially at the UN and through its alliance with Egypt, while sustaining hostility toward Ethiopia and reliance on proxy actors.

Djibouti deepened ties with Egypt, reaffirmed support for Ethiopia's energy ambitions, and positioned itself as a Red Sea and logistics hub, engaging actively in multilateral forums.

Somalia experienced intensifying federal tensions, Al-Shabaab confrontations, and political disputes, while cautiously advancing post-Ankara diplomacy with Ethiopia on lawful sea access and implementing reforms such as a new e-visa system. **Somaliland** expanded partnerships with U.S. allies, Taiwan, and Israel, while warning against Egyptian arms transfers to Mogadishu.

Sudan faced intensifying warfare between SAF and RSF, with the siege of El-Fasher creating catastrophic humanitarian conditions. The Quad peace roadmap struggled to gain traction as the warring parties dismissed it, while Khartoum's boycott of the GERD inauguration underscored its alignment with Egypt at the expense of regional cooperation.

South Sudan was marked by the treason trial of Riek Machar, worsening insecurity, corruption-driven governance failures, and severe flooding. Still, Juba pursued regional integration through Ethiopia's power exports and oil corridor initiatives.

Kenya experienced political polarization, judicial intervention on constitutional amendments, and border security concerns, while advancing trade talks with the U.S. and signing a renewed defense agreement with Ethiopia.

Overall, the Greater Horn in September reflected a dual trajectory of deepening crises in Sudan and Somalia alongside Ethiopia's rise as a diplomatic hub and driver of regional integration.

Section One: Domestic Development, Regional Tensions, and Strategic Realignments

1.1 Ethiopia: Diplomatic Ascent and National Security Consolidation

Ethiopia's strategic posture in September was defined by a calculated push for global diplomatic elevation and the resolute assertion of national interests on key fronts: energy sovereignty, economic self-reliance, and securing maritime access. This assertive external agenda was pursued while simultaneously strengthening internal security institutions and managing persistent ethno-political fragmentation in the lead-up to the 2026 national elections.

The GERD and the Nile Diplomatic Offensive

The inauguration of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on September 9 served as the definitive declaration of Ethiopia's national will, energy sovereignty, and its vision for regional integration. The high-level attendance, notably including regional leaders like the Kenyan President William Ruto, President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir, P.M. of Barbados Mia Amor Mottley, P.M. of the Kingdom of Eswatini; Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Chairperson of the AUC and Claver Gatete, UN Under-Secretary-General, publicly confirmed Addis Ababa's intent to utilize the GERD as a source of clean energy export, positioning itself as a catalyst for economic interdependence and stability in the Horn of Africa.¹

Ethiopia's persistent commitment to equitable utilization is emphasized by the dam's inherent benefits to downstream nations, which include flood mitigation, regulating the devastating high seasonal flows, and ensuring a more reliable, year-round water supply.² Ethiopia's continued willingness to submit to international law and diplomatic frameworks, despite years of construction, demonstrates its commitment to good faith negotiation. This fundamentally reframes the GERD as a model of African-led development.

In direct response to the inauguration, Egypt escalated the diplomatic dispute by submitting a letter to the UNSC, accusing Ethiopia of unilateral actions that violate international law and threaten its water rights.³ Ethiopia's swift response to the UNSC strongly defended its sovereign rights to development, rejecting what it termed the "colonial mindset" and hegemonic claims, and garnered significant diplomatic backing through the public affirmation of Africans.⁴

¹ Al Jazeera. 2025. "Ethiopia Inaugurates GERD Dam amid Downstream Tensions with Egypt, Sudan." *Al Jazeera*, September 9, 2025

² Assefa M., and Gebriel A., 2025. "Giant Ethiopian Dam Promises Greater Flood Control and Water Management." *Civil Engineering Magazine* (July)

³ Sahlu, Sisay. 2025. "Foreign Minister Defends GERD in Letter to UN Security Council, Slams Egypt's 'Colonial Mindset'." *The Reporter Ethiopia*, September 20, 2025.

⁴ Addis Standard. 2025 "Ethiopia Submits 'Sufficient Written Clarification' to UN Security Council on Egypt's GERD Complaint — Ministry of Foreign Affairs." *Addis Standard*, September 18, 2025.

Ascendancy as a Global Diplomatic Hub

Following the GERD's successful inauguration, Ethiopia decisively cemented its role as a global diplomatic hub by successfully convening the Second Africa Climate Summit (ACS2), the UN Climate Week, and the Second Africa-CARICOM Summit in Addis Ababa.⁵ This simultaneous hosting of three high-profile international forums represented a major achievement, drawing global leaders and asserting the capital's central diplomatic significance.

The joint hosting of the ACS2 and UN Climate Week was strategically utilized to advance an Africa-led climate agenda, compelling international stakeholders to focus on tangible climate finance and the accelerated development of resilient infrastructure.⁶

The platforms enabled Ethiopia to strategically amplify the continent's voice against a traditionally Eurocentric climate narrative, with reactions from key stakeholders underscoring the urgent need for concrete commitments and adaptation measures. This advocacy successfully framed a paradigm shift from traditional aid to investment in African-led innovations. The participation of high-level European and African officials highlighted the capital's central role and provided a significant opportunity to redefine bilateral and multilateral partnerships from a position of African strength.

Furthermore, the Africa-CARICOM Summit served to strategically reconnect with Caribbean partners on critical issues like reparatory justice and trade, reinforcing Ethiopia's deep commitment to the solidarity of the Global South and expanding its global diplomatic outreach beyond traditional regional boundaries.⁷ Addis Ababa was a deliberate choice: hosting at the African Union headquarters gave the event institutional weight, while Ethiopia's history of resisting colonization, most notably through its victory at the Battle of Adwa, gave the summit powerful symbolic resonance for discussions on sovereignty and reparatory justice.

Asserting National Imperatives

In September, Ethiopia participated in the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly. Ethiopia's UNGA visit, led by President Taye, was crystallized on a strategic intent at the global level.⁸ His speech was a comprehensive, multilateral pivot demanding UN and global financial reforms and formally asserting Ethiopia's maritime interests in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean as a core national security and developmental imperative. The President asserted that “reliable access to the sea is not a luxury, but a necessity for the survival and growth of a nation of Ethiopia's size, invoking the principle that these water

⁵ Africa Climate Summit. n.d. “The Second Africa Climate Summit (ACS2)”. Accessed September 30, 2025

⁶ “Ethiopia to Host the Second Climate Week of 2025 (CW2) and the Second Africa Climate Summit (ACS2),” UNFCCC, August 14, 2025,

⁷ African Union. “The 2nd Africa-CARICOM Summit.” African Union, September 7, 2025

⁸ Ethiopian News Agency, “President Taye of Ethiopia Leads Delegation to 80th UN General Assembly in New York,” *ENA English*, September 22, 2025

bodies are the common heritage of humanity and that equal access must be ensured for all landlocked, developing nations.”⁹

He stressed that Ethiopia's quest is framed as “advancing regional, economic, and security cooperation” in the Red Sea area, avoiding “unhealthy regional groupings” through mutual benefits and diplomacy. Ethiopia leveraged the UN General Assembly platform to shift focus from visibility to implementation of policies. President Taye emphasized the need for Security Council reform, debt relief, and African representation, citing the Nile River Basin Cooperative Framework and the GERD as examples of African agency.¹⁰ This clear articulation on the world stage, described as a “resounding and unified message” for African representation, sought to proactively manage and de-escalate regional tensions.

Ambassador Hadera Abera engaged in targeted diplomacy with representatives from the United States, Cuba, Azerbaijan, UAE, Belarus, Portugal, Germany, Sudan, Burundi, and others, aiming to translate discussions into tangible projects, including consular solutions, aviation, trade arrangements, FDI, climate finance, and migration management.¹¹ His engagements in AUPSC, AUSSOM, and BRICS meetings sought to convert summit declarations into actionable and financeable deliverables, to advance Multilateralism, Horn stability, and UN reforms.

Security Consolidation and Economic Self-Reliance

Reinforcing the diplomatic thrust with concrete action, the formal signing of a new Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with Kenya this month established a pivotal strategic framework for enhanced security operations.¹² This pact, renewing a six-decade-old agreement, is poised to significantly improve counter-terrorism and border security across the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia and Kenya’s long-standing partnership is gaining renewed regional significance as both countries deepen cooperation in defense, energy, and infrastructure. The agreement formalized intelligence sharing and joint military training, reinforcing their shared role in regional stability under the African Union and IGAD.

Energy integration, through Ethiopia’s electricity exports to Kenya, along with projects like the LAPSET Corridor, illustrates the practical interdependence driving their collaboration. Kenya’s support for Ethiopia’s development agenda, including President Ruto’s endorsement of the GERD, highlights Nairobi’s growing diplomatic influence in the Horn of Africa.

Structured cooperation mechanisms could transform their pragmatic collaboration into a more resilient regional partnership. Incremental institutionalization may enhance stability,

⁹ Anadolu Agency. “Ethiopian President Calls for Equal Access for All States to Red Sea, Indian Ocean.” *Anadolu Agency*, September 26, 2025.

¹⁰ Ethiopian News Agency. “Ethiopian President Calls for Security Council Reform at High-Level General Debate of 80th UN General Assembly.” *ENA*, September 25, 2025.

¹¹ Ambassador Hadera Abera, “Post on diplomatic engagement and Ethiopia’s multilateral initiatives,” *X (formerly Twitter)*, September 26, 2025

¹² Addis Standard. “Ethiopia, Kenya Sign 2nd Defense Cooperation Agreement in History Covering Intelligence Sharing, Joint Exercises.” September 24, 2025.

cross-border trade, and collective influence, positioning both countries as central actors in shaping the region's future.

In the crucial internal security domain, the elevation of 66 officers to the military's highest ranks in late September demonstrates a resolute commitment to consolidating institutional loyalty and professionalizing the defense forces.¹³

This bold move comes at a time of escalating internal constraints, with the ENDF managing continued insurgencies, including intensifying OLA attacks in Oromia and Fano clashes in Amhara. The promotion of a merit-based, ethnically diverse leadership aims to inject fresh operational efficiency and signal military resolve to allies while deterring adversaries, most notably Eritrea, whose covert operation tries to impede Ethiopia's stability.

However, this diplomatic and military consolidation is immediately and consistently undermined by the fragility of post-conflict peace in Tigray, the central internal security concern. The Prime Minister's East African Affairs Advisor, Getachew Reda, reiterated his profound concern over the fragility of the post-conflict peace in Tigray. He directly shared concerns about a covert TPLF alliance with Eritrea, which he explicitly views as detrimental to ongoing peace efforts.

He stated, *"The TPLF leadership is outrageously conspiring to leverage an alliance with Eritrea to deal with its struggle with the central government. But Eritrea's involvement is a dangerous gamble that puts the people of Tigray at risk. I will fight alongside my people against any such move, because inviting external forces into our conflict only perpetuates suffering and division."*¹⁴ This strong stance explicitly confirms an active TPLF-Eritrea political relationship, countering the party's denial. He further called for political inclusivity, respect for autonomy, and peaceful dialogue to overcome Ethiopia's ethnic and political diversity challenges.

The TPLF's recent accusation of a "silent genocide" in Tigray, strategically leveled against the guarantors of the Pretoria Agreement (US, EU, AU, UN), is a destabilizing maneuver primarily serving the TPLF's hardline faction.¹⁵ The political sincerity of this extreme rhetoric is highly questionable, given that the TPLF, led by figures still commanding military assets, remains responsible for initiating the devastating two-year conflict; therefore, being a "genocidaire by itself" before accusing the guarantors.

The core risk to Ethiopian national interest is the TPLF's consistent violation of the Pretoria Agreement's central mandate: disarmament. This delay has turned the cessation of hostilities into a "break, not a cure" for the region, effectively granting the TPLF time to consolidate its

¹³ Addis Standard. "Ethiopia, Kenya Sign 2nd Defense Cooperation Agreement in History Covering Intelligence Sharing, Joint Exercises." September 24, 2025.

¹⁴ Reda, Getachew. Interview by *Global Power Shift*. YouTube video, 45:22. Posted September 30, 2025.

¹⁵ Addis Standard. 2025. "TPLF Accuses Guarantors of Pretoria Agreement of Inaction, Warns of 'Silent Genocide' in Tigray." September 29, 2025.

military capacity and contemplate a return to war, thereby demonstrating its plan not to implement the Pretoria Peace Agreement.

This strategic non-compliance is dangerously compounded by the TPLF's apparent alignment with Eritrea, a move that severely jeopardizes Ethiopia's sovereignty. The Pretoria Agreement explicitly forbids collaboration with any hostile external force, yet reports of a TPLF-Eritrea relationship confirm that the TPLF is deliberately working against the very spirit of the accord it professes to uphold. By leveraging external pressure with the "genocide" claim and simultaneously entertaining an alliance with a historical adversary, the TPLF ensures that Tigray remains deliberately unstable. This exposes the internal dynamic in which the party's pursuit of renewed leverage turns its political setbacks into self-inflicted wounds, later repackaged as external conspiracies. In doing so, it prioritizes geopolitical brinkmanship over genuine reconciliation and the restoration of humanitarian dignity for the people of Tigray.

Finally, the TPLF's latest threat to impose "zero tolerance"¹⁶ reflects a desperate attempt to control the narrative following the party's documented failures to uphold the Pretoria Agreement and disarm.

Ethiopia's Nuclear Energy Journey

Ethiopia's announcement of a nuclear power program during the GERD inauguration marks a strategic turning point in its pursuit of energy sovereignty and industrial modernization. Building on over a decade of engagement with Russia and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the plan envisions up to two reactor units of around 1,200 MW each by the early 2030s.

Designed to complement Ethiopia's hydropower base, the project aims to stabilize electricity supply, support industrialization, and strengthen regional energy interdependence amid growing climate variability.

On September 19, Ethiopia extended its vision of nuclear power, bolstered by IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi's meeting with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The meeting aimed to advance Ethiopia's regulatory and training support, solidifying its energy sovereignty and regional integration ambitions.¹⁷ Under Minister of Innovation and Technology Belete Molla, who secured IAEA pledges for human resource development and regulatory capacity, Ethiopia laid the groundwork for a civilian nuclear program.¹⁸

Institutionally, the program's success hinges on strong regulatory governance, workforce development, and transparent adherence to international safeguards. Ethiopia's participation in IAEA frameworks provides a foundation, but domestic mechanisms for risk management,

¹⁶ Addis Standard. "TPLF Vows Crackdown on Media It Says 'Fuels Division' in Tigray, Journalists Warn of Press Freedom Threat." September 30, 2025.

¹⁷ Fana Media Corporation. "Prime Minister Abiy Meets with IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi." June 30, 2025.

¹⁸ Addis Fortune. "Ethiopia, Russia Partner on Nuclear Power Plant for Clean Energy." September 27, 2025.

waste control, and safety oversight remain essential. Effective coordination across national institutions will determine whether the initiative matures into a sustainable, sovereign energy model.

Geopolitically, Ethiopia's peaceful nuclear ambition elevates its regional profile while requiring careful diplomacy to mitigate misperceptions among neighbors and balance dependencies with major partners like Russia. If managed transparently and inclusively, the initiative could transform Ethiopia into a regional energy leader, strengthen economic resilience, and demonstrate African agency in high-technology development.

Complementing these strategic pursuits, in September, Ethiopia intensified its financial stabilization efforts with a series of decisive measures aimed at safeguarding macroeconomic security and restoring fiscal credibility. The Financial Intelligence Service (FIS) froze 123 bank accounts linked to alleged illegal foreign exchange activities, emphasizing the government's determination to curb illicit capital flows that have long undermined monetary stability, an issue often linked to cross-border networks and external interference.¹⁹ This action aligns with the administration's broader agenda to strengthen financial governance and insulate the economy from speculative pressures.

In parallel, the newly appointed National Bank of Ethiopia Governor Eyob Tekalign (PhD) embarked on his inaugural mission abroad to China, advancing debt restructuring negotiations and financial cooperation under the G20 Common Framework.²⁰ Building on the groundwork laid by his predecessor, Mamo Mihretu, Eyob's diplomacy seeks to secure debt relief, attract new investment, and reinforce Ethiopia's Home-Grown Economic Reform Agenda. His talks with Chinese financial institutions and state banks mark a strategic effort to recalibrate Ethiopia's external financing model, restore investor confidence, and stabilize a strained economy following the 2023 Eurobond default.²¹

Crucially, this financial diplomacy is designed to underpin a determined drive toward economic self-sufficiency, which was physically evident through an accelerated program of mega-projects, including the \$10 billion Bishoftu Mega International Airport,²² the Gode Fertilizer Plant,²³ and a new Oil Refinery utilizing domestic reserves.²⁴

This trifecta transcends mere infrastructure, signifying a determined pursuit of industrial self-sufficiency and cementing Ethiopia's role as a pivotal continental development force attracting vital investment.

