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The Horn in January: Sovereignty Contests, Alliance Ruptures, and a Fracturing Regional Order

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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 January 2026, draws on open-source intelligence, strategic assessments, policy briefings, and regional commentary to deliver nuanced, non-partisan, and research-driven insights into strategic complexities, internal vulnerabilities, emerging partnerships, and geopolitical recalibrations shaping the region’s trajectory. Intended to inform regional policymakers, analysts, and stakeholders, the briefing is produced by independent experts committed to regional stability, cooperative security, and evidence-based Policymaking.

**Blen Mamo, Executive
Director & Editor-in-Chief,
Horn Review**

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The Horn in January: Sovereignty Contests, Alliance Ruptures, and a Fracturing Regional Order

Executive Summary

January underscored a decisive shift in the Greater Horn. The month was marked by intensifying sovereignty contests, the erosion of long-standing security arrangements, and the recalibration of alliances. Rather than producing new equilibria, these shifts exposed the absence of a shared regional framework capable of absorbing shocks.

Somalia came under renewed strain as Uganda's announcement of an imminent troop withdrawal further destabilized an already fragile security architecture, raising urgent questions about the sustainability of international stabilization models and creating transitional gaps increasingly exploited by Al-Shabaab. Somaliland, meanwhile, entered a more exposed phase, where symbolic diplomatic gains translated into heightened security pressure and political uncertainty rather than consolidated autonomy.

Sudan continued to function as the region's primary destabilizing force. January confirmed the war's transformation into a multi-directional regional crisis, with expanding proxy involvement, deepening humanitarian collapse, and erosion of credible mediation pathway. The conflict's spillover effects increasingly shaped the security calculations of neighbor-states, reinforcing a regional environment defined by containment rather than resolution.

Ethiopia's posture in January reflected a strategy of defensive consolidation amid widening regional disorder. Addis Ababa prioritized diplomatic risk management, economic stabilization, and the protection of core national interests as Nile politics, Red Sea insecurity, and the Sudan conflict converged.

Eritrea continued to pursue strategic insulation coupled with selective alignment. January highlighted Asmara's preference for sovereignty absolutism and tactical partnerships over regional integration, even as internal pressures mounted.

South Sudan edged closer to renewed civil war as fighting escalated and incendiary rhetoric by senior commander, General Johnson Olony's call to "spare no live", growing political fractures and risks of mass civilian harm.

Collectively, January revealed a regional order no longer anchored by durable alliances or credible multilateral mechanisms. Authority is increasingly contested, security arrangements are provisional, and regional politics are shaped by rupture rather than recalibration. The Greater Horn enters the year facing not a singular crisis, but a convergence of unresolved conflicts and strategic disconnects that point toward prolonged fragmentation rather than near-term stabilization.

Section One: Contested Authority, Internal Fragmentation, and Security Stress in the Horn

1.1 Ethiopia: Diplomacy, Air Power, and Regional Resilience

In January 2026, Ethiopia advanced its regional and global engagement while strengthening national resilience. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's visits to Djibouti and hosting Horn leaders reinforced trade, security, and tri-national cooperation, highlighting the strategic importance of the Djibouti corridor amid disruptions by FRUD fighters. Ethiopia's aviation sector, showcased at Aviation Expo 2026, emerged as a key pillar linking air power with economic growth, technological innovation, and regional influence. Simultaneously, expanded diplomacy with the U.S., UAE, China, Oman, Japan, and European partners diversified economic, security, and climate cooperation, while institutional reforms like the Ethiopian Health Products Regulatory Authority strengthened governance. Amid tensions with Eritrea, localized insurgencies, and humanitarian constraints, Ethiopia balanced security, diplomacy, and development, maintaining sovereignty, institutional continuity, and regional influence.

Horn Diplomacy and Strategic Access

The sequence of high-level engagements between Ethiopia and its key Horn neighbors highlights a strategic shift toward renewed regional diplomacy and cooperative security. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's early month visit to Djibouti focused on reinforcing economic, logistic, and political ties, underscoring trade and regional stability as shared priorities with President Ismail Omar Guelleh. In response to these pressures, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's visit to Djibouti on January 16 highlighted the strategic centrality of Ethiopia's Red Sea access through the Djibouti corridor.¹ Talks focused on port operations, logistics efficiency, and security cooperation, emphasizing the interdependence between economic lifelines and regional stability.² This focus was sharpened by disruptions caused by FRUD fighters obstructing key trade routes, an incident that exposed the vulnerability of Ethiopia's primary commercial artery and reinforced the economic stakes of localized insecurity. Later in January, Ethiopia's hosting of the Presidents of Djibouti and Somalia signaled an elevation of this engagement, transforming bilateral dialogues into a tri-national platform for Horn cooperation.³

Together, these interactions reflect Addis Ababa's proactive diplomatic posture, balancing economic integration with collective security coordination, while seeking to anchor stability in a strategic region marked by complex challenges and shifting geopolitical currents.

¹ Ethiopia's Abiy Visits Djibouti, Holds Talks with President Ismail Omar Guelleh," *Ethiopia Observer*, January 11, 2026

² Asho Elmi, "Ethiopia's Abiy Visits Djibouti for Crucial Trade and Security Talks," *Dawan Africa*, January 11, 2026.

³ Ethiopian News Agency. "PM Abiy Welcomes Presidents of Djibouti, Somalia." Ethiopian News Agency, January 31, 2026.

Air Power and National Resilience

Ethiopia's air power and aviation sector emerged this month as a strategic pillar of national resilience and regional influence.⁴ At the Aviation Expo 2026, inaugurated by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed as part of the Ethiopian Air Force's 90th anniversary celebrations, government leaders showcased a forward-looking vision linking aviation development with economic growth, technological innovation, and international cooperation.⁵ The expo's theme, "Flying Forward, Building a Shared Future," reflects Ethiopia's ambition to position itself as a continental aviation hub while fostering aerospace skills and institutional partnerships.⁶ In parallel, broader leadership commentary on national interest underscored that safeguarding sovereignty, including control of Ethiopian airspace, must be driven by Ethiopian responsibility and capacity building. Together, these events illustrate how air power has evolved from a purely defensive instrument to a multifaceted asset contributing to Ethiopia's economic connectivity, industrial transformation, and diplomatic reach, reinforcing its strategic autonomy in a complex regional environment.

Global Partnerships and Institutional Development

The coordinated visits and meetings between Ethiopian leadership and the United States further underscore a renewed phase of strategic engagement extending beyond ceremonial diplomacy into deeper political, economic, and security cooperation. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's reception of the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State alongside the AFRICOM Commander highlighted the shared importance of continued collaboration and mutual respect, signaling Washington's interest in strengthening ties across political and defense dimensions.⁷ In parallel, Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos' bilateral talks with the same U.S. official focused on consolidating long-standing relations and exploring expanded cooperation on regional and international developments, reflecting Ethiopia's intent to engage Washington as a key partner in navigating complex geopolitical challenges.⁸ Together, these engagements indicate Ethiopia's dual-track diplomacy with the United States, anchoring high-level strategic dialogue while reinforcing institutional linkages that can support economic, security, and regional stability objectives amid a shifting global landscape.

Ethiopia's participation in the World Economic Forum 2026 demonstrated its determination to position domestic economic reforms and regional integration, particularly through

⁴ Ethiopian News Agency. "Aviation Expo Reinforces Ethiopia's Position as Africa's Aviation Hub: PM Abiy." Ethiopian News Agency, January 23, 2026.

⁵ Ethiopian News Agency. "PM Abiy Emphasizes National Responsibility in Protecting Ethiopia's Interests." Ethiopian News Agency, January 25, 2026.

⁶ Ethiopian News Agency. "'Eagle of the Skies' Marking 90 Years of Commitment to Regional Peace." Ethiopian News Agency, January 24, 2026.

⁷ Ethiopian News Agency. "PM Abiy Holds Talks with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, AFRICOM Commander." Ethiopian News Agency, January 28, 2026.

⁸ Ethiopian News Agency. "Foreign Minister Gedion Meets U.S. Deputy Secretary of State to Strengthen Bilateral Ties." Ethiopian News Agency, January 28, 2026.

AfCFTA and employment initiatives, at the center of global development discussions, signaling a shift toward proactive engagement with leading international economic actors. At Davos, the high-level delegation spearheaded by Finance Minister Ahmed Shide emphasized the Homegrown Economic Reform Program 2.0 and the Jobs-First AfCFTA Production Compact, framing Ethiopia's agricultural modernization and digital transformation as credible engines for continental job creation.⁹

Alongside the launch of projects, Addis Ababa sustained a deliberate push to consolidate institutional capacity and external partnerships, signaling a governing approach that links domestic transformation with diplomatic positioning. High-level engagements with the United Arab Emirates underscored the breadth of Ethiopia's strategic partnerships, spanning economic cooperation, regional security coordination, humanitarian engagement, and climate diplomacy.¹⁰ These discussions reflected a shared interest in stability across the Horn and alignment ahead of forthcoming multilateral forums focused on sustainability and water governance. This outward diplomatic momentum was reinforced by China's renewed engagement. On January 8, 2026, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in Addis Ababa at the opening of his Africa tour, reaffirming the two countries' "all-weather strategic partnership."¹² Commitments centered on infrastructure development, green energy, digital transformation, and trade facilitation within the Belt and Road framework, with particular emphasis on implementing FOCAC outcomes.¹³ The same visit marked the official launch of the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges at the African Union headquarters, highlighting Ethiopia's role as a continental diplomatic hub and deepening cultural, educational, and economic ties across a rapidly expanding China-Africa relationship.¹⁵

Ethiopia simultaneously broadened its Gulf engagement by formalizing a new cooperation framework with the Sultanate of Oman through a landmark memorandum of understanding and inaugural political consultations in Addis Ababa.¹⁶ The agreement spans trade, investment, agriculture, energy, banking, pharmaceuticals, and regional security, reinforcing Ethiopia's strategy of diversifying partnerships while leveraging ongoing economic reforms to attract capital and strengthen long-term bilateral linkages. At the institutional level, the

⁹ Ministry of Finance, Ethiopia. "High-Level Ethiopian Delegation Engages at World Economic Forum 2026 in Davos." *Ministry of Finance, Ethiopia*, January 21, 2026.

¹⁰ United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Joint Ministerial Statement between the United Arab Emirates and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia." UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 6, 2026.

¹¹ Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia, UAE Reaffirm Strategic Partnership, Address Regional Security and Climate Cooperation." Ethiopian News Agency, January 6, 2026.

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali Meets with Wang Yi." MFA of China, January 9, 2026.

¹³ *China's top diplomat meets Ethiopian PM, pledges deeper cooperation.* Reuters, January 8, 2026.

¹⁴ Fana Media Corporation S.C. "PM Abiy Ahmed Receives Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi." Fana Media Corporation, January 8, 2026.

¹⁵ Xinhua News Agency. "China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges Launched at AU Headquarters." *Xinhua*, January 9, 2026.

¹⁶ Oman Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "First Political Consultations between Oman and Ethiopia." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman, January 6, 2026.

Council of Ministers' approval of a draft regulation establishing the Ethiopian Health Products Regulatory Authority reflected a parallel focus on governance reform.¹⁷ The move aims to modernize regulatory oversight, improve pharmaceutical quality and safety, and support the rapid expansion of domestic drug production, aligning public health resilience with industrial policy.

These diplomatic and institutional advances unfolded against a more complex and contested regional security environment. President Trump's January 16 letter reviving U.S.-centered mediation on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam signaled renewed external interest in Nile politics, reintroducing proposals for monitoring and drought-time releases.¹⁸ While framed as technical risk management, the initiative underscored how GERD remains embedded in broader geopolitical bargaining rather than solely hydrological cooperation.

Regional Security and Sovereignty Challenges

Eritrea was arming militants after the seizure of a large ammunition cache in Amhara.¹⁹ The allegation marked a sharp deterioration in already fragile relations and reinforced Addis Ababa's view that internal instability is increasingly shaped by regional interference rather than purely domestic dynamics. President Isaias Afwerki's public criticism of Ethiopia during the same period added rhetorical escalation to an already volatile relationship, raising concerns about miscalculation along a historically militarized frontier.

Against this backdrop, Ethiopia continued to diversify its external security and economic partnerships. Observer participation in the BRICS+ "Will for Peace 2026" naval drills, though non-operational, reflected Addis Ababa's growing interest in maritime strategic dialogue despite its landlocked status and its intent to engage emerging multipolar security platforms.²⁰ Similarly, the Ethiopia-Japan Business Forum in Addis Ababa illustrated a calculated effort to broaden economic and strategic partnerships beyond traditional alignments, with discussions centered on infrastructure, investment, and long-term cooperation in the Horn.²¹

Ethiopia's diplomatic engagements underscore a consistent effort to broaden and deepen bilateral ties with European partners, signaling Addis Ababa's intent to anchor its foreign policy in diversified cooperation. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's talks with the German Foreign Minister focused on strengthening the longstanding partnership between Ethiopia and Germany, reaffirming mutual commitment to expand collaboration across multiple

¹⁷ Rédaction Africanews. "Ethiopian Police Find 50,000 Ammunition Rounds Sent to Rebels by Eritrea." Africanews, January 16, 2026.

¹⁸ Reuters. "Trump Offers to Mediate Egypt-Ethiopia Dispute on Nile River Waters." Reuters, January 16, 2026.

¹⁹ AllAfrica.com (from Addis Standard). "Ethiopian Federal Police Allege Eritrean Link in Ammunition Seizure Amid Tensions." AllAfrica.com, January 15, 2026.

²⁰ Cocks, Tim. "China, Russia, Iran Start 'BRICS Plus' Naval Exercises in South African Waters." Reuters, January 10, 2026.

²¹ Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia-Japan Business Forum that Aims at Deepening Trade, Investment Relations Underway." Ethiopian News Agency, January 13, 2026.

spheres.²² In a parallel development, State Minister Hadera Abera's meeting with Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister highlighted Ethiopia's desire to enhance bilateral relations by leveraging Norway's experience in climate resilience and investment potential, while also discussing cooperation on regional peace and security.²³ Together, these engagements reflect Ethiopia's strategic approach to advancing economic, environmental, and security cooperation with European partners, reinforcing multilateral support for its reform and development agenda.

Humanitarian space remained increasingly securitized, as reflected in the suspension of several international NGOs in the Welkait-Tegede-Setit Humera zone.²⁴ While justified on security grounds, the move highlighted the political sensitivity of contested territories and the tension between state control and humanitarian access.

Taken together, these developments point to a governing strategy that combines diplomatic diversification, institutional reform, and security recalibration. The current escalation in northern Ethiopia cannot be understood as a localized security incident. It reflects a broader pattern of external interference converging with internal political fragmentation, producing what increasingly resembles a regional proxy confrontation.

Eritrea's renewed escalation in northern Ethiopia reflects a deliberate strategy in which proxy warfare and direct military engagement are used to compensate for the regime's lack of institutional legitimacy and to preserve its own security. Contrary to portrayals of the conflict as an internal Ethiopian struggle, the evidence points to Eritrea under Isaias Afwerki as the principal driver of escalation, acting both through proxies such as splinter TPLF elements and Fano militias and through the direct deployment of Eritrean forces inside Ethiopian territory. The strategic objective is not the victory of any Ethiopian faction but the sustained fragmentation of Ethiopia's political and institutional capacity, thereby limiting its regional influence. While proxy forces bear the human and political costs, Eritrea retains strategic leverage without assuming full responsibility. Despite severe humanitarian consequences, particularly for young Ethiopians in Tigray, Ethiopia's institutional continuity, international legitimacy, and capacity for territorial governance remain intact, rendering Eritrea's strategy capable of disruption but ultimately insufficient to undermine Ethiopian sovereignty.

²² Fana Media Corporation. "PM Abiy Receives German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepful for Talks on Bilateral Ties." *Fana Media Corporation*, January 22, 2026.

²³ Ethiopian News Agency. "Ethiopia, Norway to Further Strengthening Bilateral Relations." *ENA*, Jan 21, 2026

²⁴ Amhara Association of America. "War Updates from Amhara Region, Ethiopia – January 5th to 11th, 2026." Amhara Association of America, January 14, 2026.

1.2 Eritrea: Strategic Signalling, Proxy Dynamics, and Regime Adaptation

Throughout February, Eritrea's political posture was defined by increasingly sharper signalling, intensified information control, and deepening entanglement in regional conflict dynamics. President Isaias Afewerki's public messaging underscored Asmara's hardened stance toward Ethiopia, its selective alignment in the Sudan conflict, and tentative outreach to external partners and the diaspora. Parallel efforts to reinforce historical narratives and suppress competing information continued alongside active diplomatic engagement through Addis Ababa and select bilateral channels. At the same time, mounting pressures on regime durability—stemming from elite attrition, security strain, and reliance on proxy alliances inside Ethiopia—highlighted both the adaptability and underlying vulnerabilities of the Eritrean state as regional tensions continued to rise.

Isaias's Interview and Strategic Messaging

On Monday, January 12, President Isaias Afewerki appeared on state media to address a range of regional and international issues, most notably the Sudanese civil war, Middle Eastern geopolitics, and the escalating tensions with Ethiopia.²⁵

On Sudan, Isaias reiterated his accusations against the United Arab Emirates, asserting that Abu Dhabi bears primary responsibility for the continuation of the conflict. In contrast, he spoke positively of Saudi Arabia, which he has previously encouraged to assume a regional "leadership role," reinforcing Asmara's preference for Riyadh as a counterweight within Red Sea and Horn dynamics.

Regarding Ethiopia, Isaias's rhetoric toward the leadership in Addis Ababa has grown noticeably sharper. He accused the federal government of fomenting instability across multiple Ethiopian regions, going so far as to claim that it is conducting a "war against its people." This language signals that Asmara continues to maintain a hostile posture toward Addis Ababa, with prospects for diplomatic de-escalation appearing increasingly remote.

Beginning the following week, the Ministry of Information rolled out the English transcript of the January 12 interview. Notably, several media outlets overlooked Isaias's remarks on "the role of the Diaspora," which appeared to hint—albeit cautiously—at a possible effort by the PFDJ to recalibrate its relationship with exiled Eritreans.²⁶

Eritrea faces mounting constraints related to manpower and capital shortages. In this context, tapping the resources of exiled Eritreans presents a significant opportunity for the regime, particularly in terms of survival and ensuring continuity in a post-Isaias scenario.

²⁵ Eritrea Ministry of Information. "Highlights of Local Media Interview with President Isaias Afwerki." *Shabait*, Jan 13, 2026.

²⁶ Afwerki, Isaias. "President Isaias Afwerki's Interview with Local Media Outlets (Third and Final Part)." Interview by local media outlets. *Shabait*, January 24, 2026.

Media Environment, Information Control, and Narrative Management

The International Federation of Journalists, in its annual “killed list” report released at the end of December, stated that Eritrea remains the largest jailer of journalists in Africa, noting that many detained journalists have been imprisoned for more than a decade.²⁷

On December 31, Agence France-Presse published a fact-check addressing footage circulating on social media that purportedly showed ongoing protests in Asmara. The footage originated from an Al Jazeera report and was accompanied by claims that demonstrations were currently unfolding in Eritrea. AFP confirmed that the footage dated back to 2017.²⁸ Other videos depicting protest-like activity by individuals identified as Eritreans have also circulated online, highlighting the contested information space surrounding the country.

Against this backdrop, Eritrea has continued to pursue an active propaganda and narrative-management strategy. On January 2, the Ministry of Information published an article titled “*Sovereignty is not Conditional: Obsessed Potemkin Party Elites and the Abuse of History*,”²⁹ criticizing aspects of Ethiopian policy discourse, particularly the so-called “two waters doctrine” and narratives framing the loss of Red Sea access as a historical mistake driven by rival states such as Egypt.

Two additional articles published during the week advanced familiar narrative themes, targeting Ethiopian media outlets and political figures, including the ruling Prosperity Party, over their interpretations of Eritrean history. This approach reflects a long-standing PFDJ strategy, evident since the armed struggle, aimed at historically decoupling Eritrea from Ethiopia and constructing a distinct national narrative grounded in selective historical interpretation and mythology.

In parallel, Minister of Information Yemane Gebremeskel criticized what he described as “media campaigns against Eritrea,” explicitly naming Horn Review and the state-affiliated Institute of Foreign Affairs.³⁰ He claimed these campaigns were intended to “deflect attention from the chronic internal security quagmire” facing Ethiopia.

Foreign Relations and Diplomatic Activity

A UAE-based outlet, *The National*, which had previously published a widely circulated report on a purported Egypt–Eritrea agreement regarding Assab, released a follow-up article at the end of December. The report stated that the agreement was signed by President Isaias

²⁷ International Federation of Journalists. “IFJ Releases Final 2025 List of 128 Journalists and Media Workers Killed.” December 31, 2025.

²⁸ AFP Fact Check, “Old Video Shows Protests in Eritrea in 2017, Not in 2025,” December, 2025.

²⁹ Eritrea Ministry of Information. “Sovereignty Is Not Conditional: Obsessed Potemkin Party Elites and the Abuse of History.” *Shabait*, January 2, 2026.