¹⁹ Ethiopian News Agency. 2025. "Financial Intelligence Service Freezes 123 Accounts Over Alleged Illegal FX." September 19, 2025.

²⁰ Addis Fortune. 2025. "Debt Crisis in Focus as Central Bank Governor Visits China." September 27, 2025.

²¹ Addis Fortune. 2023. "Ethiopia's Eurobond Default: Now What?" December 30, 2023.

²² African Development Bank. 2025. "The \$10 Billion Mega-Airport Financing Partnership Between Ethiopian Airlines and African Development Bank Takes Off." August 12, 2025.

²³ Addis Standard. 2025. "Ethiopia, Dangote Group Ink \$2.5 Billion Deal to Build Fertilizer Complex in Gode, Somali Region." August 28, 2025.

²⁴ Addis Standard. 2025. "PM Abiy Says Ethiopia to Begin Supplying Domestically Produced Gas for First Time as Export Ambition Shifts to Domestic Consumption." July 3, 2025.

Political Landscape and Ideological Framing

Ethiopia's political landscape is undergoing noticeable realignment ahead of the 2026 national elections.²⁵ The formation of a five-party coalition represents a potentially significant development, introducing new dynamics into the competitive space traditionally dominated by the ruling Prosperity Party (PP). Prosperity Party's advantage has stemmed from a fragmented opposition landscape; however, the coalition, uniting established entities such as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), reflects an effort to coordinate political messaging and consolidate influence. By focusing on core national matters and the conduct of credible elections, the alliance aims to enhance its institutional presence and legitimacy within both domestic and international arenas.²⁶

For the Prosperity Party, this evolving alignment may prompt strategic adjustments to sustain its electoral reach and reaffirm its commitment to pluralism, while for opposition actors, the coalition provides a potential platform to strengthen engagement and visibility in Ethiopia's broader political process.

This political ferment coincides with the unveiling of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's book,²⁷ *The Medemer State*, which formalizes his governing philosophy of synergy and consensus into an indigenous Ethiopian government ideology. The book clearly confronts the legacy of historical division and advocates for a pragmatic, inclusive statehood driven by unity and sovereignty, framing the current developmental and diplomatic endeavors within a grand national renewal project. The ultimate success of this ideology will be judged on its capacity to transform these ideals into lived reality across a still-polarized populace.

²⁵ Issack, Muktar Ismail. "Ethiopia's 2026 Election: Democracy's Last Stand or Authoritarian Coronation?" *Addis Standard*, June 11, 2025.

²⁶ Addis Standard. 2025. "Five Political Parties Form Coalition Ahead of National Elections." September 20, 2025.

²⁷ Ethiopian News Agency. 2025. "Ethiopia Aims to Enhance Regional Energy Cooperation through Peaceful Nuclear Program." September 19, 2025.

1.2 Eritrea: Crawling out of Isolation, and Continued Tensions with Ethiopia

September marked a month of unusual diplomatic visibility for Eritrea, underscoring an attempt to reposition itself after decades of near-pariah status. Having long relied on rigid isolation as both a defensive posture and an instrument of regime survival, Asmara has begun re-engaging external powers. Yet, as its diplomacy broadens, its familiar pattern of antagonism with Ethiopia and reliance on destabilizing networks remains ever-present, shaping the tenor of its outreach and the shadow it casts on regional security.

Enduring and Deepening Ties with Egypt

At the center of Asmara's regional posture lies its enduring alliance with Egypt, a relationship that has historically rested on shared hostility toward Ethiopia. September again highlighted this deepening axis, marked by several engagements:

1. Early September: The Egyptian Agency of Partnership for Development (EAPD) delivered medical equipment to Asmara.²⁸ The ceremony at Asmara International Airport was attended by the Egyptian ambassador and Eritrean health officials, framed as humanitarian support but symbolically reinforcing Egypt's presence.
2. September 10: Ambassador Ragui Eletreby of Egypt visited Eritrea's embassy in Japan and met Ambassador Istiphanos, where discussions touched on regional peace and security.²⁹
3. September 23: Eritrea's embassy in Ethiopia welcomed Obaida EIDandarawy, the new Egyptian ambassador to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the AU and UNECA, who discussed the growing partnership.³⁰
4. Late September (UNGA): Eritrean Foreign Minister Osman Saleh met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty in New York.³¹ According to Cairo, discussions included the Red Sea, the Nile, and ways to elevate the tripartite coordination with Somalia into a firmer alliance.

These engagements underscored how Eritrea provides Egypt with a Horn partner willing to amplify its anti-Ethiopian rhetoric, while Asmara secures external backing for its confrontational posture toward Addis Ababa.

Asmara's external activities extended beyond its Cairo axis. Its embassies in Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Tokyo, and New York were particularly active in September:

²⁸ Refaat, Taarek. 2025. "Egypt Delivers Medical Aid Shipment to Eritrea." *Sada Elbalad (See.News)*, August 30, 2025.

²⁹ Estifanos, Ambassador (@AmbassadorEstif). "Ambassador Ragui ELETREBY..." X. September 10, 2025.

³⁰ Embassy of Eritrea to Ethiopia, Permanent Mission to AU & ECA (@ERIEMBAET). 2025. "It was our pleasure to welcome H.E. Ambassador Obaida ElDandarawy..." X (formerly Twitter), September 23, 2025.

³¹ Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (@MFAEgyptEnglish). "...Dr. Badr Abdelatty, met on Saturday" Facebook. September 28, 2025.

1. At the UN, Eritrea's Ambassador Sophia Tesfamariam met UN Special Envoy Guang Cong, in what was officially described as a courtesy call on regional dynamics.³²
2. On September 17, Eritrea's Addis Ababa embassy hosted the Special Envoy, while chargé d'affaires Biniam Berehe met with the EU's Ambassador to the AU.³³

By leveraging Addis Ababa's role as Africa's diplomatic hub and ever-growing regional weight, Eritrea maintained visibility and worked to advance narratives aligned with its strategic posture.

Renewed Somali Connections

Eritrea also sought to reanimate its ties with Somali political actors. On September 10, former Somali Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon visited Asmara for talks with President Isaias Afwerki.³⁴ Shirdon is expected to run in Somalia's upcoming elections, and his engagement with Asmara raised speculation about Eritrea's intent to cultivate alternative allies in Mogadishu. The backdrop is significant: President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, once part of the Cairo–Asmara pact against Ethiopia, has since mended ties with Addis Ababa, attending the inauguration of the GERD earlier this month.³⁵ Eritrea's outreach to Shirdon thus fits a broader pattern of cultivating opposition figures as insurance against political shifts, reinforcing its reliance on indirect and destabilizing channels of influence.

High-Profile UN Diplomacy

The United Nations General Assembly provided Eritrea with another platform to attract attention. Foreign Minister Osman Saleh led the delegation, holding meetings with counterparts from Greece, Sudan, Iran, and Egypt, as well as with EU envoy Annette Weber and U.S. White House Advisor for Africa Massad Boulos.

1. *European engagement:* The meeting with Annette Weber³⁶ reflected growing European interest in the Horn, with Asmara's alarmist rhetoric on Ethiopia drawing notice rather than carefully cultivated diplomacy.
2. *U.S. engagement:* The September 26 meeting with Massad Boulos³⁷ was portrayed in Asmara as a breakthrough, though in reality it reflected Washington's broader regional attention rather than recognition of Eritrea as a key player. Eritrea seeks to

³² Tesfamariam, Sophia (@AmbStesfamariam).2025. "Welcome Mr. Guang Cong..." X. September 8, 2025.

³³ Embassy of Eritrea to Ethiopia PM to AU & ECA (@ERIEMBAET). "Constructive discussions today ..." X. September 17, 2025.

³⁴ Shirdon, Abdi Farah (@AbdiShirdoon). "I paid a courtesy visit to Asmara..." X. September 10, 2025.

³⁵ Ethiopian News Agency. "GERD's Power to Foster Continental Partnership: President of Somalia." ENA English. September 9, 2025.

³⁶ Weber, Annette (@EUSR_Weber). "I valued the substantive..." X. September 26, 2025.

³⁷ Solomon, Berhane (@EmbassyEritrea). "Today H.E. Osman Saleh, Foreign Minister of #Eritrea, met with Massad Fares Boulos." X. September 25, 2025.

capitalize on such encounters to break its isolation, though its uncompromising posture limits how far such openings can go.

3. *Iranian engagement*: Eritrea's meeting with Iran's foreign minister underscored its alignment on Middle Eastern fault lines. The Iranian Foreign Ministry issued a report of the meeting, noting the joint condemnation of Israel in stark terms, calling for united Islamic action against what they termed as "expansionist and warmongering policies" of the "Zionist regime." The use of such rhetoric places Eritrea firmly within the orbit of hardline Middle Eastern actors.³⁸
4. *A meeting with the Secretary General*: According to Eritrea's Information Minister, Yemane Gebremeskel, in a meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the Foreign Minister characterized Ethiopia's call for sea access as "expansionist ambitions," reflecting Eritrea's long-standing alarmist narrative.³⁹

In his General Assembly speech, the Foreign Minister reiterated Eritrea's long-standing call for "a new global order," emphasizing the regime's belief that it has been marginalized by the liberal order and its institutions, including the UN. The 80th session offered little deviation from this established narrative.⁴⁰

Continued Tensions with Ethiopia

Eritrea's animosity toward Ethiopia remained the defining feature of its diplomacy. Senior officials, including Information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel, escalated rhetorical attacks on Addis Ababa.⁴¹ Official outlets branded Ethiopia's Red Sea ambitions as "reckless" and "illegal", with commentaries carrying alarmist titles designed to frame Ethiopia as a regional threat. These narratives, amplified by Eritrean diplomats abroad and the Addis Ababa mission, constituted a coordinated campaign to vilify Ethiopia. Far from cautious diplomacy, these were authoritarian reflexes: confrontational, uncompromising, and directed at undermining Ethiopia's regional position.

Beneath its propaganda, Eritrea advanced its strategy of cultivating proxy actors across Ethiopia's northern periphery, referred to as Tsmdo⁴². September saw renewed efforts to build influence through digital platforms, cross-border gatherings, and support for armed factions. The TPLF, though internally divided and with only limited support among Tigray's

³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran. "Iran, Eritrea Explore Deeper Ties; Emphasize Global South Unity at UN Assembly." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran. September 28, 2025.

³⁹ Meskel, Yemane G. (@hawelti). "FM Osman Saleh met UN Secretary General, Mr. Antonio Guterres..." X. September 30, 2025.

⁴⁰ Saleh, Osman. "Foreign Minister Osman Saleh's Statement at the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly." Shabait, September 29, 2025.

⁴¹ Meskel, Yemane G. (@hawelti). "PP..officials..." X. September 18, 2025.

<https://x.com/hawelti/status/1968699249962504233>

⁴² Plaut, Martin. "The Ximdo Gamble: TPLF-Eritrea Alliance and the Fragile Peace in Tigray and the Horn of Africa." Martin Plaut, August 2, 2025.

population, remained the most visible of these interlocutors. In a recent interview, former interim President Getachew Reda hinted at the TPLF–Eritrea axis, stating that Asmara will gladly use any willing body to destabilize Ethiopia.⁴³

Eritrea also sought to embed itself in Amhara-based armed groups and other northern actors with grievances against Addis Ababa.

This proxy strategy is not without hypocrisy. While Eritrea fuels proxy warfare in Ethiopia, it denounces any external backing of the Eritrean opposition as illegitimate. Yet opposition movements such as the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO) and the Afar Democratic Organization, both hosted by Ethiopia, continue to mobilize against the PFDJ regime.⁴⁴ Their presence exacerbates Asmara’s insecurity and partly explains its persistence with Tsmdo. In the long run, the trajectory of such movements may shape Eritrea’s internal politics, especially as the ruling party weakens.

Eritrea’s propaganda machine played a central role in sustaining its external and internal campaigns. Online messaging amplified Tsmdo, while state outlets cast Eritrea as the defender of sovereignty against Ethiopia’s supposed expansionism. This narrative war illustrates the dual-track nature of Eritrea’s approach: presenting itself abroad as a security stakeholder while simultaneously sharpening its subversive posture at home and in the region.

Eritrea’s domestic conditions remained unchanged despite its diplomatic visibility. Repression, indefinite conscription, and the absence of independent media continue to drive migration and exile. The opposition, particularly the Blue Revolution movement, continues to highlight human rights abuses. Asmara’s international engagements project confidence, but they do not signal reform.

Future Prospects

Eritrea is repositioning itself toward the West, seizing on renewed American and European attention to the Horn and Red Sea. Western actors, particularly Germany and the EU, have begun engaging without attaching conditions for reform, reflecting the urgency of regional crises over the regime’s domestic record. Eritrea frames itself as a security stakeholder on issues from the Red Sea to migration, but its authoritarian rigidity and alarmist posture limit its capital. Ultimately, Eritrea’s relevance remains tethered to Ethiopia’s trajectory. As long as Asmara sustains its reliance on proxy politics and confrontation, any diplomatic reset will remain shallow, defined less by reconciliation than by Eritrea’s ability to exploit tensions with its neighbor.

⁴³ Getachew Reda. Getachew Reda Unfiltered: Tigray’s Fragile Peace and the Red Sea Question. Interview by Global Power Shifts. YouTube video. September 30, 2025.

⁴⁴ Addis Standard, “Ethiopia-Based, Anti-Eritrea Regime Afar Group Holds Conference in Semera, Renews Struggle,” Addis Standard, July 15, 2025,

1.3 Djibouti: Red Sea Security, Regional Balancing, and Global Diplomacy

In a major development this month, Prime Minister Abdulkader Kamil Mohamed hosted Egypt's Ambassador on September 30,⁴⁵ showcasing strengthened relations in trade and infrastructure to enhance bilateral economic ties. The talks centered on boosting economic ties through expanded port linkages and logistics partnerships, reinforcing Djibouti's role as a regional hub. A key focus was the security of the Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, vital to global trade, alongside discussions on regional stability, including Somalia's territorial integrity. Yet, Egypt's tightening of strategic footholds in Djibouti is not incidental; it is a calculated move to pre-emptively contain Ethiopia's regional rise. Cairo's engagement reflects a deliberate strategy that extends its rivalry with Addis Ababa beyond the Nile basin into the maritime sphere, where control over Red Sea chokepoints becomes another lever to check Ethiopia's aspirations. By embedding itself more deeply in Djibouti's security and economic architecture, Egypt signals that it intends to influence the geopolitical environment in which Ethiopia is pressing for legitimate sea access.

Djibouti also engaged in reforms and regional partnerships, reinforcing its role as a logistics fulcrum in the Horn of Africa. A key highlight was President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh's attendance at the GERD inauguration, showing support for Ethiopia's energy ambitions and the benefits of affordable energy export.⁴⁶ These efforts highlight Djibouti's heavy reliance on Ethiopia for port revenues and economic stability.

Diplomatic Engagements

In another development, President Guelleh attended the Emergency Arab-Islamic Summit in Doha, meeting Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani to discuss Middle East developments and Qatar's mediation role amid regional tensions.⁴⁷ Djibouti advanced its multilateral priorities at the UNGA's 80th session in New York, showing its commitment to global peace and regional stability. Permanent Representative Mr. Mohamed Siad Doualeh delivered Djibouti's address during the General Debate, aligning with the theme of collective action for peace, development, and human rights.

Djibouti further demonstrated support for the Palestinian cause through targeted endorsements and participation in key forums.⁴⁸ It backed the UNGA's resolution endorsing the New York Declaration on the Question of Palestine, which passed with 142 votes and outlined steps for a two-state solution, including an immediate Gaza ceasefire and hostage release. This was complemented by President Ismail Omar Guelleh's statements at the International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine, where he

⁴⁵ Egypt Today, 'Djibouti PM praises historic ties with Egypt.' *Egypt Today*, September 30, 2025

⁴⁶ ENA, 'Inauguration Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam' *ENA* september9,2025

⁴⁷ The peninsula, 'Amir meets President of Djibouti' *The peninsula*, September 15, 2025

⁴⁸ UN Permanent Mission Djibouti, 'Statement by President Ismail Omar Guelleh at the International Conference.' September 15, 2025

advocated for concrete actions beyond symbolic recognition to achieve self-determination and lasting peace.

Complementing these global initiatives, Djibouti pursued bilateral and regional ties to uphold security and cooperation. Its foreign minister visited Beledweyne, Somalia, engaging Djiboutian AUSSOM troops and local officials to affirm progressing support for Somali stabilization.

In the economic sphere, the African Development Bank's CCDA-XIII conference mobilized talks on climate-smart investments, targeting \$4 billion through its Climate Action Window. Meanwhile, in late September, the European Union launched a €32 million program to digitalize the Djibouti-Ethiopia trade corridor, streamlining cross-border commerce and aligning with the AfCFTA.⁴⁹

Diplomatically, Djibouti maintained a prominent role by engaging in UNGA80 side events to promote priorities in peace, security, and health sovereignty. Furthermore, Djibouti engaged in strengthening bilateral ties, holding political consultations with Azerbaijan,⁵⁰ where both sides emphasized mutual support within international organizations like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement, highlighting the potential of Azerbaijan's upcoming Organization of Islamic Cooperation chairmanship in 2026 for new joint initiatives.

Djibouti also contributed to the High-Level Meeting on financing the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia, where Ambassador Doualeh emphasized the need for predictable funding as a key troop-contributing nation. These efforts reinforced Djibouti's role in fostering African security structures.

1.4 Somalia and Somaliland

The Federal Republic of Somalia: Federal Tensions and Cross-Border Incursions

September emerged as a politically significant month for Somalia, marked by intensified foundational struggles within its ambiguous federal system. The escalating tensions between the Federal Government and regional states, particularly along the Kenya-Somalia border involving Jubaland and Puntland, highlighted deep-seated clan dynamics and resistance to centralization.

In Mogadishu, there was a significant increase in public demonstrations as opposition leaders charged President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's administration with corruption and violations of the constitution.⁵¹ The Somalia Salvation Forum, alongside various lawmakers, declared

⁴⁹ UNECA. "Thirteenth Conference on Climate Change and Development in Africa." September 5, 2025

⁵⁰ AZERTAC, "Foreign Ministries of Azerbaijan and Djibouti hold political consultation." September 8, 2025

⁵¹ Somali Guardian. "Somalia's Opposition Leaders Survive Deadly Standoff with Security Forces." September 25, 2025.

their intent to file lawsuits against the government both domestically and internationally,⁵² signaling a serious challenge to its authority. Accusations centered on human rights abuses, particularly forced evictions and illegal land sales that have displaced vulnerable families.

Amid this political unrest, violence erupted, including confrontations between security forces and opposition leaders that resulted in casualties. The tragic incident involving former President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and his security detail, which escalated when police opened fire, underscored the volatility of the situation. Former President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed 'Farmaajo' further stoked tensions by claiming the current government targeted the opposition, alleging that their security detail was disarmed and they faced physical intimidation.⁵³

These developments take place against the backdrop of the looming 2026 elections, which are fraught with challenges. Jubaland's unilateral pursuit of indirect elections and resistance to centralization threaten to undermine the electoral process. Farmaajo's re-emergence, with his past policies favoring a centralized security approach against Al-Shabaab and his historical ties to Ethiopia, adds another layer of political prospect. His candidacy could influence both counter-terrorism efforts and Ethiopia's strategic interests in the region.

In response to these challenges, Somalia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under Permanent Secretary Hamza Adan Haadoow, convened a high-level inter-ministerial meeting in Mogadishu.⁵⁴ The agenda focused on strengthening coordination around diplomatic immunity and security protocols, intending to enhance Somalia's international standing as a secure host for diplomatic missions.

Countering Al-Shabaab: Strategy, Challenges, and International Support

Somali national forces demonstrated sustained engagement against Al-Shabaab throughout September, securing key tactical successes. These included the successful repulsion of a major open assault on government troops in El-Dheer, which was supported by air assets and resulted in multiple militant casualties. Furthermore, Somali forces neutralized a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device targeting an army base in Ceeldheer. These counterterrorism efforts were complemented by an international air campaign, notably a confirmed U.S. Africa Command airstrike near Badhan targeting an Al-Shabaab weapons facilitator as part of disruption operations against militant networks.⁵⁵

On another note, U.S. Africa Command, in coordination with Somalia's Federal Government, conducted a targeted airstrike against ISIS-Somalia in the Golis Mountains, 60

⁵² Shabelle Media Network. "Somali Lawmakers, Opposition Alliance to File Legal Cases Against President Over Rights Abuses, Corruption." September 23, 2025.

⁵³ Somali Guardian. "Somalia PM Accuses Opposition of Coup Plot After Deadly Shootout." September 25, 2025.

⁵⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation. "Somalia Foreign Ministry Leads Inter-Ministerial Meeting on Diplomatic Immunity." Accessed October 2, 2025.

⁵⁵ AFRICOM. 'U.S. Conduct Airstrike Targeting al Shabab.' September 12, 2025

km southeast of Bossaso. This operation shows ongoing efforts to degrade the group's capacity to threaten U.S. interests and regional security, with operational details withheld to protect mission integrity.⁵⁶

Despite these operational gains, the group demonstrated a high capacity for strategic disruption. Setbacks included the reported loss of a Ugandan aircraft and the critical incident on or around September 30, where a UN-contracted helicopter was forced down and subsequently seized by Al-Shabaab fighters in operational sites.⁵⁷ This ability to disrupt air support and seize high-value assets shows the group's advanced and unconventional threat capabilities, moving beyond traditional warfare. Such incidents highlight persistent challenges, particularly concerning the resilience of the non-state actor and the government's difficulty in establishing a monopoly on security and power across all territories.

Tensions in Regional Geopolitics

The African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia has become a stage for a regional power play, notably with the deployment of Egyptian forces.⁵⁸ Egypt committed 1,091 troops to key Somali sites, joining approximately 2,500 Ethiopian peacekeepers. This composite dynamic is seen as intertwining Somalia with Egypt's efforts to contain Ethiopia in the dispute over the Grand Renaissance Dam of Ethiopia and access to the Red Sea. The deployment has raised concerns that external interference could transform localized conflicts into regional proxy battles. However, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has explicitly moved to mitigate these fears, publicly stating that the country would not become a proxy battleground.⁵⁹ This reassurance seeks to protect Somalia's sovereignty and ensure that the AUSSOM mission remains focused on combating the al-Shabaab insurgency rather than being distracted by the separate geopolitical interests of troop-contributing countries.

Post-Ankara Diplomacy and The Ethiopian Sea Access Framework

A significant pathway for de-escalation was established with the signing of the Ankara Declaration under Turkish mediation. This declaration was designed to provide a diplomatic framework for resolving the explosive tensions generated by the Memorandum of Understanding between Ethiopia and Somaliland, seeking to provide landlocked Ethiopia with access to the Red Sea.

A key indicator of diplomatic normalization emerged this month, when President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud visited Ethiopia. This high-profile visit, including his presence at the

⁵⁶AFRICOM. 'U.S. Forces Conduct Strike Targeting ISIS-Somalia.' September 26, 2025.

⁵⁷ Somali guardian. 'UN-contracted helicopter was forced down and subsequently seized by Al-Shabaab fighters.' September 29, 2025

⁵⁸ All Africa 'Somalia: Egyptian Military Delegation Arrives in Jowhar Ahead of Troop Deployment for AUSSOM Mission' September 2, 2025

⁵⁹ Keren Guilbert 'Somalia says no to Egyptian and Ethiopian peacekeepers clashing on its soil,' *Euro News*, September 24, 2025

GERD inauguration, was a tangible implication of post-Ankara Declaration development,⁶⁰ signaling a commitment to smoothing relations.

In a significant shift in rhetoric, President Mohamud has stated in an interview that Somalia supports Ethiopia's goal of securing lawful access to the sea.⁶¹ This stance, which emphasizes using internationally accepted legal channels, represents a critical point of movement away from the hardline rejection of any sea access deals and towards a potential cooperative, bilateral commercial arrangement as outlined in the Ankara Declaration. While many complex legal and logistical obstacles remain, the top-level diplomatic exchanges suggest a constructive pivot towards implementing the framework for shared regional prosperity and stability.

Institutional Reforms and Emerging Political Challenges in E-Visa Reform

The Federal Government of Somalia initiated significant institutional modernization this month, headlined by a major immigration overhaul that introduced a new e-visa system.⁶² This digital transformation, representing the first substantial update to the immigration infrastructure since 1960, is designed to streamline travel logistics and concurrently strengthen national security by inhibiting illicit movement by terrorist entities. This initiative signifies a notable advancement in modernizing national governance and border control capabilities. These operational advancements occurred against a backdrop of positive macroeconomic indicators. The World Bank reported that the Somali economy achieved a 4.0% growth rate in 2024, primarily driven by improved performance in the agricultural sector and sustained flows of international remittances.⁶³ Nevertheless, this economic course is forecasted to decelerate in 2025 due to anticipated uncertainty in foreign aid disbursements.

Regardless of these institutional and economic gains, the rollout of the new system has generated concomitant challenges with significant legal and political implications, like Diaspora Citizenship Rights. Concerns have been articulated by the diaspora community regarding the potential for the new immigration procedures to inadvertently compromise dual citizenship rights.⁶⁴ Specific reports indicate that this process may erode the traditional status of Somali citizens holding foreign passports, thereby complicating the legal standing of the diaspora population. Simultaneously, Airspace and E-Visa Jurisdiction have brought Persistent sovereignty and jurisdictional disputes between the FGS and Somaliland have been aggravated by the e-visa system. The central government's unilateral implementation of the visa regime over Somaliland's airspace is being challenged locally, leading to documented difficulties regarding flight authorizations and internal travel arrangements. As

⁶⁰ Daily Sabah 'Somalia, Ethiopia restore diplomatic ties after Ankara deal', January, 2025

⁶¹ Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation. "Somali Leader Backs Ethiopia's Bid for Sea Access, Citing International Law." September 17, 2025.

⁶² Tech Africa News. 'Somalia Officially Launches E-VISA System for Foreign Travelers.' September 5, 2025

⁶³ World Bank. "Somalia's Economic Prospects are Positive, but Foreign Aid Cuts are Downsizing Growth." June 30, 2025.

⁶⁴ The Reporter Ethiopia. "Hassan Sheikh Imposes Visa Requirement on Somali-origin Visitors." September 20, 2025.

forecasted in the World Bank report, the decline in GDP for 2025 appears likely due to reductions in foreign aid disbursements. This situation, coupled with the new e-visa system, could impact Somalia's dual citizenship policy and potentially hinder remittances that are vital for development.

Infrastructure Development and International Positioning

The FGS has advanced many-sided infrastructure efforts aimed at reversing decades of urban decline and conflict-induced neglect. A significant component of this developmental strategy is the continued construction of the new Mogadishu International Airport, a major project valued at \$643 million.⁶⁵ This investment shows the government's dedication to modernizing key infrastructure and is viewed as a strategic diplomatic effort to position Somalia as a crucial place for international commerce and regional connectivity. These infrastructure goals are linked to strengthening economic growth and enhancing the nation's capacity for secure international engagement. Modern, reliable airport facilities are essential for international partners such as the U.S. military and African Union forces to deliver security assistance, weapons, training, and logistical support to the Somali National Army. The new airport will function as a resilient and efficient base for these cooperative security efforts. As a critical piece of national infrastructure, the airport is a frequent target of destabilizing elements, such as Al-Shabaab. The development of a state-of-the-art facility incorporates advanced security planning and technology, which is paramount for both national safety and the protection of international personnel operating within Somalia.

Coinciding with this, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud announced plans for Somalia, including drilling the nation's first oil block and establishing Africa's first satellite launch base, following a Turkey-led survey of coastal oil blocks.⁶⁶ As a controversial profit-sharing deal favoring Turkey, Mohamud pledged dialogue with Jubaland and Puntland to ease political tensions, while his push for a one-person, one-vote electoral model faces fierce opposition, even in security, financial, and legal challenges, raising concerns of a potential term extension.

Widespread and Ongoing Humanitarian Emergencies

Somalia concurrently scuffles with a severe and escalating humanitarian crisis. The confluence of major ecological and conflict-driven factors, including flash flooding and persistent below-average rainfall, High domestic food prices, and developing internal conflict. These converging crises have led to projections that it is estimated that nearly half of Somalia's children under the age of five will face acute malnutrition by July 2026. Furthermore, significant funding cuts have curtailed essential health and nutrition services

⁶⁵ The East African. "Somalia Bids for the Future with New USD 643 Million Airport." September 30, 2025.

⁶⁶ Somali guardian. 'Somalia to drill oil, Host Africa's first satellite base in the coming months, says president.' September 30, 2025

nationwide. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification estimates that 4.4 million people will experience high levels of acute food insecurity by the close of 2025. This acute humanitarian instability adds significant urgency and complexity to all current stabilization and diplomatic efforts.

Strategic Diplomatic Engagements

Somalia's diplomatic activities in September 2025 were focused on the international stage, led by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's attendance at the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York. The President delivered a significant address outlining Somalia's advancements in state-building, security consolidation, and economic reform, including initiatives like AUSSOM Financing.⁶⁷ On the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, Somalia co-hosted a pivotal High-Level Financing Event for the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia.⁶⁸ During this event, the President called upon international partners to commit essential funding to support the ongoing security transition, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts to ensure stability and progress in the region.⁶⁹

Following this, UN and Bilateral Meetings were held with the president and discussions with several global leaders, notably meeting with the UN Secretary-General António Guterres on September 27 to discuss security and development cooperation.⁷⁰ He also met with the Crown Prince of Kuwait.⁷¹ Somalia, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, actively engaged in global security issues, co-requesting a high-level briefing on the situation in the Middle East. Simultaneously, Kenya reaffirmed its strong commitment to Somalia's peace and security through its participation in AUSSOM.⁷² Separately, the Somali Minister of Information participated in an international cultural forum in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Chinese Defense Minister Admiral Dong Jun met with Somali Defense Minister Ahmed Moallin Fiqi in Beijing, marking the first ministerial-level meeting between the two countries in nearly 40 years.⁷³ The meeting, held on the sidelines of the Xiangshan International Defense Forum, resulted in agreements to deepen cooperation in regional security, counterterrorism, and the development of the Somali National Army. This engagement

⁶⁷ United Nations Geneva. "Post-War Somalia Proves Multilateralism Can Make the World a Better Place." September 30, 2025.

⁶⁸ African Union. "UNGA80: High-Level African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) Financing Side Event." September 21, 2025.

⁶⁹ African Union. 'Co-Chairs' Summary of The High-Level Financing Event for The African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), 25th September 2025.'

⁷⁰ United Nations. "Readout of the Secretary-General's Meeting with H.E. Mr. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, President of the Federal Republic of Somalia." September 24, 2025.

⁷¹ Radio Dalsan. "Somalia: Somali President Meets Kuwait's Crown Prince on Sidelines of UN General Assembly." September 25, 2025.

⁷² Somali National News Agency. "Kenya Reaffirms Commitment to Somalia's Peace and Security at Diplomatic Briefing." September 11, 2025.

⁷³ Hiiraan Online 'Somali, Chinese defence ministers hold first high-level talks in Decades.' 25th September 2025

signals China's continued interest in expanding its influence in the Horn of Africa, potentially as a counterbalance to U.S. and European presence in the region.

Somaliland: Diplomatic Engagements and International Partnerships

US Congressional Pressure to Differentiate Somaliland Travel Advisory

A development in the U.S.-Somaliland relations has emerged, driven by influential Republican lawmakers, Representatives Chris Smith and John Moolenaar. These Representatives have formally urged the U.S. Department of State to amend its official travel advisory by separating Somaliland from the broader "Do Not Travel" designation currently applied to all of Somalia.⁷⁴ This request is not just an administrative revision but a strategically loaded effort designed to signal a shift in U.S. recognition and partnership in the Horn of Africa. The Representative's core argument is planted in a factual distinction regarding security. They contend that the blanket "Do Not Travel" designation, which is generally reserved for regions with active conflict, high instability, or imminent threat, unfairly penalizes Somaliland. They highlight several key facts that challenge the current classification.