³⁰ Yemane G. Meskel (@hawelti), “Potemkin Party zealots and minions continue to ramp up their wholesale, defamatory, media campaigns...,” X, January 23, 2026.

Afewerki and President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi during Afewerki's visit to Cairo in October.³¹

On January 1, reports indicated that Eritrea participated in the Russia–Africa Conference held in Cairo in late December, co-chaired by the Russian and Egyptian foreign ministers.³²

Diaspora engagement featured prominently during the month. On January 9, Fesehatsion Petros, Eritrea's Ambassador to Italy and non-resident Ambassador to Sweden, conducted a "seminar" for Eritreans in Sweden.³³ The outreach comes amid moves by several European governments, including Sweden, to curtail PFDJ influence over Eritrean diaspora communities.

On January 15, the European Union called for de-escalation between Ethiopia and Eritrea, urging dialogue and economic cooperation amid rising Red Sea tensions. Speaking in Addis Ababa, EEAS Deputy Secretary-General Olaf Skoog stated that the EU was willing to act as an "honest broker" and warned against renewed conflict. He reiterated EU neutrality on the GERD and reaffirmed support for Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, explicitly rejecting recognition of Somaliland.³⁴

Asmara's embassy in Addis Ababa has remained particularly proactive. Leveraging the presence of the African Union, Chargé d'Affaires Biniam Berihe has held regular meetings with African leaders and diplomats, as well as several European representatives. The embassy continues to function as a key diplomatic platform for Eritrea, enabling extensive diplomatic reach despite strained bilateral relations with Ethiopia.

During the same period, Amani Africa, an African Union-focused think tank, held a meeting between its Executive Director and Eritrea's Chargé d'Affaires in Addis Ababa, an engagement tied to the upcoming African Union summit scheduled for February.³⁵

In late January, Japan appointed its first ambassador to Eritrea. Ambassador Hideaki Matsuo is expected to focus primarily on developmental engagement.³⁶

Relations with Sudan and Eritrea's Role in the War

On January 2, a Sudanese delegation led by Finance Minister Gibril Ibrahim and Minister of Culture, Information, and Tourism Khalid al-Aysar met President Isaias Afewerki. The delegation thanked Eritrea for what it described as "facilities and care provided to Sudanese

³¹ Hendawi, Hamza. "Egypt Finalises Deal to Develop Djibouti's Port in Bid to Pressure Ethiopia over Nile Dam." *The National*, December 31, 2025.

³² Eritrea Ministry of Information. "Eritrea Participates in Russia–Africa Conference." *Shabait*, November January 1, 2026.

³³ Eritrea Ministry of Information. "Ambassador Fesehatsion Conducts Seminar to Diaspora Nationals." *Shabait*, Jan 5, 2026.

³⁴ *Addis Standard*. "EU Urges De-escalation between Ethiopia, Eritrea Amid Red Sea Tensions, Rejects Somaliland Recognition." January 16, 2026.

³⁵ Amani Africa (@africa_amani). "Amani Africa Exec Director paid a curtesy call to H.E. @biniamb the Head of Mission of Eritrea Embassy..." X, January 30, 2026.

³⁶ Embassy of Japan in Eritrea, "Greetings from Ambassador Matsuo," January 2026.

residents and transit travellers” amid Sudan’s ongoing crisis.³⁷

Beyond political considerations, Eritrea appears to be positioning itself as an increasingly valuable partner to Khartoum, with assistance extending beyond military cooperation into broader logistical and political support.

Warfare Relations with Ethiopia and Escalating Tensions

Tensions with Ethiopia continued to intensify throughout January. On January 16, Ethiopia’s Federal Police Commission announced that it had seized ammunition sent by Eritrea to Fano forces. According to the statement, the operation was part of a broader effort involving Eritrea and unspecified “historical enemies,” widely interpreted as a reference to Egypt. The release also stated that the TPLF is serving as a “bridge” for these arms transfers, with the weapons reportedly destined for the North Shewa zone, where an active Fano insurgency persists.³⁸

While Eritrea’s use of proxy forces inside Ethiopia remains unofficial, the statement reflects Addis Ababa’s assessment of the security environment and further heightens already elevated bilateral tensions.

On January 18, an op-ed published by *Deutsche Welle* examined the standoff between Ethiopia and Eritrea, identifying Assab and Ethiopia’s quest for sea access as central flashpoints.³⁹ Other outlets, including *The Conversation*,⁴⁰ published similar analyses exploring the same fault lines.

Afar Opposition Movements and Sub-State Dynamics

On January 6, the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSAPDO) issued a joint statement with the Eritrean Afar National Congress (EANC) via its official Facebook account. The statement articulated a shared position on issues such as the “right to self-determination,” identified the PFDJ as a “common enemy,” and asserted the legitimacy of efforts aimed at overthrowing it.⁴¹

The EANC, a longstanding opposition group that continues to maintain an organizational presence within the Eritrean diaspora, has had a fluctuating profile over time. The joint declaration nonetheless signals a notable escalation in opposition coordination among Afar constituencies spanning Eritrea and Ethiopia.

On January 12, the Israeli outlet *Ynet* published an article claiming that Afar groups are

³⁷ "Isaias Afwerki Discusses Red Sea Stability with Sudanese Ministers," *Sudan Tribune*, January 5, 2026.

³⁸ "Ethiopia Says Seized Ammunition Sent by Eritrea to Rebels as Tensions Rise," *BBC News*, January 15, 2026.

³⁹ "Port Assab Becomes Flashpoint for Ethiopia–Eritrea Relations," *Deutsche Welle*, January 15, 2026.

⁴⁰ William Gourlay, "Another War in the Horn of Africa Would Be Disastrous for One of the World’s Most Repressed Nations," *The Conversation*, January 14, 2026.

⁴¹ Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO), "Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization and the Eritrean Afar National Congress Issue Joint Statement for Opposition Unity," Facebook, January 7, 2026.

seeking Israeli support in relation to Eritrea.⁴² Citing an unnamed source, the report alleged that recent Afar opposition movements are attempting to attract Israeli backing amid concerns over Iranian expansion in the region.

The Afar inhabit a strategically significant corridor along the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and are reportedly seeking to leverage this geography to draw Israeli interest. Asmara is widely understood to maintain established relations with Iran, having previously served as a transit point for Iranian military shipments to the SAF, and has publicly criticized Israel's actions in Gaza. Israel remains the first and only country to recognize Somaliland and is increasingly viewed as prioritizing the Horn of Africa as part of its broader regional strategy.

Relations with the United States and Western Policy Responses

President Isaias opened his January 12 interview by addressing Eritrea's relationship with the United States. His remarks, alongside previous statements, suggest that Asmara is seeking improved ties with Washington. Referred to by PFDJ diplomats as a "reset," this effort aims at formulating renewed U.S. engagement.

However, on January 14, a new travel ban issued by the U.S. State Department included Eritrea among the affected countries.⁴³ Eritrea had already been subject to a comprehensive visa ban prior to this extension. The decision suggests that Eritrea's outreach has thus far yielded limited results and that the country remains a low priority in U.S. foreign policy.

On January 17, an op-ed by Michael Rubin called on the Trump administration to pursue regime change in Eritrea.⁴⁴ While the argument stretches the likely contours of U.S. policy, it nonetheless prompted a strong response from PFDJ-associated voices, including the Minister of Information. Asmara is understood to be seeking engagement with Trump-aligned political circles, helping explain the intensity of the reaction.

Separately, the Eritrean Embassy in Washington issued a statement criticizing an article published by *The Conversation* on Ethiopia-Eritrea tensions, likely triggered by the article's focus on the danger the Eritrean regime faces in a possible confrontation.⁴⁵

On January 27, a Dutch court sentenced notorious Eritrean human trafficker Ammanuel Walid to 20 years in prison.⁴⁶ Charged with human smuggling, extortion, violence, and money laundering, the sentence matched the maximum requested by prosecutors. Walid's case was described as unprecedented, marking the first time a European country prosecuted a

⁴² Lior Ben Ari, "Afar Tribe Seeks Israeli Support Amid Iranian Expansion and Eritrean Repression," *Ynetnews*, Jan 12, 2026.

⁴³ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, "Immigrant Visa Processing Updates for Nationalities at High Risk of Public Benefits Usage," January 14, 2026

⁴⁴ Michael Rubin, "Trump Should Pursue Regime Change in Eritrea," *American Enterprise Institute*, January 17, 2026

⁴⁵ Berhane G. Solomon (@EmbassyEritrea), "When Academic Analysis Excuses Aggression: Setting the Record Straight on Eritrea's Sovereignty," X, January 19, 2026.

⁴⁶ "Zwolle Court Sentences Eritrean to 20 Years for Leading Violent Human Trafficking Gang," *NL Times*, January 27, 2026.

leader of a criminal network operating multiple detention camps in Libya.

Governance, Security Apparatus, and Regime Durability

A veteran EPLF fighter and senior PFDJ figure, Musa Naib, passed away in January.⁴⁷ A member of the PFDJ Central Committee who held multiple senior roles, his death reflects a broader trend of aging and attrition within the ruling elite, further depleting the regime's human capital and adding uncertainty to its future.

A Horn Review report cited internal sources claiming that Eritrean intelligence officers have defected to Ethiopian intelligence services.⁴⁸ The development would represent a significant rupture within Eritrea's security architecture. The highly securitized state relies heavily on its intelligence apparatus to maintain internal control and project influence externally; sustained defections would therefore pose serious challenges to regime resilience.

With the TPLF initiating military activity in Ethiopia's Amhara and Afar regions in late February, reports indicate that Eritrea is involved in the emerging offensive.⁴⁹ Eritrea had worked on stringing its reach in Ethiopia, aligning with proxy forces inside the country, namely Fano elements and the TPLF, in a coalition against the federal government. While clashes are ongoing, the full extent of Eritrean involvement remains unclear, raising concerns about broader regional escalation.

1.3 Djibouti: Strategic Centrality Amid Regional Militarization

Throughout January 2026, Djibouti sustained its positioning as a regional diplomatic and logistical hub. The month featured high level engagements with Ethiopia, Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, China, France, the United States, and Russia, alongside progress on renewable energy and green industrialization projects with Chinese partners. A constructive IMF assessment reinforced economic stability. Djibouti deepened military and security cooperation with Ethiopia and France through new agreements and joint exercises. Tensions with the self-declared Republic of Somaliland escalated sharply with the revocation of passports issued to Somaliland officials and elites, prompting reciprocal airspace restrictions on Air Djibouti flights. Unconfirmed reports of activity by the armed Afar opposition group FRUD-Armé circulated but received no official government response.

International Engagements

Djibouti maintained engagement with major international partners throughout the month. President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh met a delegation from Chinese state owned enterprises on

⁴⁷ Eritrea Ministry of Information. "Veteran Freedom Fighter Musa Husein Naib Passes Away." January 26, 2026.

⁴⁸ Horn Review Editorial, "Turned & Embedded: Eritrean Spies Feeding Ethiopia's Intelligence Machine," *Horn Review*, January 21, 2026.

⁴⁹ Horn Review Editorial, "Eritrea's Renewed Drift Toward War: Who Benefits – and Who Pays," *Horn Review*, January 30, 2026.

January 20 to discuss potential large scale investments in solar and wind power generation.⁵⁰ On the same period, the government signed a letter of intent with a Chinese consortium for a feasibility study on a green industrial park supporting sustainable industrial growth objectives.⁵¹ A separate announcement on January 19 revealed that a consortium of five Chinese companies led by Sinochem plans to invest over USD 1 billion by the end of 2026-2027 in renewable energy, salt industry development, local value addition, and job creation, aligning with Vision 2035 goals.

On another development France and Djibouti conducted a joint military exercise in the Koron and Grand Bara regions on January 28, simulating real world scenarios to enhance land and air capabilities and coordination.⁵² The exercise observed by French Institute for Advanced Defence Studies personnel and Djiboutian students from various institutions follows the 2024 renewal of the Defence Cooperation Agreement extending France's military presence for 20 years and committing both nations to joint defence efforts across land, air, and maritime domains.

The United States Department of State announced on January 23 that Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau would include Djibouti in a multi-nation tour encompassing Egypt, Ethiopia, and Kenya, with discussions focused on regional security, counter-terrorism, economic partnership, and stability in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea region. The visit formed part of a broader itinerary spanning January 24 to February 1.⁵³

In addition to this, On January 30, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the federal law ratifying the Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Djibouti originally signed in Moscow on August 27, 2025. The agreement aims to strengthen cooperation in combating crime by providing legal assistance when requested acts constitute offences under both parties' laws, subject to safeguards protecting sovereignty, security, public order, and core legal principles. Djibouti also hosted a regional climate forum and concluded a constructive IMF assessment that underscored ongoing economic stability measures.⁵⁴

Diplomatic Engagement

Regional diplomacy remained a priority, with multiple high level exchanges reinforcing Djibouti's role in Horn of Africa stability. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed conducted a one-day working visit to Djibouti on January 11 received by President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh. The discussions addressed the regional geopolitical landscape, peace and security concerns, and avenues for deeper bilateral cooperation in trade, logistics, and joint

⁵⁰ Dawan Africa. 2026. "Djibouti in Talks with China Firms for Green Energy Boost." January 20.

⁵¹ Dawan Africa. 2026. "Djibouti, Chinese Consortium Sign Deal for Green Industrial Park Feasibility Study." January 27

⁵² Dawan Africa. 2026. "Djibouti, France Conduct Joint Military Exercise to Strengthen Defence Cooperation." January

⁵³ U.S. Department of State. 2026. "Deputy Secretary Landau's Travel to Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti." January

⁵⁴ Kremlin. 2026. "Russia Ratified Agreement with Djibouti on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters." January

development projects.⁵⁵ Prime Minister Abiy toured the Doraleh Multipurpose Port and Horizon Terminal critical facilities handling the majority of Ethiopia's maritime trade. Both leaders reaffirmed commitment to regional stability, economic integration, and mutual prosperity. Follow-on engagements around January 11-12 emphasized safeguarding Ethiopia's trade corridor, port usage agreements, and the Ethio-Djibouti Railway.

Following this, Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty met Djiboutian Minister Abdoukader Houssein Omar in Cairo on January 14 on the sidelines of Sudan related talks. The meeting covered bilateral cooperation in trade, energy, and infrastructure, alongside mutual support for Somalia's unity and territorial integrity.⁵⁶

On January 23, Djibouti and Ethiopia signed a formal military cooperation agreement enabling joint operations against cross-border threats, including terrorism, arms and human trafficking, and organized crime, further deepening their strategic security partnership. On another note, IGAD headquarters in Djibouti issued a statement on January 21 welcoming Somalia's parliamentary ratification of the updated IGAD Treaty, achieved with 141 votes and meeting the two-thirds threshold required for full implementation focused on peace, security, and economic integration.⁵⁷

On January 31, President Guelleh traveled to Jigjiga in Ethiopia's Somali Regional State for a trilateral summit with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. The leaders addressed strengthening regional cooperation, economic integration, infrastructure connectivity, peace, and security. The visit included the joint inauguration of the Shebelle Resort tourism project to promote development and integration.⁵⁸

Economic and Security Developments

Djibouti faced heightened bilateral friction with Somaliland. On January 19, the government announced the cancellation of approximately 1,400 passports previously issued to Somaliland officials, elders, journalists, and parliamentarians. These documents had served as essential travel instruments due to the non-recognition of Somaliland passports internationally.⁵⁹ The measure followed the earlier closure of Somaliland's liaison office in Djibouti. In response, Somaliland authorities banned all Air Djibouti commercial flights from its airspace. Critics interpreted the passport revocations as political pressure ahead of elections.

Unconfirmed reports of activity by the Afar opposition group FRUD-Armé emerged from

⁵⁵ Addis Standard. 2026. "PM Abiy Visits Djibouti, Tours Doraleh Port Weeks After Egypt Signs Port and Energy Deals." January 11

⁵⁶ Middle East Monitor. 2026. "Djibouti and Sudan Discuss Peace Efforts and Khartoum's Return to the African Union." January

⁵⁷ IGAD. 2026. "Federal Parliament of Somalia Ratifies the IGAD Treaty." January 21.

⁵⁸ Fana Media Corporation. 2026. "Leaders of Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti Tour Corridor Development Works in Jigjiga." January

⁵⁹ Al Mayadeen English. 2026. "Djibouti Revokes 1,400 Somaliland Passports in Tit-for-Tat Move." January 21

January 16 onward. The armed wing issued a statement from Brussels reaffirming support for Somaliland's independence and condemning President Guelleh's government for alleged domestic repression and regional interference.⁶⁰ Subsequent social media and regional outlet claims around January 18-19 alleged clashes with government forces in northern areas, including Garabtiisa in the Tadjourah region, with reported casualties, captured outposts, and communal tensions in Djibouti City. The government provided no official comment on these allegations.

1.4 Somalia and Somaliland

Somalia: Sovereignty Defense, Alliance Realignment and Sustained Counter-Terrorism Momentum

Somalia asserted sovereignty through multilateral forums countering challenges to its territorial integrity. Diplomatic relations realigned including a rupture with the UAE and new partnerships with Qatar. Domestic politics were seen by federal and regional tensions and constitutional disputes. Sustained counter terrorism offensives continued though al-Shabaab retained disruptive capacity. The period was defined by recalibration even persistent internal and external pressures.

International and Multilateral Engagements

Somalia entered January assuming the rotating presidency of the United Nations Security Council where a role the Federal Government used to elevate issues of sovereignty, territorial integrity, rule of law and Middle East interaction within the Council's agenda.⁶¹ Somali officials consistently enclosed Israel's recognition of Somaliland as incompatible with international law and as a destabilizing distraction from the Gaza conflict. This drafting was reinforced during a 2 January press briefing by Somalia's Permanent Representative to the UN who reaffirmed Somalia's unity and cautioned against precedent setting unilateral recognitions.⁶²

Multilateral backing for Somalia's position consolidated rapidly. On 6 January the African Union Peace and Security Council convened an emergency ministerial session expressing concern that Israel's action threatened Somalia's unity and the stability of the Horn of Africa.⁶³ This was followed on 8 January by a joint statement from twenty two states including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye, alongside the Organization of Islamic

⁶⁰ Somali Dispatch. 2026. "Armed Opposition Group FRUD in Djibouti Issues Statement Supporting Somaliland's Recognition." January 16

⁶¹ Aman Africa for Peace and Development. "Emergency Session on Israel's Recognition of Somaliland." Aman Africa, January 2026.

⁶² United Nations. Security Council. "Security Council Press Statement on Situation in Somalia." Press Release. January 2026

⁶³ Peace and Security Council, African Union. "Communiqué of the 1324th Meeting of the PSC Held on 6 January 2026 at the Ministerial Level on the Preservation of the Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, Unity and Stability of the Federal Republic of Somalia." African Union, January 6, 2026.

Cooperation which rejected actions undermining Somalia's sovereignty.⁶⁴ India separately reiterated its long standing position supporting Somalia's territorial integrity.⁶⁵ These positions collectively scored a broad multilateral consensus aligned with Mogadishu.

Somalia further advanced its regional integration agenda through parliamentary ratification of the revised IGAD Treaty on 21 January enabling the treaty to approach full implementation and reinforcing Somalia's commitment to multilateral frameworks addressing peace, security and economic integration.⁶⁶

Diplomatic Engagements and Partnerships

Bilateral diplomacy during the month was patent by both rupture and recalibration. Relations with the United States experienced temporary strain following Washington's 8 January suspension of assistance programs benefiting the Somali Federal Government citing allegations of mismanagement involving a U.S. funded World Food Programme warehouse at Mogadishu Port.⁶⁷ Somali authorities issued a comprehensive denial asserting that humanitarian aid remained under WFP custody and attributing demolition activities to port expansion.⁶⁸ Subsequent clarification including confirmation by WFP staff that no looting occurred facilitated the U.S. decision later in January to resume food aid while continuing to review broader assistance.

Engagement with China remained stable despite the postponement of a historic visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Beijing publicly rejected speculation that security concerns motivated the delay and issued an explicit statement affirming that Somaliland is part of Somalia. This position was reinforced during a high level phone call between Wang Yi and Somali Foreign Minister Abdisalam Dhaay and later through a meeting in Mogadishu between Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre and the Chinese Ambassador which emphasized expanded cooperation in security, trade and development and reaffirmed China's support for Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁶⁹

The most consequential diplomatic shift involved the United Arab Emirates. Following allegations that Somali airspace had been used to facilitate the transit of Southern Transitional Council leader Aidarous al-Zubaidi the Federal Government imposed an immediate ban on UAE military and cargo aircraft. This escalation culminated in the Somali Cabinet's decision to annul all bilateral agreements with the UAE including port operations and defense cooperation. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud framed the decision as a

⁶⁴ Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. the Illegal Visit of an Israeli Official to the 'Somaliland' Region of the Federal Republic of Somalia .January 2026.

⁶⁵ Somali National News Agency (SONNA). "India Rejects Israel's Recognition of Somaliland, Reaffirms Support for Somalia's Territorial Integrity." SONNA, January 2026.

⁶⁶ Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). "Federal Parliament of Somalia Ratifies the IGAD Treaty." IGAD, January 2026.