Somaliland continued to strengthen relationships with U.S. allies, including Taiwan and Israel.⁷⁵ Lawmakers are showing Somaliland's close cooperation with Taiwan on healthcare, infrastructure, and maritime cooperation, as well as growing ties with Israel through its solid support of the Abraham Accords. Somaliland's growing ties with Israel, demonstrated through its solid support of the Abraham Accords, signal a policy alignment with the U.S.-led regional stability initiatives. This stance positions Somaliland within a bloc of nations seeking to normalize relations with Israel and promotes a moderate political posture in a region often defined by volatility. This diplomatic choice strengthens trust with influential sectors of the U.S. government, validating Somaliland's commitment to shared security and foreign policy goals. The most significant diplomatic event for Somaliland was its public response to growing military cooperation between Somalia and Egypt, which is viewed as a direct consequence of the Ethiopia-Somaliland MoU.

On September 23, 2024, the Somaliland government issued a formal statement expressing profound concern over the supply of heavy weapons to the Mogadishu administration by Egypt. The statement argued that the transfer jeopardizes regional stability, risks an arms race, and could lead to weapons falling into the hands of extremist groups like Al-Shabaab and various clan militias. This act underscores Somaliland's primary diplomatic goal of positioning itself as the guarantor of stability in the Horn of Africa against a volatile FGS.

⁷⁴ The Select Committee on the CCP. 'Moolenaar, Smith Call on the State Department to Distinguish Somaliland, Voice National Security Benefits.' September 3, 2025

⁷⁵ Amit Yarom. 'Gateways to the Red Sea: The case for Israel-Somaliland normalization.' *Atlantic Council*, July 31, 2025

In chorus, the Republic of Somaliland issued a strong condemnation of attacks on Qatar, denouncing them as violations of international law and the UN Charter.⁷⁶ Expressing solidarity with Qatar, Somaliland called for restraint and diplomatic solutions to ensure regional stability, reaffirming its commitment to peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among nations.

The diplomatic tensions sparked by the MoU remained high throughout the month, with the dispute being a central topic in broader international forums, including reports circulated to the UN Security Council. Somalia's diplomatic offensive, which included the security pact with Egypt, was a direct countermeasure to Somaliland's agreement with Ethiopia. Mediation attempts, such as those led by Türkiye, failed to gain traction, highlighting the entrenched nature of the dispute.

On or around September 22, a high-level delegation led by the Somaliland Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Rhoda J Elmi, met with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Ambassador James Swan. In the meeting, Somaliland officials reaffirmed the nation's commitment to regional peace and security, highlighted its progress in development and democratization, including preparations for upcoming elections, and encouraged the United Nations to continue and enhance its humanitarian and development assistance to the Republic of Somaliland.

1.5 Sudan: Escalation, Mediation Fatigue, and the Quad Peace Proposal

Battlefield Escalation and Wartime Consolidation

September 2025 demonstrated the dual trajectory of Sudan's war: intensifying battlefield offensives on the one hand and faltering diplomatic attempts centered on the Quad's new peace roadmap on the other. The Quartet, involving the U.S., UK, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, outlined a three-month truce and a nine-month negotiation timeline. The plan explicitly excludes Islamist groups, signaling the Quartet's view that these networks are obstacles to peace. Reactions inside Sudan ranged from cautious optimism among civilian blocs to outright rejection by the warring parties. The month was further complicated by foreign entanglements, expanded sanctions, and deepening regional alignments. The humanitarian crisis reached new depths, with displacement and hunger surging at alarming rates.

Fighting intensified in North Kordofan, where the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) claimed to retake Bara⁷⁷ before announcing control of another strategic town.⁷⁸ The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) countered with reinforcements to safeguard supply corridors, while both sides escalated drone warfare⁷⁹ in a technological arms race. In Darfur, SAF commander Shams

⁷⁶ MFA Somaliland. 'Somaliland Strongly Condemns the Attack on the State of Qatar and Calls for Regional Stability.' September 17, 2025

⁷⁷ Sudan Tribune. 2025. "Sudanese Army Retakes North Kordofan Town of Bara from RSF."

⁷⁸ Sudan Tribune. 2025. "Sudanese Army, Allied Forces Claim Control of a Strategic Town in North Kordofan."

⁷⁹ Sudan Daily. 2025. "Sudan's Army, RSF Escalate Conflict with Advanced Drone Warfare."

al-Din Kabbashi pledged to “unleash the reins” in a fresh offensive to roll back RSF control, even as Khartoum lodged a formal complaint at the United Nations, accusing the UAE of deploying Colombian mercenaries to bolster RSF operations⁸⁰. Domestically, SAF introduced measures to tighten its wartime grip, banning private arms in Khartoum, replacing the national police chief,⁸¹ and monopolizing gold exports under the central bank⁸²—steps framed as stabilization, but which underscored a deeper centralization of power and the normalization of indefinite war.

Diplomatic Initiatives and the Quad Roadmap

Diplomatic efforts fared little better. On 12 September, the Quad unveiled its peace roadmap, stressing a “clear timeframe” for dialogue to overcome previous mediation fatigue.⁸³ Some political parties, unions, and civil society actors cautiously welcomed it as a structured opening, yet criticism quickly followed over its lack of enforcement mechanisms. The combatants dismissed it outright: Burhan’s camp vowed to fight until “legitimate authority” was restored,⁸⁴ while RSF commanders pressed ahead with offensives, signaling that negotiations would come only from a position of strength.

The Quad’s plan explicitly excludes the role of Islamist groups and related actors, rejecting any role for them in future governance under the roadmap. Civilian democratic groups such as the Sumud coalition welcomed the diagnosis that Islamists are viewed in the roadmap as obstacles to peace. Islamist networks and some civilian figures rejected the initiative altogether, denouncing the UAE’s role as proof of external bias. The AU and IGAD welcomed the effort, while civilian blocs remained fractured between endorsing AU mediation and boycotting it, further illustrating Sudan’s political disunity.

The El-Fasher Dilemma and Humanitarian Crisis

These political impasses coincide with the intensification of the RSF’s military campaign in Darfur, particularly the near-total siege of El-Fasher.⁸⁵ Reports indicate over 68 kilometers of earthen walls now encircle the city, effectively restricting civilian movement and humanitarian access⁸⁶. The RSF’s operations include heavy bombardments of residential neighborhoods, displaced persons camps, and critical infrastructure, while exit routes are tightly controlled. Satellite imagery confirms civilians attempting to flee, but their movements are met with lethal force, resulting in significant casualties and rapid expansion of burial sites.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Agenzia Nova. 2025. “Sudan Reports UAE to UN for Recruiting Colombian Mercenaries in Darfur.”

⁸¹ Sudan Horizon. 2025. “Al-Burhan Replaces Police Chief.”

⁸² Rusa From Media. 2025. “Sudan’s Central Bank Imposes Ban on Private Gold Exports.”

⁸³ U.S. Department of State. 2025. “Joint Statement on Restoring Peace and Security in Sudan.”

⁸⁴ Sudan Tribune. 2025. “Sudan’s Burhan Rejects Quad Ceasefire Call, Vows to Keep Fighting.”

⁸⁵ BBC News. 2025. “Barrier Being Built Around Besieged Sudan City, Satellite Images Show.”

⁸⁶ Sudan Tribune. 2025. “Siege of Sudan’s El-Fasher escalates with near-total encirclement, Yale report finds”

⁸⁷ Yale School of Public Health, Humanitarian Research Lab. 2025. “Residents of El-Fasher Attempting to Escape as RSF

The siege demonstrates a calculated effort by the RSF to assert military supremacy and dictate political leverage. By encircling El-Fasher, RSF not only strengthens its territorial control but also undermines civilian morale and constrains opposition forces. The recent drone strike on Al-Safiya Mosque, killing more than 70 worshippers during dawn prayers,⁸⁸ marked one of the bloodiest single incidents of the siege. The UN Secretary-General condemned the attack, calling for an immediate ceasefire and humanitarian corridors, while the AU denounced it as a flagrant violation of fundamental human values and principles, as well as international humanitarian law.⁸⁹

If current trends persist, El-Fasher is at high risk of falling within weeks to months, a development that would give the RSF effective control over western Darfur. Such a consolidation would provide the group with significant leverage in any post-war settlement by converting territorial gains into bargaining power. It would also trigger new waves of displacement into Chad and Ethiopia, exacerbate famine risks, and further restrict humanitarian access. Beyond the humanitarian toll, the RSF's ability to transform military advances into governance claims would raise the likelihood of entrenched fragmentation and deepen the risk of Sudan's war hardening into a more prolonged and divided conflict. Potentially reshaping the region's political landscape and accelerating a trajectory toward de facto partition.

The humanitarian outlook also darkened through September. The UN warned of catastrophic hunger peaks by year's end as displacement surged and aid shortfalls widened. This month alone, more than 116,000 families were uprooted in North Kordofan,⁹⁰ adding to the millions already displaced nationwide.

Flooding in displacement camps further uprooted thousands, compounding the crisis. Across Kordofan, civilians face siege-like conditions, acute food shortages, and worsening malnutrition, while nearly 10 million remain displaced nationwide, and funding gaps persist.⁹¹ These overlapping crises underscore the scale of civilian suffering and the urgent need for unimpeded humanitarian access and increased donor support. Regional spillovers continued: Ethiopia has received over 76,000 Sudanese arrivals since April 2023, including 8,268 this year.⁹² With aid pipelines underfunded and needs accelerating, the prospect of famine conditions is growing imminent, posing risks not only for Sudan but for stability across the wider Horn of Africa.

Attacks Continue." Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health.

⁸⁸ Al Jazeera. 2025. "UN 'Gravely Alarmed' by Deteriorating Situation in Sudan's El-Fasher." Al Jazeera, September 21, 2025.

⁸⁹ African Union Commission. 2025. "The Chairperson of the African Union Commission Condemns Attack on Civilians in El Fasher." Press Release, September 20, 2025.

⁹⁰ Sudan Tribune. 2025. "Sudan Humanitarian Official Visits Kordofan as Displacement Figures Top 116,000 Families." Sudan Tribune, September 20, 2025.

⁹¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Sudan Humanitarian Update (August–September 2025). Situation Report. September 25, 2025.

⁹² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2023). "Flash Update 24: Impact situation Sudan–Ethiopia"

International media have begun to echo this urgency. El-Fasher is described as destined to be remembered on “the bleakest pages” of 21st-century history, noting that 260,000 civilians face starvation or death under bombardment after more than 500 days of siege. Demonstrating the catastrophic humanitarian toll and the role of external actors in fueling the conflict. While acknowledging recent AU, EU, and Quad calls for a truce, it is warned that such efforts have come too late for many and must be sustained if Sudan is not to slide further into fragmentation.⁹³

September also featured the collapse of Sudan’s essential services, compounding the humanitarian disaster into a political crisis. Deadly shelling and drone strikes across El-Fasher and Nyala killed scores of civilians, with MSF facilities overwhelmed and basic water trucking and community kitchens shutting down. Famine has already been confirmed in the Zamzam IDP camp, while OCHA warned that civilians in El-Fasher are on the brink of mass starvation, including children trapped under siege conditions.⁹⁴ Khartoum itself has not been spared: RSF strikes on power infrastructure triggered blackouts that crippled hospital operations, further exposing the capital’s fragility. Natural disasters layered onto this man-made catastrophe. Heavy floods displaced thousands across Aj Jazirah, while a landslide in the Marra Mountains reportedly erased an entire village.⁹⁵ The inability of the state to mobilize an effective response, combined with restricted humanitarian access due to RSF blockades, further erodes both SAF’s governing legitimacy and the credibility of local institutions.

Foreign Policy and International Alignments

Amid this diplomatic drift, Khartoum’s foreign policy missteps became more visible. Most striking was its decision to abstain from participation in the inauguration of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD),⁹⁶ celebrated continent-wide in September as a milestone of self-financed African infrastructure. For Sudan, GERD promises regulated water flows that mitigate flooding, expanded irrigation potential, and access to affordable electricity at a moment when its grid is collapsing under the strain of war. Yet Khartoum’s abstention was less a calculated diplomatic gesture than a reflection of its political alignment with Cairo; al-Sisi’s strong support for al-Burhan’s SAF contributed to the stance of portraying GERD as a threat rather than an opportunity. This position appears increasingly untenable given the Sudanese authorities’ recent warning of severe floods across five states, demonstrating that even with GERD, the country’s flood crisis remains critical. The dam’s completion is thus not only significant for Sudan’s long-term stability but also a project it cannot afford to oppose, as regulated flows represent one of the few structural tools available

⁹³ The Guardian. 2025. “The Guardian View on Catastrophe in Darfur: The World Has Looked Away, but Sudan’s Civilians Can’t Wait Any Longer.” The Guardian, September 29, 2025.

⁹⁴ UN News. 2025. “Deadly Attacks and Collapsing Services Push Sudan Closer to Catastrophe.” September 15, 2025.

⁹⁵ Al Jazeera. 2025. “Landslide Kills More than 1,000 in Sudan’s Darfur Region, Armed Group Says.” September 2, 2025.

⁹⁶ Al Jazeera. 2025. “Ethiopia Inaugurates GERD Dam Amid Downstream Tensions with Egypt, Sudan.” September 9, 2025.

to blunt the recurrent devastation of seasonal flooding, let alone getting access to electricity.⁹⁷

In effect, Sudan allowed itself to be drawn into Egypt's zero-sum framing, undermining its own developmental interests. The decision deprived Khartoum of a pivotal moment to engage in cooperative regional frameworks, instead reinforcing a posture of isolation at a time when energy and water integration could provide both economic relief and a foundation for Post-war reconstruction. By failing to pursue closer collaboration with Ethiopia, Sudan risks missing key opportunities to benefit from shared electricity exports, coordinated water management, and broader regional infrastructure initiatives. These mechanisms could have strengthened both its economic recovery and its strategic positioning for a post-war Sudan in the Horn of Africa.

Sudan's external alignments in September highlighted the war's accelerating internationalization. At a joint meeting in Cairo, Sudan and Egypt reaffirmed their rejection of wider Nile Basin participation in GERD negotiations,⁹⁸ further anchoring Khartoum in Egypt's Nile security framing. In parallel, Khartoum advanced cooperation deals with Russia on post-war reconstruction,⁹⁹ even as sanctions pressure deepened: the UN Security Council renewed its sanctions for another year,¹⁰⁰ the United States sanctioned Sudan's finance minister and an allied militia over Iran ties,¹⁰¹ and the EU extended restrictive measures until October 2026.¹⁰² Wagner Group activity spilling over from the Central African Republic into Darfur¹⁰³ reinforced the proxy dimensions of the conflict. Meanwhile, Burhan's condemnation of Israeli strikes in Doha and his expressions of solidarity with Qatar¹⁰⁴ illustrated Sudan's entanglement in broader Gulf rivalries. Illustrating the increased internationalization of Sudan's conflict: sanctions deepen its isolation, Wagner's presence highlights proxy warfare, and Burhan's alignment with Qatar highlights how Gulf rivalries are shaping Khartoum's external posture.

Sudan's Foreign Ministry weighed in on 14 September, welcoming regional and international peace efforts while stressing its rejection of "foreign interference that does not respect Sudan's sovereignty, its legitimate institutions, and its right to defend its people and land." The statement endorsed calls to end RSF "terrorist attacks" on cities and lift the siege of El-Fasher, but criticized the international community's failure to enforce UN Security Council

⁹⁷ EFE. (2025). "Sudan issues red alert over high risk of Nile flooding in 5 states."

⁹⁸ Addis Standard. 2025. "Sudan, Egypt Reject Wider Nile Basin Role in Ethiopia Dam Dispute." September 30, 2025.

⁹⁹ AllAfrica. 2025. "Sudan, Russia Sign Economic and Trade Protocol to Promote Strategic Cooperation." September 25, 2025.

¹⁰⁰ United Nations Security Council. 2025. "Security Council Renews Sudan Sanctions Regime, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2791 (2025)." Meetings Coverage, 9993rd Meeting (AM), 12 September 2025. SC/16165.

¹⁰¹ Abdallatif, Mawahib. 2025. "US Imposes New Sanctions on Sudan Minister over Iran Ties." September 16, 2025.

¹⁰² Council of the European Union. 2025. "Sudan: EU Extends Sanctions Regime by One Year." Press Release, September 22, 2025.

¹⁰³ Sudan Tribune. 2025. "Wagner Group Accused of Deadly Incursions into Sudan from CAR." September 18, 2025.

¹⁰⁴ MSN. 2025. "Burhan Condemns 'Israeli Aggression' in Doha, Affirms Sudan's Full Solidarity." MSN, September 25, 2025.