⁶⁷ Al Jazeera. "US Suspends Assistance to Somali Government for Alleged Seizure of Aid." January 8, 2026.

⁶⁸ Business Insider Africa. "Somalia Denies Aid Diversion as US Probes WFP Supplies at Mogadishu Port." January 2026

⁶⁹ Somalia Guardian. "China Denies Security Fears Behind Delay of Foreign Minister's Somalia Visit." January 2026

necessary defense of national sovereignty while senior officials characterized it as the culmination of concerns over Emirati engagement with federal member states.⁷⁰ The subsequent withdrawal of UAE personnel mediated by Ethiopia using Ethiopian government aircraft allowed for an orderly de-escalation on the ground while cementing the rupture.

In parallel, Somalia pursued alternative alignments. A comprehensive defense cooperation agreement signed with Qatar on 20 January⁷¹ signalled a clear strategic axis while reports of advanced discussions with Saudi Arabia and Egypt pointed toward an emerging Red Sea security alignment.⁷² Somalia also deepened diplomatic engagement with Pakistan through a diplomatic passport visa waiver agreement and expanded ties with the European Union through a €102 million financing agreement supporting state building, public finance reform and stabilization.⁷³

Somalia remained actively engaged in regional diplomacy, culminating in a trilateral summit with Ethiopia and Djibouti in Jigjiga on 31 January. Discussions focused on economic integration, transport and energy connectivity, and coordinated security responses. The summit scored Somalia's continued role as a central stakeholder in Horn of Africa stability even as relations with Djibouti were strained by developments linked to Somaliland.⁷⁴

Domestic Political Developments

Internally, January was marked by acute political contestation. Parliamentary proceedings descended into disorder over proposed constitutional amendments prompting opposition lawmakers to mobilize against further changes. The Somali Future Council agreed to participate in a national consultative conference scheduled for February but conditioned its attendance on halting constitutional revisions and prioritizing security, electoral consensus and humanitarian challenges.⁷⁵ Federal and regional tensions intensified as Puntland and Jubaland rejected the annulment of UAE agreements asserting their regional autonomy in external economic partnerships.⁷⁶

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's visit to Las Anod from 16 to 18 January represented a significant assertion of federal authority in a contested northern region. The inauguration of the SSC-Khatumo administration was widely interpreted as a strategic counter to Somaliland's territorial claims and a signal of Mogadishu's intent to consolidate federal presence.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Reuters. "Somalia Annuls All Agreements with UAE, Including Port Deals." January 12, 2026.

⁷¹ Somalia Guardian. "Somalia, Qatar Sign Defense Deal Amid UAE Rift." January 2026.

⁷² Bloomberg. "Saudi Arabia in Talks with Egypt, Somalia on Military Coalition." January 16, 2026.

⁷³ Somalia and European Union Sign €102 Million Deal to Bolster Budget and Reforms." January 2026

⁷⁴ Garowe Online. "Somali President Holds Talks with Ethiopian, Djiboutian Leaders." January 2026.

⁷⁵ Associated Press. "Somalia's Parliament Extends its Mandate after Scuffle." AP News, January 2026.

⁷⁶ Garowe Online. "Somalia's UAE Deal Suspension Draws Strong Rejection from Federal States." January 2026

⁷⁷ Somali National News Agency (SONNA). "President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud Declares Las Anod the City of Unity at Historic North East State Inauguration." SONNA, January 2026.

Security and Counter-Terrorism

Security operations in Somalia remained sustained and intensive throughout January 2026, as the Somali National Army supported by the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia U.S. Africa Command and Turkish forces, conducted major offensives against al-Shabaab across Middle Shabelle, Lower Shabelle, and Lower Juba. Joint SNA-AUSSOM operations particularly in Lower Shabelle, proved effective with a notable January 15 strike near Bulunagaad Forward Operating Base eliminating over 30 militants while protecting civilian access and humanitarian corridors.⁷⁸

Broader SNA-led efforts often coordinated with U.S. partners, targeted militant infrastructure in Middle and Lower Juba including the destruction of explosives factories and bases. High-profile actions included the January 13 air raid in Jabad Godane that killed 17 militants, the recapture of Kudhaa island and town in Lower Juba with 130–250 militants reported killed between January 21–23,⁷⁹ and multiple precision U.S. airstrikes on both al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia positions in the Golis Mountains near Bosaso throughout the month.⁷⁹

A significant enhancement to these efforts came in late January with Türkiye's deployment of three F-16 fighter jets and attack helicopters to Mogadishu. This move intensified direct strikes on al-Shabaab targets and served to safeguard Turkish interests amid heightened regional tensions including fallout from Israel's late-December 2025 recognition of Somaliland. The deployment scored Türkiye's deepening military partnership with Somalia and added a powerful air dimension to ground operations already underway.⁸⁰

Despite these gains, al-Shabaab retained considerable operational resilience, launching coordinated assaults on SNA bases and achieving temporary territorial seizures, most prominently in Jubaland where militants briefly overran positions in Kudhaa before being forced out.⁸¹ These incidents highlighted the group's continued capacity for surprise attacks and localized control even under sustained pressure. In the northeast, Puntland authorities drew attention to the transnational dimension of the extremist threat by publicly parading nearly 50 captured foreign ISIS-Somalia fighters on January 17–18 following successful operations in the Cal Miskaad mountains.⁸²

The month's security landscape was further complicated by Uganda's January 26 announcement of plans to fully withdraw its troops after 19 years of service in Somalia. Chief of Defence Forces Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba stated that the mission had effectively ended and withdrawal preparations were beginning, though no specific timeline was provided. As Uganda contributes the largest contingent to AUSSOM and secures vital sites

⁷⁸ AU-SSOM (African Union Transition Mission in Somalia). "Over 30 Al-Shabaab Militants Killed in Joint Operation in Bulunagaad, Lower Shabelle, Somalia." January 2026

⁷⁹Counter IED Report. "Somali, U.S. Forces Destroy Al-Shabab Explosives Factory in Middle Juba Region." January 2026

⁸⁰ Bloomberg. "Turkey Deploys F-16s in Somalia to Step Up Strikes on Al-Shabaab." Bloomberg, January 30, 2026.

⁸¹ Somali Guardian. "Somalia: Al-Shabaab Takes Jubaland Base in Kudhaa amid Surge in Assaults." January 21, 2026

⁸² Hiiraan Online. "Puntland Names Nearly 50 Foreign ISIS Fighters Captured in Northeastern Somalia." January 18, 2026.

in Mogadishu including the airport and port this potential exit raised concerns about emerging capability gaps and the long term implications for stabilization efforts.⁸³

Somaliland: Consolidation, Regional Backlash and Diplomatic Isolation

Somaliland secured a diplomatic advance through its engagement with Israel initiating plans for mutual embassies. This action generated substantial international and regional opposition reaffirming support for Somalia's territorial integrity. Relations with Djibouti and Somalia deteriorated sharply. The move also provoked domestic religious dissent highlighting internal societal divisions. Somaliland's posture hardened in response to perceived external threats framing its strategy as essential for security and development.

International and Diplomatic Engagements

January presented a watershed moment for Somaliland's external relations following Israel's December recognition. This recognition was operationalized through the 6 January visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar to Hargeisa during which both sides announced plans to open embassies and appoint ambassadors. Somaliland authorities characterized the visit as a defining diplomatic milestone while Israel emphasized its sovereign right to determine its recognitions.⁸⁴

Somaliland's leadership intensified international advocacy throughout the month. President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi Irro engaged in high level meetings on the margins of the World Economic Forum in Davos including discussions with Israeli President Isaac Herzog focusing on security, technology, water management, agriculture and mining. Somaliland officials indicated that a prospective visit to Israel could culminate in formal accession to the Abraham Accords positioning Somaliland within a broader Middle Eastern diplomatic architecture.⁸⁵ Parallel outreach to international investors emphasized Somaliland's preference for partnership based engagement centered on Berbera Port and resource development.

International Pushback and Regional Repercussions

The diplomatic gains with Israel were accompanied by pronounced international and regional resistance. Somalia formally denounced all Israeli engagements in Somaliland as illegal, a position echoed by the African Union the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and a broad coalition of states. China publicly reaffirmed that Somaliland is part of Somalia explicitly rejecting any alternative interpretation.⁸⁶

Djibouti escalated tensions by cancelling approximately 1,400 passports previously issued to

⁸³ Somali Guardian. "Somalia: Al-Shabaab Takes Jubaland Base in Kudhaa amid Surge in Assaults." January 21, 2026

⁸⁴ Israel. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "FM Sa'ar on Official Visit to Somaliland." January 6, 2026.

⁸⁵ BBC. "Somaliland President Meets Eric Trump and Israel's Isaac Herzog at Davos." January 23, 2026.

⁸⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "Joint Press Statement of Foreign Ministers between the People's Republic of China & the Federal Republic of Somalia." January 12, 2026

Somaliland officials, elders, journalists, and parliamentarians significantly constraining Somaliland's diplomatic mobility. The closure of Somaliland's liaison office in Djibouti and subsequent retaliatory measures by Hargeisa including banning Air Djibouti flights marked a sharp deterioration in bilateral relations.⁸⁷

Relations with Somalia and Security Posture

Relations with Mogadishu deteriorated further as Somaliland rejected the Federal Government's annulment of UAE agreements as legally irrelevant and reaffirmed the validity of its international partnerships. Somaliland issued a formal condemnation of Somali Defence Minister Ahmed Fiqi's call for foreign military intervention framing it as a violation of the UN Charter and a destabilizing escalation.⁸⁸ In response to what it described as escalating threats from Somalia extremist groups and regional actors Somaliland announced heightened security measures across its territory. These measures were explicitly linked to anticipated backlash following Israel's recognition.⁸⁹

Domestic Developments and Societal Dynamics

Internally, the Israel engagement provoked religious and societal dissent. The detention of Sheikh Mahamed Wali Abdirashid following a sermon critical of ties with Israel underscored the sensitivity of the issue. Subsequent public warnings by prominent religious scholars framed the outreach as politically and morally detrimental, highlighting the intersection of religion and politics in Somaliland's domestic discourse.⁹⁰ Despite internal criticism Somaliland's leadership maintained a consistent narrative portraying international engagement as essential for development, security, and long term recognition, emphasizing diplomatic resilience and strategic patience.

1.5 Sudan: Multi-Theatre Conflict and the Erosion of State Authority

Over the past month, Sudan's war has crossed a critical threshold from entrenched stalemate into deeper national fragmentation. While neither the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) nor the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) achieved decisive strategic gains, the conflict expanded geographically and structurally. RSF operations in Blue Nile State, alongside sustained pressure in Kordofan and Darfur, demonstrated an ability to open secondary fronts, stretching SAF response capacity and reinforcing the war's transformation into a multi-theatre conflict.

Notably, an RSF/SPLM-N (Hilu faction) offensive escalated sharply mid-to-late January with clashes in Bau, Yabus, Malkan/al-Salk, and other areas; where RSF forces reportedly

⁸⁷ Al Mayadeen English. "Djibouti Revokes 1,400 Somaliland Passports in Tit-for-Tat Move." January 21, 2026

⁸⁸ Somali Guardian. "Somaliland Condemns Somalia Defence Minister's Call for Saudi Military Intervention." January 12, 2026.

⁸⁹ Dawan Africa. "Somaliland Strengthens Security Measures Amidst Backlash Over Israel's Recognition." January 10, 2026.

⁹⁰ Mareeg Media. "Somaliland Cleric Detained Over Israel Deal Opposition." January 3, 2026

moved through South Sudan, briefly seizing territories before SAF repelled them and recaptured spots like al-Sillik.⁹¹ Analysts have framed this as shifting Blue Nile from a peripheral to a central battleground, highlighting risks to Sudan's agricultural heartland and dams.

Drone warfare continued to be a defining feature of this phase.⁹² RSF drone strikes targeting urban centers, energy infrastructure, and strategic assets, including attempted attacks near Merowe Dam and sustained disruption of electricity supply in El-Obeid⁹³ and oil-producing regions—signaled an escalation in long-range capabilities and a shift toward infrastructure-centered warfare. SAF likewise relied increasingly on aerial operations, targeting RSF leadership networks while contributing to civilian and economic spillovers. The growing militarization of critical infrastructure underscored the conflict's transition from territorial contestation to systemic degradation.

Territorially, RSF advances around South Kordofan and sustained control over parts of Darfur contrasted with SAF's localized counteroperations and symbolic recaptures. A significant SAF breakthrough occurred in breaking the RSF siege of Dilling (al-Dalanj) in South Kordofan, ending a nearly two-year blockade that had caused acute famine-like conditions.⁹⁴ SAF forces advanced from multiple directions, recaptured key areas like Habila, and opened supply routes, representing one of the clearer localized successes in Kordofan and boosting SAF morale—though RSF drone strikes intensified immediately afterward, including mass-casualty attacks on Dilling.⁹⁵ The absence of durable control by either side reinforced assessments that the war is not converging toward resolution but diffusing across Sudan's peripheries.

Civilian Impact and Atrocity Risk

The humanitarian situation deteriorated sharply over the month, with the war marking 1,000 days amid warnings that the crisis has moved beyond emergency response into prolonged catastrophe. Mass displacement accelerated across Darfur, Kordofan, and urban centers, with camps swelling beyond capacity and basic shelter, food, and health services increasingly unavailable.

Darfur remained the epicenter of atrocity risk. Limited UN access to El-Fasher revealed conditions described as a "crime scene," with widespread destruction, killings, and acute shortages of essential supplies.⁹⁶ Reporting throughout the month documented mass-casualty

⁹¹ AllAfrica. "Blue Nile State — The Rapid Support Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Launch Attack." AllAfrica, January 29, 2026.

⁹² Al Jazeera. "RSF Drone Attack Kills 27 in Southeast Sudan: Report." Al Jazeera, January 13, 2026.

⁹³ The Arab Weekly. "Encircled City: Sudan's Kordofan Targeted by Drones as RSF Intensifies Attacks." The Arab Weekly, January 31, 2026.

⁹⁴ Al Jazeera. "Sudan Army Says Nearly Two-Year RSF Siege of Key Town Broken." Al Jazeera, January 27, 2026.

⁹⁵ Al Jazeera. "Dozens Killed in RSF Drone Attack in War-Torn Sudan's South Kordofan." Al Jazeera, January 29, 2026.

⁹⁶ YouTube (DW News). "UN Says El Fasher Is a 'Massive Crime Scene': Survivors Tell of the Horrors They Witnessed." Video, DW News, January 8, 2026.

attacks, village burnings, sexual violence, and forced displacement attributed largely to RSF operations. International accountability mechanisms intensified scrutiny, with allegations of mass graves, extrajudicial killings, and systematic abuse reinforcing concerns of crimes occurring with near-total impunity.⁹⁷

Civilian protection risks extended beyond Darfur. Drone attacks causing mass casualties, persecution of vulnerable communities, and the targeting of detainees highlighted the erosion of norms across conflict zones. The cumulative effect was a normalization of extreme violence against civilians, with no credible deterrence mechanisms in place.

Political Posture and Governance Collapse

Politically, SAF leadership maintained a victory-first posture.⁹⁸ Chairman Abdel Fattah al-Burhan's repeated framing of the war as existential for the Sudanese state and rejection of negotiations under current conditions reinforced the absence of a political horizon. Symbolic gestures, such as limited detainee releases, offered marginal humanitarian relief but did not alter systemic detention practices or civilian suffering. The government relocation back to Khartoum,⁹⁹ announced on January 11 after years based in Port Sudan underscored SAF consolidation in central areas following their 2025 gains there, but it did not change the overall fragmentation.

Governance collapse deepened across sectors. Energy shortages, damaged infrastructure, and fuel-scarcity disrupted electricity supply and basic services nationwide, compounding economic paralysis.¹⁰⁰ Beyond immediate infrastructure damage, the conflict eroded institutional capacity, cultural heritage, and environmental governance.

Regionalization and External Dynamics

The conflict's regional dimension sharpened over the month. SAF's detention of South Sudanese nationals allegedly fighting alongside the RSF introduced new diplomatic sensitivities with Juba, underscoring the increasingly transnational composition of armed actors.¹⁰¹ Arms inflow concerns persisted, with reporting on potential external military supply arrangements highlighting continued militarization despite humanitarian collapse. Transnational aspects, such as RSF movements via South Sudan and alleged foreign fighter detentions, added tensions.

Diplomatic activity intensified but remained fragmented and disconnected from battlefield realities. Sudan's own pushback against perceived bias in mediation frameworks reflected

⁹⁷ United Nations News. "Sudan Crisis Update." UN News, January 2026.

⁹⁸ Darfur Network for Human Rights. "Burhan Rejects Peace with RSF – Sudan January 2026." DNHR, Jan 27, 2026.

⁹⁹ Xinhua News Agency. "Sudan-Related News Report." Xinhua, January 11, 2026.

¹⁰⁰ West Africa Trade Hub. "Prolonged Conflict Pushes Sudan Deeper into an Energy Crisis." West Africa Trade Hub, January 2026.

¹⁰¹ Al Jazeera. "Sudan Sources Say South Sudanese Among Captured RSF Members as War Rages." Al Jazeera, January 3, 2026.

Khartoum's continued resistance to externally driven political processes. International accountability efforts included EU sanctions on seven individuals for abuses and escalation, targeting figures associated with both sides.¹⁰²

Sudan's engagement in parallel diplomatic tracks, including renewed Nile mediation discussions, illustrated how broader geopolitical calculations—Red Sea security, regional alignments, and resource politics—are increasingly shaping external engagement with Sudan, often sidelining civilian protection and accountability.

Strategic Outlook

This month confirms Sudan's trajectory toward prolonged fragmentation rather than stabilization. The expansion of fighting into new regions, institutional collapse, escalating atrocity risks, and infrastructure degradation point to a war consuming the foundations of statehood itself. Humanitarian needs continue to outpace international response capacity, while diplomatic initiatives remain reactive and poorly aligned with on-the-ground dynamics.

Absent a fundamental shift in the security balance or a credible political framework capable of constraining armed actors, Sudan is likely to remain locked in a multi-dimensional crisis characterized by diffuse violence, deepening regional entanglement, and sustained civilian suffering.

1.6 South Sudan: Escalating Conflict, Political Fragmentation, and the Looming Electoral Crisis

Over the past month, South Sudan's security environment deteriorated sharply, marking a transition from chronic fragility toward a high-risk escalation phase. Armed confrontations intensified across Jonglei, Upper Nile, Unity State, and peripheral border zones, with opposition forces—particularly SPLA-IO elements—registering notable battlefield gains against SSPDF positions. The overrunning of government garrisons in Jonglei and near the Sudan border underscored the fragility of security arrangements under the revitalized peace framework and exposed weaknesses in state command and control.

Jonglei emerged as the central pressure point. Fighting around Bor and surrounding areas triggered mass displacement and raised fears of renewed large-scale confrontation. Opposition rhetoric,¹⁰³ including calls for marches toward Juba following reported advances, elevated anxiety in the capital and reinforced concerns about the erosion of deterrence and political restraint. Border insecurity, including deadly incidents near Uganda and Sudan, further highlighted the permeability of South Sudan's security environment and the

¹⁰² Sudan Horizon. "EU Imposes Sanctions on Major Actors in Sudan War." Sudan Horizon, January 30, 2026.

¹⁰³ Reuters. "South Sudan Opposition Forces Call for March on Juba After Battlefield Gains." Reuters, Jan 19, 2026.

interaction between internal conflict and regional instability.¹⁰⁴

While some indicators suggested a marginal decline in overall conflict-related deaths, this did not signal de-escalation. Instead, rising abductions, attacks on installations, and forced evacuations ahead of military offensives reflected a shift in violence patterns, increasing civilian exposure and protection risks rather than reducing them.

South Sudan edged closer to renewed civil war in January as fighting intensified and incendiary rhetoric by senior commanders raised alarm across the region. A widely reported speech by General **Johnson Olony**—a key SSPDF leader—urging troops ahead of operations in **Jonglei State** to “*spare no lives... not even the elderly... not even a chicken*”¹⁰⁵ underscored how political fractures and militarized responses are eroding the transitional framework and heightening the risk of mass civilian harm and renewed nationwide conflict.

Civilian Protection and Humanitarian Pressure

Civilian vulnerability worsened markedly over the month. Large-scale displacement, most notably the reported movement of over 200,000 people in Jonglei alone placed additional strain on already overstretched humanitarian systems.¹⁰⁶ Violence in proximity to IDP camps, including fatal shootings, underscored the erosion of safe spaces for displaced populations.

Human rights reporting documented mass arbitrary arrests, abusive anti-gang operations, and allegations of scorched-earth tactics, including village destruction and forced displacement. United Nations bodies and rights organizations issued unusually stark warnings, citing inflammatory rhetoric by senior political and military figures that risk inciting mass violence, ethnic targeting, and atrocities.¹⁰⁷

Humanitarian access continued to shrink amid insecurity and administrative constraints. Food insecurity remained acute, with parts of Upper Nile, including Nasir, facing sustained famine risk.¹⁰⁸ Aid delivery was further complicated by evacuations ordered ahead of military operations and by increasing attacks and abductions affecting civilians and aid workers alike.