Resolutions 2736 and 1591 against the RSF. This positioning reflects Khartoum's dual approach of cautiously embracing mediation while resisting external pressure it deems intrusive.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, on 26 September, at the 80th session of the UN General Assembly, Sudan's Prime Minister Kamil Idris reasserted his government's commitment to a roadmap for peace in the ongoing civil war, outlining three immediate pillars: a nationwide ceasefire, the withdrawal of RSF forces from occupied zones, and the lifting of the siege on El-Fasher.¹⁰⁶

Idris explicitly called on the international community to enforce Security Council Resolution 2736, adopted in June 2024, which demands the RSF halt its siege of El-Fasher and affirms humanitarian access and protection of civilians. He cautioned that continued inaction by the international community risks triggering catastrophic human consequences, stressing that the silence of global actors comes as children are already dying on the ground."¹⁰⁷ In his address, Idris also denounced international sanctions on Sudan, characterizing them as politically motivated. More pointedly, he urged that the RSF be designated a "terrorist militia" and called for an arms embargo to curtail the flow of mercenaries and weapons into the country.¹⁰⁸

Strategic Outlook

Despite the carnage, international coordination remains fragmented. The Secretary-General's personal envoy, Ramtane Lamamra, conducted consultations in Port Sudan and Nairobi, meeting key Sudanese and regional stakeholders.¹⁰⁹ The UN continues to emphasize an intra-Sudanese solution backed by the AU, IGAD, and the League of Arab States. But the lack of a unified enforcement mechanism, as seen with the ineffective implementation of Resolution 2736, continues to render such efforts aspirational.

Politically, these cascading crises shift the balance in several ways. First, they reinforce the RSF's leverage: control over humanitarian corridors is being weaponized and transforming starvation into a bargaining tool. Second, they complicate the Quad's peace roadmap: with service collapse accelerating, time is no longer on the mediators' side, making sequenced dialogue less feasible as famine looms. Third, the scale of humanitarian suffering risks overshadowing military narratives, forcing regional actors and donors to prioritize relief corridors over political settlement. The result is a paradox: the worse the civilian catastrophe grows, the more both SAF and RSF double down militarily to demonstrate relevance, while international actors struggle to enforce even minimal humanitarian pauses.

¹⁰⁵ Middle East Monitor. "Sudan Welcomes Peace Efforts to End War with RSF, Rejects Foreign Interference." September 14, 2025.

¹⁰⁶ Africanews, 2025. "Sudan's Prime Minister Urges Ceasefire Roadmap at UNGA." September 26, 2025.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ TRT World. 2025. "Sudan's Prime Minister Urges UN to Designate RSF as Terrorist Group, Calls for Arms Embargo." September 26, 2025.

¹⁰⁹ UN News, "Deadly Attacks."

At the same time, the Quad struggled to maintain consensus. While the group had earlier outlined a roadmap calling for a three-month humanitarian truce followed by a civilian-led transition, sharp divisions surfaced in New York. The UAE resisted language demanding RSF withdrawal from El-Fasher and rejecting RSF attacks on civilians, while Egypt pressed for stronger condemnation.¹¹⁰ The split reflects battlefield alignments: Cairo backs Burhan and the SAF, while Abu Dhabi's support for Hemedti and the RSF continues to shape its diplomacy.

On the sidelines of UNGA, a broader coalition of over 20 countries and five blocs, convened by the AU and EU with France, Germany, and the UK, endorsed a set of “10 non-negotiables” for Sudan. These included resuming direct negotiations for a permanent ceasefire, protection of civilians and critical infrastructure, and condemnation of foreign interference. The communiqué reaffirmed Sudan's sovereignty and rejected parallel governing structures, while urging full compliance with UNSC Resolution 2736 (2024) and humanitarian law obligations. Delegates pledged continued financial and diplomatic support for relief efforts, welcomed the extension of the Adré border crossing, and demanded unhindered humanitarian access across Darfur and the Kordofans.¹¹¹ By underscoring both accountability – through the UN fact-finding mission and ICC – and sustained humanitarian access, the gathering broadened diplomatic convergence beyond the Quad, though questions remain about enforcement.

This divergence risks undermining the momentum. For the first time since the war began, Washington has attempted to align key external actors on an “endgame” vision, but the Quad's inability to agree on RSF accountability illustrates the limits of external coherence. It is critical that fragmented mediation — AU roadmaps, Quad initiatives, and Western-led declarations — may dilute leverage at a moment when the humanitarian situation is collapsing.

The strategic implication is clear: unless these tracks converge, international diplomacy may provide warring parties with cover to prolong the conflict rather than compel compromise. With famine confirmed in Darfur, hospitals shuttered, and natural disasters killing thousands, time lost to disunity will translate directly into higher civilian death tolls and deeper state collapse.

¹¹⁰ Pecquet, Julian. “Sudan Peace Talks Hit a Stumbling Block at UN.” *The Africa Report*, September 25, 2025.

¹¹¹ defenceWeb. “Sudan War in the Spotlight on the Sides of the UNGA.” September 26, 2025.

1.6 South Sudan: Trial, Tension, and Repatriation

Political Crisis and Security Strains

In September, South Sudan's politics were dominated by the treason trial of suspended First Vice-President Riek Machar. The hearing opened in Juba on 22 September, with Machar and seven co-accused brought before a caged dock as prosecutors read charges of murder, treason, and crimes against humanity tied to violence in Nasir earlier this year.¹¹² The defense challenged the court's jurisdiction and claimed that a hybrid court under the African Union should be established, pointing to protections Machar holds under the 2018 peace deal.¹¹³ However, the court dismissed the objection, citing its jurisdiction to try the case. Journalists were barred from the courtroom, with access limited to state media, a move that drew criticism from press bodies and raised questions about transparency.¹¹⁴

The trial quickly reverberated outside the capital. Demonstrations broke out in Bentiu demanding Machar's release, showcasing the depth of his support in Unity State.¹¹⁵ The United Nations said it was monitoring the proceedings and urged that the trial meet international standards, warning of the risks to fragile peace arrangements.¹¹⁶ At the same time, the country continued to face mounting insecurity, with reports of aid worker kidnappings more than doubling compared to last year. International partners voiced concern that the combination of Machar's suspension, the ongoing trial, and widening insecurity could undermine the unity government and place the 2018 agreement under renewed strain.

Adding to tensions, a sharp flare-up of violence near Nasir left at least 14 people dead. The clash involved soldiers and militia fighters linked to the White Army.¹¹⁷ The fighting feeds mistrust and forces the capital to reallocate scarce security resources to containment rather than politics or services. It raises the risk that local commanders will act independently of national command, and it deepens the fault lines that already strain the unity arrangement.

Governance Failures and Humanitarian Pressures

A UN Commission on Human Rights report released in September highlights that entrenched corruption among South Sudan's political elites has severely weakened the state's capacity to respond to crises, diverting billions of dollars from essential services like health, education, and infrastructure.¹¹⁸ Notably, \$1.7 billion of a \$2.2 billion oil-for-roads program remains unaccounted for, leaving 95% of planned infrastructure incomplete. The scheme directly implicates Benjamin Bol Mel, appointed Vice President in February 2025, whose companies

¹¹² Motamedi, M. (2025). Treason trial begins for South Sudan VP Machar as 'unity government' breaks. Al Jazeera.

¹¹³ Mandil, N., & Rukanga, B. (2025). South Sudan court rejects Riek Machar's bid to halt murder and treason trial. BBC News.

¹¹⁴ Unango, K. (2025). Private media exclusion sparks outcry in Machar case. Standard Zone News.

¹¹⁵ Radio Tamazuj. (2025). Demonstration in Bentiu to demand Machar's release.

¹¹⁶ Bullen, B. (2025). UN closely monitors Machar's treason trial in Juba. Standard Zone News.

¹¹⁷ Reuters. (2025). South Sudan clash kills 14 in renewed violence in north.

¹¹⁸ United Nations Human Rights Council. (2025). South Sudan: UN inquiry's report details how systemic government corruption is fueling an acute human rights crisis.

failed to deliver most of the promised roads. This systemic mismanagement directly amplifies the country's vulnerability to natural disasters. As of September 26, approximately 592,686 people across 25 counties in six states have been affected by severe flooding.¹¹⁹ Jonglei and Unity states, where homes, farmland, and critical infrastructure have been destroyed, exemplify how the lack of functional infrastructure and emergency preparedness, stemming from decades of corruption, magnifies the humanitarian impact. Consequently, the floods not only displace communities and disrupt livelihoods but also reveal the structural fragility of South Sudan's governance, where widespread food insecurity and limited access to basic services are compounded by both natural hazards and misappropriation of resources.

Humanitarian operations came under renewed strain as Norway's embassy in Juba reported more than 30 aid workers abducted so far this year, roughly twice last year's figure, and called for protection of personnel.¹²⁰ That rise signals a shrinking humanitarian operating space. If aid agencies cannot guarantee staff safety, access to vulnerable communities will narrow. Reduced access will leave needs unmet and will increase political pressure on the government and donors to respond in ways that can complicate relief delivery.

Economic Shocks and Regional Integration

A cross-border economic shock then hit South Sudan's main revenue artery when Sudan ordered a shutdown at the Heglig oil processing facility after drone strikes, blaming the Rapid Support Forces¹²¹. Heglig handles the bulk processing of South Sudanese crude, and its stoppage immediately cuts export throughput. The consequence is direct and fiscal: government receipts fall, the budget tightens, and the state's ability to pay for security and public services weakens. That squeeze amplifies political stress at a moment when leaders cannot absorb another shock.

At the same time, IGAD ran a two-day workshop in Juba on a National Blue Economy Coordination Platform, backed by Sweden and focused on governance, financing, and river transport links, aligning with the South Sudan–Djibouti corridor.¹²² The workshop offers a medium-term path to reduce the country's dependence on a single export bottleneck. Strengthened inland waterways and coordinated transit planning can diversify routes and blunt single-point shocks like Heglig. Yet this is not an immediate fix: turning workshops into financeable projects and secure transport corridors will take time, money, and improved security to be effective.

¹¹⁹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2025). South Sudan: Floods Snapshot (As of 26 September 2025).

¹²⁰ Royal Norwegian Embassy in Juba. (2025). Statement on the Abduction of Aid Workers in South Sudan. Norway in South Sudan.

¹²¹ Reuters. (2025). Sudan shuts down Heglig oil facilities after drone attacks.

¹²² Intergovernmental Authority on Development. (2025). Building stronger pathways for South Sudan's blue economy. IGAD.

Salva Kiir's attendance at the GERD inauguration symbolized more than bilateral goodwill.¹²³ It underlined South Sudan's intent to be an active participant in regional integration, and Ethiopia's growing role as an anchor of that process. The power export agreement with Ethiopia would plug South Sudan's chronic supply gap and lower energy costs, making local refining, storage, and value-adding more feasible, while also positioning Ethiopia as a reliable supplier of GERD electricity. Coupled with the planned alternative oil infrastructure development with Ethiopia¹²⁴, these initiatives create a mutually reinforcing web of interdependence in which Ethiopia's energy supply underpins South Sudan's refining ambitions, and South Sudan's oil flows enhance Ethiopia's role as a regional transit and energy hub. Together, they weave both nations more tightly into the fabric of regional integration, where shared infrastructure and reciprocal reliance advance economic opportunity and political stability.

Meanwhile, South Sudan has secured the release of 27 young cattle herders detained in Muzan prison in Ethiopia after they allegedly crossed the border; Juba says it coordinated closely with Ethiopian authorities to arrange their discharge and imminent repatriation.¹²⁵ The episode, handled through official channels and consular engagement, highlights constructive neighborly cooperation and Ethiopia's willingness to apply legal processes while enabling a humanitarian outcome that fosters bilateral relations.

South Sudan remains in a precarious state, with corruption, governance failures, and natural disasters compounding its humanitarian crisis. Political tensions are escalating as President Salva Kiir maneuvers to position Benjamin Bol Mel as his successor, dissolving the 2018 peace agreement and intensifying divisions within the ruling coalition and opposition.¹²⁶ These developments highlight the urgent need for reform and sustained engagement to prevent further instability.

1.7 Kenya: Political, Economic, and Diplomatic Developments

Political Developments and Institutional Dynamics

The month of September has represented a political climax for Kenya, marked by debates over constitutional amendments, fiscal policies, and security issues, alongside circulating criticisms of the current administration by former President Uhuru Kenyatta. He publicly reproached President William Ruto's administration, accusing it of mismanaging public resources and undermining the legacy of past achievements. This criticism appears to signal an early escalation ahead of the 2027 elections. The alignment of influential figures such as Rigathi Gachagua and Fred Matiang'i along different sides further signals polarization within

¹²³ Ethiopian News Agency. (2025). South Sudan President hails GERD inauguration as historic milestone for regional unity.

¹²⁴ Osman, M. N. (2024). Ethiopia, South Sudan Work Together to Build Alternative Oil Transportation Infrastructure. Sputnik Africa.

¹²⁵ Okuj, O. (2025). 27 South Sudanese herders freed in Ethiopia await transportation: Official. Eye Radio.

¹²⁶ International Crisis Group. (2025). Succession fever deepens South Sudan's malaise.

the nation's political elite, with potential implications for voter perceptions and party dynamics in the coming years.

The judiciary further underscored institutional checks and balances when, on September 18, the High Court stopped Parliament¹²⁷ from passing the Constitution Amendment Bill, 2025. Amid concerns over fiscal transparency and debt reclassification, the draft proposed including three key funds, likely encompassing the Housing Levy and the Social Health Insurance Fund. Additionally, another bill proposed the introduction of “special seats” in both the National Assembly and Senate. While this could potentially expand political representation, it would also increase public expenditure. These developments exposed the Senate to public scrutiny, particularly as the bills also proposed extending term limits from five to seven years for elected officials, an amendment vehemently rejected by the Senate. Opposition groups welcomed the court's ruling as an affirmation of constitutionalism, whereas government allies criticized it as judicial overreach, intensifying institutional friction in the country.

Economic Policy and Fiscal Management

Concurrently, President William Ruto is advancing a bilateral trade agreement with the United States slated for completion by the end of 2025, alongside a request for a five-year extension of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). This initiative is aimed at securing broader access for Kenyan exports to the U.S. market while inviting American investment in sectors such as fishing and mining. Complementing this, on September 25, IMF delegates visited Nairobi to initiate discussions scheduled for conclusion by October 9 on a potential support program¹²⁸. This proactive engagement seeks to address fiscal prudence, debt management, and inclusive economic growth, reflecting Kenya's efforts to maintain an investor-friendly environment.

Domestic Security and Border Challenges

On the domestic front, an influx of armed Somali fighters into Kenya's southeastern Mandera County has been reported following clashes between Jubaland regional forces and Somalia's federal government. While the national government maintains that there is no disturbance, the county governor has urged residents to protect themselves and their families, warning that such behavior will not be tolerated. This situation has further strained relations between the central authorities and regional leaders, as the national government seeks to present itself as a reliable source of security despite the absence of concrete assurances for the country's safety.

¹²⁷ Sam Kiplagat, “Court blocks Ruto from assenting Bill seeking to Entrench three funds into the constitution,” Daily Nation, September 18, 2025,

¹²⁸ Kwambe Akuamah Boateng, “IMF staff to visit Kenya,” IMF, September 24, 2025,

Youth vulnerabilities also featured prominently this month, with reports of Kenyan citizens allegedly being coerced into joining the Russian military. Civil society organizations highlighted these incidents as indicative of insufficient protection for citizens abroad, amplifying public frustration over youth marginalization and governance shortcomings. These dynamics have compounded ongoing unrest and protests that have shaped the nation's political climate since mid-2024.

International Diplomacy and Multilateral Engagements

In the international arena, Kenya's engagement with the United States has exposed procedural ambiguities. The country signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)¹²⁹ with the state of Nebraska aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation in trade, investment, and agricultural development. However, the agreement, signed by Secretary of State Bob Evnen and representatives of the Republic of Kenya, was publicly disowned by the Nebraska governor, who clarified that the MoU was not officially endorsed by the state and characterized it as a personal action by the Secretary of State. This discrepancy raises concerns regarding procedural clarity as Kenya seeks to deepen its engagement with the United States, potentially complicating its diplomatic efforts.

Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi highlighted the international community's neglect of the Al Shabaab threat in Somalia during the sidelines of the current UN General Assembly. He emphasized that the 3,000 troops from the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) remain critical for stability, asserting that if Kenya were to withdraw, no immediate replacement would assume responsibility. This claim, however, is unsubstantiated and ahistorical, as it overlooks and undermines Ethiopia's central role in Somalia's security and stabilization efforts. Mudavadi further noted low funding levels and called upon Cyprus, set to assume the EU presidency in 2026, to intervene and provide support for Somalia's peacekeeping.

President William Ruto also addressed the ongoing crises in Gaza, Israel, and Sudan, emphasizing the need for the United Nations to assume a more proactive role in sustaining peace. He advocated for a ceasefire and a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while emphasizing Sudan's sovereignty¹³⁰. Kenya's interventions in these debates reflect both its concern with humanitarian emergencies and its broader effort to reinforce its regional diplomatic engagement. President William Ruto highlighted significant challenges facing the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission in Haiti¹³¹, endorsed by the UN Security Council, noting that it remains underfunded, underequipped, and operating at less than 40 percent of its planned capacity. Despite these setbacks, President Ruto commended

¹²⁹ Government of Kenya, MoU between Kenya and Nebraska 2025 (Nairobi the states for Diaspora Affairs, 2025), PDF,

¹³⁰ Didacus Malowa, "William Ruto Condemns ongoing Sudan conflict, champions dialogue: "deeply concerned"," MSN, September 25,2025,

¹³¹ Damilola Banjo, "Special Report: Ruto of Kenya, Syria, Argentina, Latvia, Serbia and Gender justice" *Passblue*, September 25,2025,

the dedication of Kenyan personnel, emphasizing their critical role in advancing the mission's objectives. Kenya's leadership in this endeavor underscores its steadfast commitment to global peace and security, further solidifying its reputation as a key contributor to international stability. Kenya is well-positioned to enhance Africa's global influence, notably through its leadership in the African Union's C10 on UN Security Council¹³² reform. Additionally, Kenya's participation in COP30 (2025) and UNEA-7 (2026) will further strengthen its role in multilateral diplomacy.

Governance, Security, and Peace Frameworks

Under the leadership of H.E. Mahmoud¹³³ Ali Youssouf, a high-level panel review in Nairobi, Kenya, from September 1–5, 2025, evaluated Kenya's governance, security, and peace frameworks against Agenda 2063's Aspirations 3, 4, and 7. The review confirmed their relevance but noted challenges, including limited political commitment, resource constraints, and shifting geopolitical dynamics. Informed by the August 29–31 expert meeting, the panel recommended stronger synergy between the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to advance Agenda 2063.

Regional Engagement and Bilateral Cooperation

Regionally, much to Egypt's dismay,¹³⁴ Kenya intensified its strategic partnership with Ethiopia.

On September 8, President Ruto attended the 2nd Africa Climate Summit in Addis Ababa, and the following day, he participated in the inauguration of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in Guba. These visits continued the pattern of reciprocal state visits by both leaders, reinforcing bilateral ties and sustained cooperation¹³⁵. During his inauguration speech, President Ruto underscored that no nation should be prohibited from harnessing significant natural resources like the GERD, signaling support for Ethiopia's developmental initiatives. Nairobi also reaffirmed its commitment to Ethiopia's developmental projects, including the March agreement facilitating Ethiopia's access to Lamu Port, while expressing readiness to expedite Ethiopia's pursuit of Red Sea access, underscoring Kenya's dedication to regional economic integration. Complementing this, on September 24, Nairobi signed its second Defense Cooperation Agreement with Ethiopia, endorsing intelligence sharing, joint military training, and enhanced interoperability to

¹³²Ministry of foreign and Diaspora Affairs, Republic of Kenya, "Kenya at the 80th session of the United Nation General Assembly" September 21, 2025,

¹³³ African Union, Report on the High-Level Panel Review of Kenya's Governance, Security, and Peace Frameworks (Addis Ababa: African Union, 2025), 1–2,

¹³⁴ Ethiomonitor, "Ruto's presence at Ethiopia's dam launch sparks Egypt's frustration," *Ethiomonitor*, September 25, 2025,

¹³⁵ Charles Ouma, "5 key highlights of President Ruto's trip to Ethiopia," *Pulselive Kenya*, September 07, 2025,

address transnational threats.

This agreement follows the first such pact concluded in 1963, the year Kenya attained independence, marking a significant renewal of bilateral defense relations after more than six decades. This development challenges narratives of Ethiopia's isolation in the region, highlighting its continued engagement and partnerships with neighboring states. It reinforces Ethiopia's position as a central actor in regional diplomacy and economic integration, maintaining strategic partnerships while actively participating in cross-border development and security initiatives. Its regional engagement was further demonstrated through reaffirmed support for Somalia's stabilization at a high-level briefing in Mogadishu, where Ethiopia reiterated its commitment to the AU-led AUSSOM mission.

Section Two: MENA Region, Gulf, and Global Engagement

2.1 Egypt: Strategic Diplomacy, Security Posturing, and Regional Maneuvering

In September, Egypt adopted a deliberate strategy centered on legal mechanisms, tactical diplomacy, and security signaling to challenge upstream developments on the Eastern Nile, while simultaneously seeking to enhance its regional influence against the backdrop of escalating crises in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. This approach began with Egypt dispatching a formal letter to the President of the UN Security Council, claiming that operations of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) contravened international norms and urging prompt global intervention,¹³⁶ which is an effort to exert external pressure on Ethiopia.

Shortly thereafter, United States President Donald Trump publicly highlighted his administration's role in averting a possible conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia over the dam, emphasizing Egypt's critical dependence on the Nile and the effectiveness of U.S. mediation.¹³⁷ However, the prospect of military confrontation remains untenable, as any Egyptian intervention against the GERD would risk catastrophic downstream consequences, a strategic constraint that Cairo must navigate, stressing the preference for diplomatic channels that Ethiopia has consistently promoted as a pathway to resolution.

Ethiopia's Foreign Minister Gedion Timotheos spearheaded a measured response, culminating in a formal address at the 80th UN General Assembly that refuted Egypt's assertions on the GERD as unsubstantiated. Deputy Permanent Representative Ambassador Yoseph Kassaye reinforced this position by affirming Ethiopia's dedication to cooperative principles and contemporary international law, while critiquing Egypt's adherence to outdated colonial-era agreements that perpetuate downstream privileges.¹³⁸ This stance

¹³⁶ *Daily News Egypt*, "Egypt Takes GERD Dispute to UN Security Council, Demands International Action on Eastern Nile Developments." September 2025.

¹³⁷ *Egypt Today*, "Trump Says He Succeeded in Averting Potential War between Egypt, Ethiopia over Controversial Dam.", September 21, 2025

¹³⁸ Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia Rejects Egypt's Unfounded Claim on GERD at UN General Assembly." September

highlighted a contrast with Egypt's approach, which appeared to prioritize regional discord through external interventions, cautioning against involving the UN in what Addis Ababa described as politically motivated maneuvers by Cairo. By urging Egypt to engage constructively, Ethiopia positioned itself as a proponent of mutual regional cooperation.

In this context, diplomatic signaling around the GERD inauguration shifted the discourse from technical arguments to recognition politics. President William Ruto's attendance at the launch drew sharp Egyptian criticism,¹³⁹ complicating Cairo's narrative of isolation and highlighting Ethiopia's framing of the dam as a sovereign development project. This attendance not only showcased international support for Ethiopia but also challenged Egypt's attempts to undermine the dam's significance.

Furthermore, Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty solidified a coordinated downstream position by engaging with Sudanese officials, rejecting Ethiopia's proposals on Nile initiatives, and committing to robust support for General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan's regime during Sudan's ongoing civil war.¹⁴⁰ This alignment not only bolsters Egypt's leverage in a fractured Sudan but also carries implications for potential border tensions that could inadvertently involve Ethiopia, illustrating how Cairo's partisan engagements might exacerbate regional vulnerabilities while sidelining Ethiopia's upstream entitlements.

Extending this outreach, Abdelatty visited basin neighbors such as Uganda,¹⁴¹ where he underscored Nile security as an existential priority for Egypt, advocating for governance frameworks that emphasize technical standards potentially restrictive to upstream autonomy.

Similarly, the agreements with Rwanda, on water management, logistics, housing, and investments,¹⁴² were framed as collaborative ventures, yet they expand Egypt's presence in East Africa, possibly as a means to dilute the GERD's regional momentum and marginalize Ethiopia in broader basin discussions.

Egypt's over-securitized initiatives intensified in Somalia, where it amplified relations through support for the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), including provisions of training, equipment, and intelligence sharing¹⁴³ to bolster counter-terrorism efforts. While presented as stabilizing assistance, this engagement mirrors historical precedents like the United States' involvement in Iraq, where arms supplies amid governance weaknesses led to unintended proliferation among non-state actors such as ISIS through corruption and internal divisions. In Somalia's context of porous oversight and clan-based fractures, similar risks emerge, with potential for diverted arms to reach groups

28, 2025.

¹³⁹ *Ethiomonitor*, "Ruto's Presence at Ethiopia Dam Launch Sparks Egypt's Frustration." September 25, 2025

¹⁴⁰ Sudan Tribune, "Sudan, Egypt reject wider Nile Basin role in Ethiopia dam dispute." September 3, 2025

¹⁴¹ Egypt Today. "FM Reaffirms Egypt's Rejection of Unilateral Measures in the Eastern Mediterranean." September 28,

¹⁴² Amwal Al Ghad, "Egypt, Rwanda Sign Cooperation Deals on Water, Housing, Investment." September 22, 2025

¹⁴³ *Daily News Egypt*, "Egypt-Somalia Pledge Closer Strategic Partnership in Face of Horn of Africa Instability." September 25, 2025

like Al-Shabaab, fostering border incursions that could destabilize the Horn and indirectly challenge Ethiopia's role as a key stabilizer. This underscores the need for caution in such military aid, as it may inadvertently compromise collective security interests rather than enhance them.

Amid these Nile-focused efforts, the Doha summit revealed constraints on Egypt's ambitions for a unified regional security architecture, as Cairo proposed a NATO-like Arab defense pact aimed at rapid responses to displacements and external interferences.¹⁴⁴ The initiative encountered resistance, particularly from Gulf states including Qatar and the UAE, due to divergences over leadership, membership, and objectives, resulting in its failure to gain traction. This setback can be linked to Egypt's growing anxieties regarding the 1978 Camp David Accords, amid heightened tensions with Israel. President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's rhetoric escalated, characterizing Israel as an enemy¹⁴⁵ and questioning the accords' sustainability, marking a notable adjustment in Egypt's foreign policy orientation.

Concurrently, Egypt augmented military deployments in the Sinai Peninsula,¹⁴⁶ surpassing the accord stipulations, as a precautionary measure against potential spillovers from Gaza operations, prompting dialogues with Israel and the United States, where Cairo emphasized severe repercussions for any infringement on its sovereignty. These actions served to reinforce domestic perceptions of el-Sisi as a steadfast guardian of national interests but strained the accords' framework, potentially inviting accusations of non-compliance and altering Egypt's posture from balanced diplomacy to heightened militarization. Mid-September, el-Sisi connected Israel's activities in Gaza to impediments in regional agreements, interweaving Nile and Middle East concerns in a manner that aimed to foster Arab cohesion¹⁴⁷ but risked alienating established partners.

The late-month postponement of U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee's visit to Egypt,¹⁴⁸ signaled underlying policy frictions, potentially isolating Cairo and reducing its efficacy in forums like the UN and the Quartet. This shift may further erode Egypt's standing as a mediator in the Muslim world, where its historical ties with Israel facilitated intra-Arab reconciliations, as evidenced by the Doha rejection, illustrating difficulties in converting assertive rhetoric into viable multilateral structures.

¹⁴⁴ Middle East Eye, "Egypt's NATO-Style Arab Defense Force Proposal Rejected at Doha Summit." *Middle East Eye*, September 2025.

¹⁴⁵ Middle East Eye. "Sisi Calls Israel an 'Enemy' but Will Egypt Take Real Action over Gaza Genocide?" September 29, 2025

¹⁴⁶ Middle East Monitor. "Israeli Officials Reportedly Warn of Egyptian Military Buildup in Sinai." Last modified September 29, 2025.

¹⁴⁷ Anadolu Agency. "Egypt's President Warns Israeli Actions Risk Undermining Current Peace Agreements." September 15, 2025.

¹⁴⁸ New York Times. "Huckabee's Postponed Visit to Egypt Highlights Tensions over Israel and Gaza." September 30, 2025.

Egypt's portrayal as a regional stabilizer, as articulated in Abdelatty's UN General Assembly statements on mediation in Sudan and Libya, merits close examination.¹⁴⁹ In Sudan, Egypt participates in the Quartet mediation framework alongside the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to promote peace amid the civil war. However, its overt military backing of the Sudanese Armed Forces under al-Burhan, including arms deliveries and alleged airstrikes, though denied by Cairo, compromises impartiality, as favoring one side inherently skews mediation and may prolong hostilities. Likewise, in Libya, Egypt hosts diplomatic discussions for ceasefires and elections to foster stability, yet its provision of military aid to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, coupled with threats of intervention, aligns it with a faction opposing the UN-recognized government, thereby perpetuating fragmentation rather than enabling unified progress.

On the wider geopolitical front, Egypt pursued diversified partnerships, such as with Russia,¹⁵⁰ to address accumulating challenges, participating in the BRICS ministerial meeting to coordinate on global issues and delivering its UN address on crises.¹⁵¹ In late September, Abdelatty convened with South Korean President Lee Jae-myung's envoy Park Beom-kye to commemorate the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations, exploring expansions in economic, trade, and investment ties, drawing from prior presidential exchanges between 2016 and 2022.¹⁵²

Initiatives included establishing a joint committee for collaborations in industrial localization, green hydrogen, renewables, the New Administrative Capital, and the Suez Economic Zone, with proposals for a dedicated Korean industrial area leveraging Egyptian incentives, alongside UN coordination given Korea's Security Council membership and trilateral African engagements via a 2024 memorandum. This broadening of alliances beyond traditional spheres may aim to mitigate perceived isolation on Nile matters through alternative economic avenues, though without explicit connections to core disputes, it risks dispersing focus from achieving equitable resolutions.

Overall, Egypt's maneuvers in this month constituted a concerted push to constrain Ethiopia's developmental autonomy, often by recasting the GERD as a peril to regional equilibrium rather than a catalyst for progress, thereby seeking to undermine Addis Ababa's reputation in international and basin contexts. This reveals strategic limitations and increasing seclusion for Cairo, juxtaposed with Ethiopia's persistent advocacy for equitable, dialogue-driven approaches that remain unreciprocated, highlighting foregone prospects for principled cooperation in Nile governance.

¹⁴⁹ United Nations. "Egypt." September 27, 2025.

¹⁵⁰ Russia's Pivot to Asia. "Russia, Egypt, Bilateral Relations: September 2025 Update." September 26, 2025.

¹⁵¹ Ministry of External Affairs, India. "BRICS Joint Media Statement (September 26, 2025)." September 27, 2025.

¹⁵² Presidency of the Arab Republic of Egypt. "President El-Sisi Meets with the Russian Federation President in Kazan." September 26, 2025.

2.2 Yemen: Expanding Houthi Reach and the Deepening Red Sea Crisis

This September deepened the Red Sea crisis into a clearly multi-domain confrontation in which maritime interdiction, long-range aerial strikes, targeted leadership removals, and symbolic economic measures reinforced one another and raised the tangible costs for commercial shipping, civilians, and regional stability.

The month's operational highlights were two maritime incidents that illustrate the expanding geographic scope and practical effects of Houthi operations: on September 29, the Dutch-flagged general cargo ship *Minervagracht* was struck by an explosive device, caught fire, and was left adrift after its 19 crew members were evacuated by helicopter. Two sailors were reported injured, and the rescue was coordinated by the EU maritime mission *Aspides* and by the vessel's operator *Spliethoff*.¹⁵³

The *Minervagracht* incident followed earlier Houthi actions in September, including their claim of a strike on the Liberian-flagged and Israeli-managed tanker *Scarlet Ray*.¹⁵⁴ Maritime managers and monitors later assessed that event as involving a nearby splash, and they reported that the vessel itself was undamaged. This contrast illustrates how Houthi targeting claims and independent verification can differ in politically charged situations.

These maritime attacks are not isolated kinetic gestures; rather, they are part of a deliberate campaign that combines sea denial tactics with aerial strikes against Israel, as well as kinetic pressure within Yemen itself. During September, Houthi-launched drones and missiles targeted southern Israel, damaging facilities around Eilat¹⁵⁵ and producing civilian injuries and local disruption.