Political Fragmentation and Electoral Uncertainty

Politically, the month was marked by deepening fragmentation rather than consolidation. President Salva Kiir’s repeated cabinet and security reshuffles, following rebel advances in

¹⁰⁴ ACLED. “Violent Escalation in Jonglei Threatens South Sudan’s Peace Agreement.” ACLED, 2026.

¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch. “South Sudan: Government Commander Promotes Attacks on Civilians.” Human Rights Watch, January 26, 2026.

¹⁰⁶ United Nations Mission in South Sudan. “Statement by UNMISS Officer-in-Charge and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General.” UNMISS, January 30, 2026.

¹⁰⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). “South Sudan: UN Commission Warns Incitement and Command Failures Risk Mass Violence.” OHCHR, January 2026.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* UNMISS.

Jonglei, were intended to project control but instead highlighted internal strain and elite uncertainty. Opposition figures interpreted the dismissals as signs of confusion and desperation within the governing apparatus, while hardline rhetoric from within the political establishment signaled diminishing appetite for compromise.¹⁰⁹

Preparations for the proposed 2026 elections appeared increasingly disconnected from security realities.¹¹⁰ Analysts, opposition figures, and civil society actors converged on assessments that escalating violence, shrinking civic space, unresolved security arrangements, and institutional weakness render credible elections unlikely under current conditions. Reports of threats against activists and witnesses further underscored the contraction of political participation and accountability mechanisms.

Official calls for peace and restraint contrasted sharply with battlefield developments and coercive practices on the ground, reinforcing perceptions of a widening gap between political messaging and operational reality.

International Pressure and External Engagement

International scrutiny intensified over the month. The United States initiated reviews and partial halts of assistance to parts of South Sudan, citing governance failures, obstruction, and interference in aid delivery.¹¹¹ While Juba rejected these claims, multiple reports confirmed heightened donor frustration and diminishing external patience. Humanitarian actors warned that aid disruptions risk accelerating food insecurity and famine, particularly in conflict-affected regions.

At the multilateral level, the UN Security Council prepared closed consultations on South Sudan amid warnings of catastrophic escalation.¹¹² UNMISS expanded its protective posture, reinforced by the deployment of China's 12th Peacekeeping Infantry Battalion,¹¹³ signaling concern that existing stabilization mechanisms may be insufficient under current conditions. The African Union's proposed mediation retreat reflected parallel efforts to arrest escalation, though its impact remains uncertain.

Regionally, South Sudan continued diplomatic engagement on Nile Basin cooperation and transboundary water issues, projecting institutional normalcy even as domestic security conditions deteriorated. However, the spillover effects of Sudan's war—particularly through oil dependence, border insecurity, and economic vulnerability—continued to compound South Sudan's instability.

¹⁰⁹ Washington Center for African Studies. "Danger of Atrocities Looms in South Sudan Amid Renewed Civil War." Washington Center, 2026.

¹¹⁰ Horn Review. "Elections as a Catalyst for War: South Sudan's Dangerous Pre-Electoral Phase." Horn Review, January 23, 2026.

¹¹¹ U.S. Embassy in South Sudan. "Suspension and Review of Assistance in Response to South Sudanese Actions." U.S. Embassy Juba, January 8, 2026

¹¹² Security Council Report. "South Sudan: Closed Consultations." Security Council Report, January 2026.

¹¹³ Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China. "12th Chinese Peacekeeping Infantry Battalion to South Sudan (Juba) Completes Deployment." Ministry of National Defense PRC, 2025.

Strategic Outlook

This month marks a convergence of security escalation, political fragmentation, and humanitarian stress in South Sudan. Rebel advances, mass displacement, incendiary rhetoric, and shrinking humanitarian and civic space collectively signal a shift toward a high-risk phase rather than stabilization. International pressure is rising, but remains reactive and fragmented, while domestic political responses emphasize control over reconciliation.

Absent urgent de-escalation, credible civilian protection measures, and a reconfiguration of the political process, South Sudan faces growing risk of renewed large-scale conflict ahead of the 2026 elections. Rather than moving toward transition, the country appears increasingly caught between unresolved war legacies and an electoral timeline misaligned with realities on the ground.

1.7 Kenya: Security, Diplomacy and Regional Leadership

Kenya emerges as a key player in East African security and diplomacy in early 2026, with US base expansions in Manda Bay enhancing counter-terrorism against al-Shabab and Red Sea threats. Diplomatic visits, AGOA renewals, and alliances with the EU and Germany underscore Kenya's pivotal role in regional mediation, economic integration, and resisting unilateral global initiatives, navigating uncertainties in a multipolar world

In January 2026, the United States expanded its military base in Kenya's Manda Bay,¹¹⁴ a strategic move aimed at bolstering regional security against threats like al-Shabab and Houthi disruptions in the Red Sea. This development underscores Washington's renewed focus on East Africa amid great power rivalries, particularly with China's growing influence, enhancing Kenya's role as a pivotal ally in counter-terrorism operations.

By facilitating larger aircraft operations and joint exercises, the expansion not only strengthens surveillance and rapid response capabilities but also signals a commitment to long-term stability, fostering deeper bilateral ties that could deter transnational crimes and piracy in a volatile geopolitical landscape.

Transitioning from military enhancements, US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau's visit to Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti highlighted interconnected security concerns across the Red Sea and Horn of Africa.¹¹⁵ Engaging with leaders on trade rebalancing and peace initiatives, the tour emphasized countering al-Shabab and ISIS threats while promoting a positive business environment. This diplomatic outreach reflects America's strategic pivot to treat the region as a unified theater, countering Iran's proxy influences and ensuring navigation safety in critical trade routes, thereby reinforcing Kenya's position in multinational naval coalitions and amplifying its influence in regional stability efforts amid global uncertainties.

¹¹⁴ "US Expands Military Base in Kenya to Boost Regional Security." *The Defense Post*, January 31, 2026.

¹¹⁵ Domena, Adwoa Tenkoramaa. "US Eyes Red Sea as State Envoy Visits Africa." *Deutsche Welle*, January 31, 2026.

Building on these engagements, discussions around the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) renewal emerged as a key diplomatic priority, with Landau's trip aligning with Senate deliberations for a one-year extension.¹¹⁶ For Kenya, this promises sustained duty-free exports, vital for economic resilience and job creation in sectors like apparel. Geopolitically, it counters Ethiopia-Eritrea tensions and Sudan's conflicts by bolstering trade ties, positioning Kenya as a mediator in Horn disputes while enhancing US-Africa relations, ultimately fostering mutual prosperity and security in an era where economic partnerships serve as bulwarks against instability.

Amid global shifts, Chatham House's analysis urged Africa to embrace regional leadership to navigate uncertainties like weakened multilateralism and power competitions.¹¹⁷ Kenya, with its youth-driven movements and strategic location, exemplifies this by championing African Union unity in mediation and economic integration via the Continental Free Trade Area. Politically, it counters gerontocratic rule and conflicts in neighbors like the DRC and Sahel, advocating for institutional reforms that prioritize sovereignty and resilience, ensuring timeless principles of collective action endure against transactional international interests.

Complementing these efforts, Kenya's partnership with the European Union, marking 50 years, evolved into a balanced alliance focused on trade, security, and development.¹¹⁸ With the EU as Kenya's top export market and investor in energy and digital sectors, initiatives like the Global Gateway and anti-piracy operations fortify regional stability. Geopolitically, this elevates Kenya's leadership in the Horn, aligning shared values in multilateralism to counter volatility, proving that enduring collaborations built on equity can sustain progress and security in a multipolar world.

In a firm stance on global order, Kenya dismissed US President Trump's proposed Board of Peace, defending the UN-led framework as essential for multilateral consensus.¹¹⁹ Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi argued that parallel mechanisms risk fragmenting coordination in conflicts like Gaza, emphasizing reforms to amplify Africa's Security Council voice. This position highlights Kenya's commitment to sovereignty and collective diplomacy, resonating with allies like Germany and underscoring the timeless value of unified institutions over unilateral initiatives in maintaining international peace.

Furthering bilateral diplomacy, Mudavadi's talks in Addis Ababa with Ethiopian counterparts unlocked trade deals, emphasizing African-led solutions for prosperity and security in the Horn.¹²⁰ By prioritizing mutual investments and peace collaborations, these engagements mitigate external interferences, strengthening historical ties rooted in trust. Geopolitically, they position Kenya and Ethiopia as anchors for regional stability, illustrating how pragmatic

¹¹⁶ "Problematic Resurrection for AGOA Trade Scheme After Congress Votes." *Africa Confidential*, January 30, 2026.

¹¹⁷ "Africa 2026: Global Uncertainty Demands Regional Leadership." *Chatham House*, January 2026.

¹¹⁸ "EU-Kenya Partnership Built on Shared Progress." *European External Action Service*, January 30, 2026.

¹¹⁹ Kibii, Eliud. "Kenya Dismisses Trump Peace Board, Defends UN-Led Global Order." *The Star*, January 25, 2026.

¹²⁰ Saha, Magdalene. "Mudavadi in Addis Ababa for High-Level Kenya-Ethiopia Talks." *The Star*, February 1, 2026.

partnerships can transcend borders to foster sustainable development and counter threats like territorial disputes.

Domestically, Vellum's political roundup noted Kenya's reset with Tanzania after detentions strained ties, with Presidents Ruto and Suluhu resuming dialogues to bolster East African Community integration.¹²¹ Regionally, Uganda's post-election crackdowns and Ethiopia's internal challenges underscore governance fragilities, urging Kenya to lead in human rights advocacy. These dynamics emphasize the timeless imperative of regulatory harmony and cross-border trust for collective security and political stability.

Additionally, Kenya and Germany's joint briefing in Nairobi pledged deeper ties in politics, economy, and development, with Foreign Minister Wadephul's visit emphasizing trade expansion and global issues.¹²² This partnership, amid Europe's strategic outreach, bolsters Kenya's geopolitical leverage, proving that diversified alliances foster enduring security and prosperity by addressing shared challenges like climate and migration.

Finally, DW's exploration of traditional peacebuilding in northern Kenya highlights indigenous methods for resolving border tensions, offering timeless insights into conflict resolution.¹²³ By integrating elders' councils with modern security, Kenya can enhance stability against pastoralist clashes, connecting local wisdom to broader diplomatic frameworks and underscoring the power of cultural heritage in sustaining regional harmony.

In Sum, Kenya's proactive diplomacy and strategic alliances in 2026 solidify its leadership in the Horn of Africa, blending military strength, economic ties, and cultural wisdom to promote enduring peace, sovereignty, and prosperity against transnational threats and geopolitical shifts.