One significant incident involved a projectile or drone strike that hit a hotel and shopping area in Eilat, injuring multiple civilians and prompting criticism regarding how the intrusion reached southern airspace. In response, Israel conducted large and precise airstrikes on Houthi-held targets in Sanaa and other governorates.¹⁵⁶ The Israeli military described these strikes as targeting command, intelligence, and logistics nodes, while Israeli leaders framed them as efforts to degrade the group's ability to project UAVs and missiles.

That pairing of external strikes and Houthi retaliation has a distinct political logic. Israel's September 25 raids on Sanaa were described by Israeli officials as a concentrated effort to remove command and control capacity and to destroy stockpiles of unmanned aerial vehicles and munitions, a tactical approach that amounts to political decapitation when it removes senior officials or traffic in leadership-targeting strikes.

¹⁵³ The New Arab. "Dutch-Flagged Ship Ablaze in Gulf of Aden After Attack." September 30, 2025

¹⁵⁴ S&P Global. "Houthis Fire Missile at Israeli Tanker in Northern Red Sea Amid Heightened Tensions." September 1, 2025.

¹⁵⁵ Al Jazeera. "Yemen's Houthis Launch Drone Attack on Israel's Eilat, Wounding 22 People." September 24, 2025

¹⁵⁶ BBC News. "Israeli Strike on Yemen's Houthis Reportedly Kills Eight." September 26, 2025

The killing of Ahmed Ghaleb al-Rahawi¹⁵⁷ earlier, reported and confirmed in late August, had already illustrated how leadership removal inside Houthi-controlled areas can act as both a tactical blow and a catalyst for further Houthi attacks against Israeli territory and maritime targets.

In response to these developments, states and multinational missions have implemented complementary strategies. Tactical measures have included large-scale air operations targeting Houthi command and weapons infrastructure, naval rescue missions coordinated by the EU Aspides operation, and both public and private maritime advisories for operators transiting the region. These actions reflect a heightened awareness of the associated risks.

On a strategic level, the U.S. and its allies have implemented financial measures aimed at disrupting procurement and smuggling chains linked to Houthi operations. This approach is complemented by the Enhanced Border Security Partnership (EBSP) between the U.S. and Bahrain, which institutionalizes the automated exchange of biometric data.¹⁵⁸ By solidifying Bahrain's role as a hub for regional patrol forces and intelligence sharing, this partnership significantly enhances Bahrain's strategic importance. Its geographic location allows Bahrain to extend its influence across the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and vital chokepoints in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb, thereby contributing to regional security efforts.

Both the U.S. and Bahrain recognize the threats posed by Iran and its proxies, particularly the Houthis. The EBSP aims to increase pressure on Yemen, potentially disrupting Houthi activities and integrating maritime control within broader counter-proxy strategies.

September's event highlights that the Red Sea crisis deepened into a tightly interwoven, multi-domain confrontation linking maritime, aerial, and economic arenas. The month's incidents underscored both the Houthis' expanding reach and the high costs imposed on shipping, civilians, and regional stability.

2.3 Israel: Recognition Momentum, Regional Conflict, and Strategic Dilemmas

September 2025 marked a turning point in Israel's diplomatic standing. A cascade of recognitions of Palestinian statehood by France, the UK, Canada, Australia, Portugal, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Belgium, and Andorra reflected a widening consensus that the two-state solution requires more than rhetoric.¹⁵⁹ France framed Palestinian sovereignty as essential to peace rather than a concession to Hamas. President Emmanuel Macron highlighted that recognition did not absolve Hamas of its attacks but represented a political rebalancing toward a viable solution.¹⁶⁰

Israel reacted with defiance. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used his UN address to

¹⁵⁷ BBC News. "Houthis Confirm Their Prime Minister Killed in Israeli Strike." August 30, 2025

¹⁵⁸ Golden, Ivan. "Enhanced Border Security Partnership: U.S. and Bahrain Agreement." *THX News*, September 29, 2025.

¹⁵⁹ Les Décodeurs. (2025). Map: The countries that recognize a Palestinian state. *Le Monde*.

¹⁶⁰ Daniels, C. M. (2025). Macron defends decision to recognize Palestinian statehood. *Politico*.

insist that Israel must “finish the job” in Gaza, denouncing allies who recognized Palestine as undermining Israel’s security and legitimizing terrorism.¹⁶¹ He further emphasized that allowing the two-state solution that sidelines Israel is considered as condoning a terrorist attack that targeted Israel on October 7, 2024. Israel’s growing diplomatic isolation was put in to show during Netanyahu’s speech.

UK Domestic Politics and Reform Party’s Pro-Israel Turn

Amid this shifting international consensus, domestic political actors in the UK took concrete steps to signal their positions on Israel, illustrating how the debate over Palestinian recognition is influencing party diplomacy and parliamentary discourse.

In this context, Richard Tice, Deputy Leader of the UK Reform Party, travelled to Israel this week and held meetings at the Foreign Ministry and with a range of interlocutors, including Gideon Sa’ar, diplomats, and groups of hostage families.¹⁶² The visit demonstrates the party’s firm solidarity with Israel and explicit rejection of the UK government’s recent decision to recognize a Palestinian state. The visit confirmed that Reform stands “strong with Israel” and that it expects close cooperation if the party wins power. Nigel Farage had already spoken with Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar this month, condemning the UK government’s recognition of Palestine. Sa’ar, in turn, thanked him for his stance and stressed that Israel distinguishes between the government in London and the British people.¹⁶³

Domestic politics in the UK make the Reform Party’s electoral rise consequential. Multiple recent polls and modelled projections put Reform UK within striking distance of being the largest party in the next election and, in some models, close to a working majority. YouGov’s constituency poll MRP and other seat-projection exercises show Reform able to win hundreds of seats under current voting intentions.¹⁶⁴ That electoral reality is why Reform figures are already practicing foreign-policy engagements, including this Israel visit. A party preparing to lead the government naturally seeks quick wins in foreign policy that signal decisiveness to its voters.

If Reform takes power, immediate changes would be most visible in tone and bilateral gestures. Expect a government led by Reform to reverse the rhetorical move that recognized Palestine, to deepen public affirmations of Israel’s security needs, and to prioritize closer bilateral security and intelligence links. Tice’s meetings and statements this week demonstrate that posture. Those options are politically cheap and reversible, and they play well to the party’s base. But practical limits might constrain how far any new UK government could legally or institutionally shift policy on its own. Formal diplomatic

¹⁶¹ Hume, T. (2025). Netanyahu tells UN that Israel must ‘finish the job’ in Gaza. Al Jazeera.

¹⁶² Lukash, A. (2025). ‘We’ve got to get rid of Hamas’: UK Reform Party leader pledges unwavering support on Israel visit. Ynet News.

¹⁶³ Tanenbaum, G. (2025). Israel’s FM meets with visiting British Reform Party deputy chairman. Israel.com.

¹⁶⁴ English, P., & Difford, D. (2025). YouGov MRP shows a Reform UK government a near-certainty if an election were held tomorrow. YouGov.

recognition, multilateral agreements, and trade-security arrangements are embedded in legal and institutional frameworks. Any rapid attempt at wholesale reversal would face legal, administrative, and international resistance.

The question of contagion across Europe should be judged soberly. Europe already shows a patchwork of responses to Israel, from outright support in Budapest to critical stances in several Western capitals. A pro-Israel turn in London would strengthen like-minded governments and make coordinated criticism harder, but may not automatically force mainstream European governments to backtrack.

Ultimately, Tice's visit is political and strategic. It signals how Reform would approach Israel: firm public backing, diplomatic reversal where feasible, and closer bilateral security ties. Polling makes such a government plausible, which raises the stakes for British foreign policy. Yet institutional constraints and the fragmented nature of European politics mean London's pivot would be influential rather than decisive. If several right-leaning governments move in the same direction, the balance at the EU level could shift. If not, Britain's change of course will matter for tone and bilateral relations, but it will not by itself rewrite European policy.

Europe's Fragmented Stance and EU Sanctions Debate

Conversely, the EU Commission proposed suspension of its trade pact with Israel, including potential sanctions, demonstrating an unprecedented step against one of the EU's largest trading partners.¹⁶⁵ This coincided with the release of a UN inquiry that formally labeled Israel's war in Gaza as genocide, holding the government directly responsible based on both official statements and battlefield conduct.¹⁶⁶ These developments compound Israel's legal and diplomatic vulnerabilities, further emboldening states considering recognition.

U.S. Policy: Conditional Support under Trump

In September, the United States signaled a significant shift in its stance toward Israel's territorial ambitions. For the first time, President Donald Trump publicly stated that Washington would not allow Israel to annex the occupied West Bank, drawing a clear red line while maintaining strong rhetorical support for Israeli security.¹⁶⁷ This sequence of events revealed that even under a strongly pro-Israel administration, U.S. policy was now defined by conditional support, tying Israeli actions to broader regional stability and the preservation of existing diplomatic agreements.

It also indicates that unconditional backing from Israel's most critical ally was no longer guaranteed and reflected strategic calculations potentially aimed at preserving the Abraham

¹⁶⁵ Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf. (2025). Commission proposes suspension of trade concessions with Israel and sanctions on extremist ministers of the Israeli government and violent settlers. European Commission.

¹⁶⁶ UN News. (2025). Gaza: Top independent rights probe alleges Israel committed genocide.

¹⁶⁷ Sullivan, H. (2025). Trump says he 'will not allow' Netanyahu to annex West Bank. BBC News.

Accords, the 2020 normalization agreements with several Arab states. The accord, only unlocked after Israel pledged to halt annexation in exchange for ties with the United Arab Emirates, set a precedent that the Trump administration still sought to leverage for broader regional integration.

Shortly after this declaration, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with President Trump in Washington to discuss the 21-point ceasefire plan aimed at ending the Gaza conflict. The plan included provisions for hostage release, Hamas disarmament, and the de-radicalization of Gaza as a terror-free zone.¹⁶⁸ Netanyahu accepted the plan in principle but under significant conditions, including retaining Israeli security control over Gaza, the release of all hostages within 72 hours, and opposing the establishment of a Palestinian state.¹⁶⁹ This cautious endorsement aimed to balance international pressure with domestic political realities, as right-wing coalition members opposed concessions to Hamas.

The month also saw Israel carry out its operations beyond the immediate conflict zone. On September 9, it conducted an airstrike in Doha, Qatar, targeting a meeting of Hamas political leaders, resulting in casualties among Hamas members, Qatari security personnel, and civilians.¹⁷⁰

Regional Escalations and Horn of Africa Dynamics

The ripple effects extended beyond Europe and Washington. In the Horn of Africa, the diplomatic realignment was equally evident. Sudan leaned heavily into pro-Palestinian rhetoric to shore up its legitimacy, aligning with Cairo and Doha.¹⁷¹ Ethiopia, however, abstained on key UN votes, reflecting its attempt to balance Gulf partnerships and its positioning as a frontline stabilizer. For states along the Red Sea corridor, the recognition momentum and Israel's isolation have become intertwined with their own strategic calculations, from energy corridors to security alliances, pulling the Horn deeper into the conflict's orbit.

The escalation in the Red Sea corridor unfolded sharply after 17 September, when an Israeli drone struck a Pakistani LPG tanker docked at Ras Issa port under Houthi control. The attack ignited one LPG tank, which the crew extinguished, yet shortly afterward, the vessel was halted by Houthi boats and its crew briefly held hostage before being released.¹⁷² In the following weeks, Houthi forces intensified their campaign against Israel, launching drones and missiles that included a notable strike in early September on Ramon Airport near Eilat, which temporarily halted operations and injured two people.¹⁷³ The escalation reached a new

¹⁶⁸ Gjevori, E. (2025). Here's the full text of Trump's 20-point plan to end Israel's war on Gaza. Al Jazeera.

¹⁶⁹ Bronner, L. (2025). Netanyahu accepts Trump's Gaza peace plan under pressure, but sets conditions. Le Monde

¹⁷⁰ Sexton, K., & Fatimah, M. (2025). Israeli military strikes Hamas leaders in Qatar. DW.com.

¹⁷¹ Sudan Tribune. (2025). Sudan condemns Israeli attack on Doha, al-Burhan phones Qatar's emir.

¹⁷² Gokce, S. (2025). 24 Pakistanis among 27 crew aboard LNG gas tanker attacked by Israel at Yemen port. Anadolu Agency.

¹⁷³ Lidman, M., & Magdy, S. (2025). In a rare hit, a drone fired by Yemen's Houthi rebels strikes Israel's southern airport. ABC7

peak on 24 September, when a Houthi drone penetrated Israeli air defenses and struck central Eilat, injuring 22 people, including two seriously, and exposing gaps in Israel's aerial defense coverage.¹⁷⁴ In response to this growing threat, Israel carried out deep strikes in Yemen targeting military bases, command centers, ports, and airports in an effort to degrade Houthi launch capabilities and deter future attacks.¹⁷⁵ This sequence of events underscores the vulnerability of critical infrastructure and the broader regional implications: heightened risk for Red Sea shipping, potential spillover into neighboring states, and deeper entanglement of Iran-aligned proxies in Middle Eastern security and geopolitics.

On the ground, Israel escalated its military operations in Gaza, launching a large-scale operation in Gaza City that flattened entire districts and displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Prime Minister Netanyahu stated that the operation's goal is to destroy Hamas, despite mounting international calls for a ceasefire. Amid these operations, Hamas requested a 24-hour halt to Israeli airstrikes to locate two missing Israeli hostages, a request that Israel did not accept, further intensifying the crisis.¹⁷⁶

Simultaneously, Israel advanced its settlement agenda in the West Bank, accelerating projects including the controversial E1 plan, which aims to connect Jerusalem to Ma'ale Adumim. This expansion drew widespread international criticism and raised concerns about the feasibility of a two-state solution.

Diplomatic Confrontations at the UN

Diplomatically, Israel faced significant pushback. Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech at the UN General Assembly was met with objections and walkouts from diplomats, though he reaffirmed Israel's determination to defeat Hamas.¹⁷⁷ In response to ongoing international efforts, a UN-hosted summit on September 22 aimed to advance the two-state solution; Israel and the U.S. boycotted the event, while other countries continued pushing for Palestinian statehood recognition. Netanyahu, however, expressed reservations, insisting on achieving "total victory" over Hamas and opposing the establishment of a Palestinian state, signaling continued tension between diplomatic initiatives and military objectives.

These developments, woven together, in September, revealed Israel's facing of mounting pressure on three fronts: Warfield in Gaza, International law, and a changing diplomatic arena where recognition momentum is reshaping the politics of legitimacy. The regional order is shifting around it, one in which recognition of Palestine is becoming mainstream, and where refusal to engage risks leaving Israel increasingly isolated.

¹⁷⁴ Hazboun, I., Magdy, S., & Krauss, J. (2025). Drone fired by Yemen's Houthis wounds 22 in southern Israel, in a rare breach of missile defenses. Associated Press.

¹⁷⁵ Sullivan, R., & News Agencies. (2025). Israel launches series of strikes on Yemen's Red Sea port of Hodeidah. Al Jazeera.

¹⁷⁶ France24. (2025). Hamas urges Israel to halt strikes on Gaza City as it searches for two hostages.

¹⁷⁷ Bennett, T. (2025). Netanyahu attacks Palestinian recognition as dozens walk out of UN speech. BBC News.

2.4 Turkey: Sea of Friendship, Rapprochement and Hedging

Turkey and Egypt held joint naval exercises called Sea of Friendship between September 22 and 26, the first such drills in 13 years, marking a calculated rapprochement after relations were repaired and ambassadors reappointed in 2023.¹⁷⁸ The drills took place in the eastern Mediterranean and featured Turkish frigates, fast attack vessels, a submarine, and F-16 fighter jets operating alongside Egyptian naval units. On September 25, a high-level observer day capped the exercise. Beyond the tactical value, the drill signaled renewed alignment between the two powers.

At the same time, Ankara has been consolidating its influence across the Horn of Africa. Over the past decade, it has been Somalia's foremost investor and military backer, while a 2021 comprehensive defense pact with Ethiopia broadened cooperation into training, equipment, and logistics. These longstanding ties, reinforced by President Erdoğan's September 15 meeting with Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in Doha¹⁷⁹ and follow-up meetings in Ankara on September 24, underscore Turkey's bid to anchor itself as a pivotal security and development partner along the Red Sea corridor. Erdoğan's vocal denunciations of Israel's war in Gaza further reveal his strategy of projecting Turkey as both a regional stabilizer and moral leader within the Muslim world.

In a separate development, President Erdoğan met with Donald Trump in Washington, D.C., to discuss arms deals, trade, and the Gaza situation.¹⁸⁰ Trump reportedly sought to rehabilitate Erdoğan's image among U.S. political circles, with Turkey signaling a willingness to lower tariffs and pursue deals with Boeing. The meeting potentially marks a reset in U.S.–Turkey relations, focused on leader-to-leader diplomacy that could ease bilateral tensions—though key disputes, such as U.S. support for Syrian Kurdish forces, remain unresolved.

Turkey also significantly intensified its diplomatic engagement around the Gaza conflict in September: Intelligence Chief İbrahim Kalın traveled to Qatar to engage with Hamas and mediators over a peace plan proposed by former U.S. President Trump¹⁸¹. This followed direct meetings between Erdoğan and Trump, suggesting Turkey is positioning itself as a key mediator. Success in brokering a deal could boost Turkey's regional standing; failure could damage its credibility. The move also signals a willingness by Ankara to engage multiple international actors in resolving the crisis.

Meanwhile, Turkey and Syria showed signs in September of deepening defense ties.¹⁸² This

¹⁷⁸ TRT World, "Türkiye and Egypt Deepen Strategic Ties with First Joint Naval Exercise in 13 Years." September 22, 2025.

¹⁷⁹ AK Party, "President Erdoğan Meets with President Mohamud of Somalia." September 15, 2025.

¹⁸⁰ Reuters, "Erdogan Hails 'Meaningful Progress' in His Talks with Trump," September 26, 2025, Reuters

¹⁸¹ Times of Israel, "Turkish Intelligence Chief in Qatar for Talks with Hamas about Trump's Gaza Plan," September 30, 2025, The Times of Israel,

¹⁸² Turkish Minute, "Turkey Begins Training Syrian Forces under New Security Deal: Report," September 9, 2025, Turkish Minute,

included a visit by a Syrian naval delegation and reports that Turkish forces were training Syrian troops in air defense. This development may point to a broader strategic realignment. Closer ties could shift power dynamics in Syria but might complicate the positions of actors such as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

On another front, the normalization process with Armenia advanced: special representatives met this month to discuss opening border crossings and enhancing cultural and academic ties.¹⁸³ Progress here could improve regional stability and foster economic cooperation across the South Caucasus.

Turkey's relationships with Western partners remain in a transactional phase, shaped by both structural tensions (e.g., democratic concerns, divergent regional interests) and by converging interests in defense, trade, and migration. This "hybrid" phase reflects continued strategic hedging: Ankara is not breaking with the West, but its pursuit of a more independent foreign policy may increase reliance on non-Western powers like Russia and China—though it must manage this carefully to avoid diplomatic isolation.¹⁸⁴

In sum, this highlighted Turkey's push to reassert itself as a pivotal power—reviving old alliances, testing new openings, and positioning as both mediator and regional stabilizer, while carefully hedging between Western partners and non-Western actors.

2.5 Gulf States:

Qatar: Mediation under Pressure and Strategic Economic Expansion

This month, Qatar experienced an airstrike by Israel within its capital, Doha,¹⁸⁵ targeting Hamas leaders in Leqtaifiya and killing six, including a Qatari security officer. The attack, which Qatar described as state terrorism, led to the convening of an Emergency Arab-Islamic Summit, where Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani rallied regional condemnation and exposed Gulf States' growing distrust in U.S. security assurances. This development, along with the new Saudi-Pakistan defense pact, reflected a growing regional impetus to cultivate security arrangements independent of Washington, as Gulf leaders questioned America's ability to curb Israeli militarization. Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, reflecting African solidarity, condemned the strike as well, stating it was a violation of international law, aligning with global outcry from the UN Security Council and reinforcing Qatar's diplomatic ties in the Horn of Africa.

Following the attack, Qatar's Prime Minister affirmed the country's intention to continue its mediation efforts in the Gaza conflict,¹⁸⁶ regardless of the incident having disrupted the U.S.-

¹⁸³ P.A. Turkey, "Türkiye, Armenia Vow to Pursue Normalization without Preconditions," September 12, 2025, PA Turkey,

¹⁸⁴ Balta, Evren. "Interview – Evren Balta." *E-International Relations*, September 30, 2025

¹⁸⁵ Al Jazeera. 'Israel attacks Hamas leadership in Qatar: What we know.' September 9, 2025

¹⁸⁶ AL Arabiya. 'Qatar says it will continue Gaza mediation despite Israeli attack on Doha.' September. 2025

backed ceasefire talks. The strike against Hamas figures during truce discussions created a risk of disrupting negotiations. However, Qatar continued its efforts to facilitate hostage releases and a ceasefire, outlining its role as a neutral diplomatic axis and host to U.S. forces. In addition to this, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit to Doha on September 16 sought to reaffirm the partnership, acknowledging Qatar's mediation and defense cooperation amid tensions following the strike. This bilateral engagement was complemented by President Trump's meeting with Gulf leaders at the UN General Assembly, which pushed for a Gaza ceasefire and reconstruction but accentuated enduring Gulf concerns over U.S. reliability, with alternatives like France's two-state proposal gaining little traction.

In another significant diplomatic development, Israel formally conveyed an apology to Qatar for the September airstrike during a high-level call mediated by the US President.¹⁸⁷ The discussion, which included Qatar's Prime Minister and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, addressed the direct violation of Qatari sovereignty and its impact on regional stability. The apology was positioned as a main step toward de-escalation, aiming to rebuild trust and create the necessary conditions for Qatar to resume its role as a mediator in the Gaza ceasefire and hostage negotiations.

Economically, Qatar also worked to expand its economic presence in the Horn of Africa and beyond, directing a portion of a \$103 billion investment initiative toward the Horn of Africa.¹⁸⁸ This included allocations of \$19 billion for energy and mining in Sudan and \$12 billion for agricultural development in Ethiopia.

Saudi Arabia: Vision 2030-Driven Engagement and Stabilization Efforts

Saudi Arabia's engagements in September were seen as an implementation of its Vision 2030 objectives, focusing on economic diversification and strategic stabilization in the Horn of Africa. Through Vision Invest, the Kingdom committed \$700 million to arise Integrated Industrial Platforms to develop agro-industrial zones in 14 Horn of Africa markets and beyond,¹⁸⁹ including Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia, directly linking these projects to its national food security goals.

Following this, Saudi Arabia reinforced its role as a key mediator by participating in the "Quad" alongside the US, UAE, and Egypt, which proposed a Sudan peace roadmap calling for a three-month humanitarian truce and a permanent ceasefire.¹⁹⁰ This effort, complemented by pledges for \$5 billion in development aid by 2030 focusing on agriculture in Sudan and infrastructure in Djibouti, shows Riyadh's strategy to secure maritime routes and prevent regional spill-over from the Sudan conflict.

¹⁸⁷ Reuters. 'Israel's Netanyahu apologizes to Qatar for the attack on Doha, source says.' September 29, 2025

¹⁸⁸ The Business & Financial Times. 'Qatar's US\$103bn investment: Pledging to deepen its influence across Africa.' September 9, 2025

¹⁸⁹ Reuters. 'Saudi Arabia's Vision Invest enters Africa with ARISE IIP investment.' September 11, 2025

¹⁹⁰ US State Department. 'Joint Statement on Restoring Peace and Security in Sudan.' September 12, 2025

In leading the development of Palestinian Statehood, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan co-led a French-Saudi resolution for a two-state solution, securing 142 votes.¹⁹¹ Riyadh's deft diplomacy rallied nations like the UK, Canada, and Australia to recognize Palestine, challenging Israel's stance and advancing Arab League ceasefire goals for Gaza. This move, shown in Vision 2030's global leadership aspirations, positions Saudi Arabia as a moral and diplomatic force, bridging divides while amplifying its mediation credentials.

In defense and regional security, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed a mutual defense pact at Al-Yamamah Palace, pledging joint responses to aggression.¹⁹² Timed after Israel's Doha strikes, the agreement strengthens Saudi defenses against Iran, with hints of nuclear deterrence access via Pakistan. Reassuring India of unchanged ties, Riyadh reshapes Gulf-South Asia dynamics, aligning Vision 2030's security goals with regional stability.

UAE: Diplomacy, Disputes, and Deals

The month began with a solid warning to Israel. The UAE president, Mohammed bin Zayed, met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and expressed that any annexation of West Bank territories would cross a red line,¹⁹³ alarming the Abraham Accords system for regional integration. This stance was reiterated on September 18, with sources indicating the UAE's readiness to downgrade diplomatic ties with Israel if annexation proceeded, showing strains in the post-Accords relationship.

On the international stage, the UAE strengthened its diplomatic mark. At the 80th United Nations General Assembly, Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, urging an end to the Gaza conflict,¹⁹⁴ the release of hostages, and progress toward a two-state solution. At the same time, UAE Minister of State Lana Nusseibeh emphasized diplomacy against global crises, advocating for increased investments in Africa and the Global South while cautioning against extension in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.¹⁹⁵ The UAE led a delegation at the High-level International Conference on the Two-State Solution in New York, reaffirming its support for Palestinian statehood.

In the Horn of Africa, the UAE continued to deepen its strategic engagement, particularly with Somaliland. At the Africa Investment Summit in Dubai, UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade Thani Al Zeyoudi highlighted \$110 billion in African investments since 2019, with a focus on logistics, energy, and mining.¹⁹⁶ Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Irro proposed Berbera Port and Economic Zone as East Africa's economic

¹⁹¹ Al Jazeera. 'UN General Assembly backs two-state push for Israel and Palestine.' September 12, 2025

¹⁹² Reuters. 'Saudi Arabia, nuclear-armed Pakistan sign mutual defence pact.' September 18, 2025

¹⁹³ BBC News, 'UAE warns Israel that Annexing West bank would cross 'red line' September 4, 2025

¹⁹⁴ UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abdullahi bin Zayed urges urgent end to Gaza war in meeting with Israeli Prime Minister in New York, September 27, 2025

¹⁹⁵ The UAE remains committed to diplomacy against mounting global crises, Lana Nusseibeh says,' September 28, 2025.

¹⁹⁶ Mohammed Dulale, Somalia: From Ports to Investment President Irro Puts Somaliland on UAE's Global Stage.' *Horn Diplomat*, September 27, 2025

gateway, leveraging the 2016 UAE-DP World agreement. However, these moves drew criticism from Eritrea and Somalia, with Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki accusing the UAE of destabilizing the Red Sea region through its support for Ethiopia and Somaliland. Somalia's federal government viewed the UAE's preferential treatment of Somaliland, including eased visa policies for its nationals, as undermining its sovereignty.¹⁹⁷

The UAE faced additional regional tensions over its Horn of Africa policies. Mid-September, Eritrea and Somalia condemn external interference at the UNGA, implicitly targeting the UAE's role in supporting Ethiopia's regional ambitions and Somaliland's de facto sovereignty. Critics accused the UAE of exploiting resources in Somaliland's Sanaag region under the guise of development, though UAE officials emphasized partnerships for mutual prosperity.¹⁹⁸ A legal setback in Djibouti over the Doraleh Container Terminal dispute further complicated the UAE's regional strategy.

The UAE strengthened ties with Australia,¹⁹⁹ elevating relations to a Strategic Partnership during Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's visit to mark 50 years of diplomacy. The agreement emphasized economic growth, support for a two-state solution, and Australia's recognition of Palestine.

September 2025 showcased the UAE's multifaceted role as a diplomatic mediator, economic powerhouse, and regional influencer. From navigating tensions with Israel to African infrastructure, the UAE balanced bold investments with careful diplomacy. Its actions in the Horn of Africa, particularly with Somaliland, highlighted both economic opportunities and geopolitical challenges, while its global engagements at the UNGA and beyond reinforced its commitment to stability and progress.

Section Three: International Organizations and Global Powers Engagement

Diplomatic Dynamics and Regional Presence

In the high-level diplomatic engagements, China's Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Xue Bing, led a delegation visit across regional states, reiterating Beijing's dedication to support African-led peace initiatives, economic development, and infrastructure investment. Complementing this, the United States dispatched its Special Advisor Mike Hammer to Africa to the Horn, emphasizing the United States' focus on stabilizing humanitarian and security challenges without impinging on regional ownership.

China maintains an official non-intervention policy, with its special envoy promoting state-to-state cooperation and economic connectivity. However, a nuanced diplomatic relationship emerges through the UN's Special Envoy, who holds both UN authority and diplomatic ties to China, providing Beijing with indirect influence in regional affairs while respecting

¹⁹⁷ Asad Cabdullahi Mataan, Isaias: Somalia Sovereignty threatened by UAE ambitions.' *Caasimada*, September 23, 2025

¹⁹⁸ Ghebremichael, Afewerki. 2025. "Why Is the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Accused of Destabilizing the Horn of Africa?" *Setit*, July 1, 2025. Accessed October 2, 2025.

¹⁹⁹ UAE Ministry of foreign affairs, Joint Declaration of the elevation of ties to a strategic partnership between the United Arab Emirates and Australia.' September 30, 2025.

multilateral diplomacy.

Regional Peace Processes and Institutional Efforts

Despite Ethiopia's extensive experience and prestigious role in Sudanese peacekeeping missions and conflict mediation, notably its long-standing engagement in Sudan, the country was notably absent from several key peace forums organized by Washington, Riyadh, Cairo, and Abu Dhabi during September, like the quad mediation effort for the Sudan.²⁰⁰ The absence of engagement is a purposeful sidelining of Ethiopia by the neighboring countries in a critical diplomatic process that can shape the regional security which Ethiopia is as main actor, and the action is not seen Ethiopia's previous actions in peace mediation in Sudan through efforts to bring the two warring parties, the RSF and the SAF.

Regional institutions have taken pragmatic steps to operationalize peace and humanitarian norms. For instance, IGAD signed a memorandum of understanding with Geneva Call on September 25 to develop civilian protection and integrate humanitarian-development-peace strategies at community levels.

Although financial and operational capacities remain a challenge,²⁰¹ the African Union (AU) complements this effort through broader peace and stabilization mandates. Notably, the month marked the AU's long-term theme, "Silencing the Guns," highlighting its continent-wide strategy to conflict prevention and resolution.²⁰²

The synergy between IGAD's on-ground mediation and humanitarian initiatives and the AU's strategic peace frameworks reflects a coherent regional governance continuum, albeit under pressure from unpredictable financing gaps that threaten the effectiveness of stabilization missions like the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia.

U.S. Policy and Regional Developments

President Donald Trump publicly asserted that his administration mediated the resolution of the Ethiopia-Egypt conflict over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). He reiterated this claim at the UN General Assembly. Yet, experts observe that while operational, the GERD dispute remains unresolved in practice, with Ethiopia maintaining its sovereign rights over the dam, and downstream tensions persisting.

Simultaneously, the United States extended sanctions related to northern Ethiopia for an additional year in early September 2025, citing continued concerns over peace, security, and humanitarian conditions in the region.²⁰³ This extension reflects a complex U.S.-Ethiopia relationship characterized by simultaneous diplomatic engagement and persistent sanctions pressure.

²⁰⁰ Plaut, Martin. 2025a. "Diplomatic Outreach in the Horn of Africa." *EEPA Report*, September 24, 2025

²⁰¹ Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). 2025. "Initiatives on Humanitarian Protection and Peacebuilding

²⁰² African Union. 2025. "'Silencing the Guns' Campaign and Funding Challenges.

²⁰³ Plaut, Martin. 2025b. "US Diplomatic Efforts and Sanctions in the Horn of Africa." *EEPA Report*, September 24, 2025.

Conclusion

September 2025 revealed the Greater Horn as a region at a crossroads: protracted wars in Sudan and Somalia deepened humanitarian suffering, while Ethiopia's assertive diplomacy and integration efforts redefined regional dynamics. Eritrea's cautious re-engagement, Djibouti's balancing act, South Sudan's fragile politics, and Kenya's contested governance all highlighted the interplay of crisis and opportunity. External actors — from Egypt and the Gulf states to global powers — intensified their involvement, embedding the Horn more deeply in wider geopolitical rivalries. Taken together, these trends underscore the Horn's dual character as both a theatre of acute instability and an emerging hub of African agency, integration, and global relevance.



HORN

REVIEW

IDEAS CONNECTIONS SYNERGY

Ideas



Connections



Synergy