Section Two: MENA Region, Gulf, and Global Engagement

2.1 Egypt: Strategic Diplomatic Engagements and Regional Power Plays

In early 2026, Egypt pursued calculated diplomatic strategies to assert its influence across the Middle East and Africa. Leveraging multilateral forums and bilateral ties, Cairo navigated complex regional dynamics, from Mediterranean security to Gaza mediation and Horn of Africa. These moves prioritized national interests like border security, resource control, and proxy advantages, positioning Egypt as a pivotal player amid escalating tensions over water rights, trade routes, and geopolitical alignments.

¹²¹ "Presidents Ruto and Suluhu Seek to Bury the Hatchet." *Africa Intelligence*, January 26, 2026.

¹²² "Kenya and Germany Pledge Stronger Ties During Joint Media Briefing in Nairobi." *LN24 International*, January 22, 2026.

¹²³ "Tackling the Changing Face of Conflict in Northern Kenya." *Conciliation Resources*, January 2026.

Eastern Mediterranean and Multilateral Consultations

On January 18, Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty hosted his Greek and Cypriot counterparts in Cairo for trilateral consultations focused on energy cooperation, migration management, and security in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹²⁴ The talks reinforced economic ties while addressing shared concerns over Gaza's humanitarian situation, Libya's stability, Sudan's unity, and Somalia's territorial integrity, positioning Egypt as a coordinator of mutual interests without direct confrontation.

Building directly on these multilateral channels, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan conducted phone calls on January 19 with Egyptian, Saudi, and Jordanian officials centered on Gaza developments and regional de-escalation.¹²⁵ These exchanges reflected a coordinated Arab response to humanitarian pressures, keeping diplomatic avenues active to avert escalation in the Middle East. Egypt's participation underscored its border proximity to Gaza, amplifying stakes in sustainable outcomes, while fostering collective restraint that avoided inflaming proxy dynamics involving rivals.

Gaza Humanitarian and Peace Initiatives

Parallel to regional tensions, Egypt deepened its mediator role in Gaza's humanitarian and peace initiatives through multilateral and bilateral efforts. On January 2, it united with Turkey, Jordan, the UAE, Indonesia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar to urge Israel to lift aid restrictions amid harsh weather affecting displaced Palestinians, pushing for NGO access, infrastructure repairs, an open Rafah crossing, and Palestinian self-determination.¹²⁶

Building on these actions, high-level engagements from January 8–10 with EU High Representative Kaja Kallas advanced proposals for an international stabilization force and a Palestinian technocratic governing committee to avert Hamas re-entrenchment or Israeli re-occupation.¹²⁷ Foreign Minister Abdelatty also advocated with UN and AU agencies for broader corridors connecting Gaza and Sudan crises.

Culminating at Davos around January 20–21, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi met U.S. President Donald Trump and joined the Gaza 'Board of Peace' initiative,¹²⁸ enabling Egypt to influence truce terms that protected its border control and historical ties while countering Iranian or Hamas influences. These steps solidified Egypt's indispensable diplomatic position, though often driven by strategic interests like mitigating Sinai refugee pressures and preserving leverage rather than pure altruism.

¹²⁴ "Egyptian-Greek-Cypriot Ministerial Meeting Starts." SIS (State Information Service - Egypt), January 14, 2026.

¹²⁵ "Turkish Foreign Minister Holds Phone Calls with Egyptian, Saudi Arabian, Jordanian Counterparts." Anadolu Agency, January 14, 2026.

¹²⁶ "Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Türkiye, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE." Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 2, 2026.

¹²⁷ "Egypt, EU Stress Urgent Implementation of Second Phase of Gaza Reconstruction." Kuwait News Agency, January 10, 2026.

¹²⁸ "El-Sisi Holds Talks with Trump in Davos." Egyptian State Information Service, January 21, 2026

Horn of Africa, Sovereignty Assertions, Nile Water Diplomacy and GERD Tensions

On January 19 Egypt deployed troop and advisor to Somalia,¹²⁹ ostensibly in response to the recognition but explicitly aimed at containing Ethiopian regional influence, safeguarding Red Sea trade routes critical to Egypt, and preempting Nile water security risks.

Complementary efforts included finalizing upgrades to Djibouti's Doraleh port and Eritrean facilities as economic encirclement tools pressuring landlocked Ethiopia, alongside reports of a nascent military bloc with Saudi Arabia and Somalia¹³⁰ for Red Sea corridor security. These moves collectively sought to encircle Ethiopia's growing footprint rather than foster genuine cooperation, prioritizing Cairo's hegemonic interests despite Ethiopia's sovereign right to develop projects like the GERD for national benefit and mutual regional growth. Egypt's anxiety over Nile flows distorts equitable cooperation, undermining opportunities for shared development in the basin.

Nile Basin positioning remained contentious, at Davos, Sisi pressed Trump for U.S. support on water rights, welcoming Trump's expressed hope to relaunch Egypt-Ethiopia talks,¹³¹ yet leveraging the encounter to extract concessions amid Egypt's existential framing of the dam. This culminated in Water Minister Hani Sewilam's aggressive January demand for compensation from Ethiopia over 38 billion cubic meters of alleged lost Nile water due to the GERD,¹³² underscoring a self-serving campaign to constrain Ethiopia's development under equity rhetoric while seeking to monopolize river control and curb Addis Ababa's influence. Egypt's approach reflects misplaced anxiety, ignoring Ethiopia's legitimate sovereign development rights and the potential for cooperative frameworks benefiting all riparians through mutual benefit rather than containment.

Sudan Engagements and Proxy Dynamics

Ties with Sudan featured calculated economic and security deepening. Building on late December 2025 agreements granting Egyptian firms' priority in rebuilding electricity, water, healthcare, and education infrastructure with technical aid for factories, customs training, a January 2026 border conference, and 2027 Khartoum follow-up, Sudanese ministers toured Egypt's Future Authority for Sustainable Development on January 20 seeking reconstruction support.¹³³ This bound Sudan economically to align with Cairo's Nile and Red Sea interests against Ethiopian threats.

¹²⁹ "Egypt Expands Military Footprint in Somalia amid Israeli Moves in the Horn of Africa." Middle East Monitor, January 19, 2026.

¹³⁰ "Somalia Confirms Talks on Red Sea Security Pact with Saudi Arabia and Egypt." Garowe Online, January 19, 2026.

¹³¹ "After Meeting Sisi, Trump Vows to Relaunch Egypt-Ethiopia Talks on Nile Dam Row." The Arab Weekly, January 22, 2026.

¹³² "Egypt Demands Compensation from Ethiopia for Nile Water Losses." Middle East Online, January 21, 2026.

¹³³ "Sudanese Ministers Visit Egypt Development Authority ahead of Sudan Reconstruction Projects" Ahram Online, January 31, 2026.

On January 24, Sudanese army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan met Egyptian intelligence director Hassan Rashad in Port Sudan on counterterrorism and Red Sea security,¹³⁴ reinforcing backing for Sudanese Armed Forces over Rapid Support Forces (RSF) amid UAE influence fears. Egypt and Saudi Arabia pressured Libyan commander Khalifa Haftar around the same time to block UAE arms and fuel to RSF,¹³⁵ tilting Sudan's conflict toward Cairo-loyal factions to safeguard proxy advantages. These layered actions, including reported Egyptian airstrikes on RSF convoys timed before Haftar's Cairo visit,¹³⁶ emphasized regime stability and border security at the expense of broader inclusive peace processes, potentially mitigating spillover risks but also entrenching Egypt's regional dominance in ways that raised questions about long-term equity and neutrality.

Domestic Political Context

As the House of Representatives approached its five-year term end in January 2026, Egypt exhibited quiet political transition amid entrenched restrictions on freedoms,¹³⁷ with the regime offsetting domestic constraints by emphasizing its regional "center of gravity" role through diplomatic indispensability. Monitoring highlighted prioritization of external credibility over liberalization, maintaining internal narratives of stability.

In Sum, Egypt strategically maneuvered in January 2026 to bolster its regional clout, orchestrating multilateral dialogues on Eastern Mediterranean security and Gaza aid with allies like Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, and the US. It countered Ethiopian influence in the Horn of Africa via Somali deployments and Red Sea alliances, while escalating Nile water demands. Ties with Sudan emphasized economic and proxy leverage, prioritizing Cairo's interests over collaborative equity amid domestic political consolidation.

2.2 Yemen: The STC and Gulf Rivalry

The final days of December marked a sharp escalation in Yemen's internal conflict and in Saudi-UAE tensions. Between December 29 and 30, the Saudi-led coalition conducted airstrikes on Mukalla port, reportedly targeting an unauthorized UAE weapons shipment destined for southern separatists, a claim denied by Abu Dhabi.¹³⁸ In addition, Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) declared a 90-day state of emergency, cancelled a defence agreement with the UAE, imposed a 72-hour air, land, and sea blockade, and formally demanded the withdrawal of Emirati forces.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ "Sudan's Al-Burhan Meets Egypt's Intelligence Chief in Port Sudan." Sudan News Agency, January 31, 2026.

¹³⁵ "Egypt and Saudi Arabia Pressure Libya's Haftar to Stop UAE Supplies to Sudan's RSF." Middle East Eye, January 22, 2026.

¹³⁶ "Egypt Bombs RSF Convoy Days Before Saddam Haftar's Cairo Visit." The New Arab, January 13, 2026

¹³⁷ "Egypt in 2026: What's Next?" The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, January 21, 2026.

¹³⁸ Al Jazeera. "Saudi-Led Coalition Strikes Yemeni Port over Unauthorised Weapons Shipment." December 30, 2025.

¹³⁹ *Yeni Şafak*. "Yemen Cancels Defense Pact with UAE, Demands Troop Withdrawal." December 30, 2025.

On December 31, the UAE announced the withdrawal of its remaining forces amid rising tensions with Saudi Arabia.¹⁴⁰ Pro-independence protests expanded across southern governorates, while the Southern Transitional Council (STC) warned of possible Saudi airstrikes as forces mobilized near the border. On January 1, the UAE confirmed a full retreat from Yemen. The STC refused to withdraw from provinces near the Saudi border but agreed to the deployment of Riyadh-backed forces. Clashes soon erupted between Saudi-aligned government forces and UAE-backed separatists, spreading into Hadramout. Government forces later retook Say'un city, with reports indicating that at least 80 separatist fighters were killed in subsequent fighting.

On January 2, the STC announced a two-year transition plan culminating in a referendum on southern independence and the drafting of a constitution for a proposed "State of South Arabia."¹⁴¹ At the same time, Saudi-backed forces regained control of resource-rich areas of Hadramout. While the STC welcomed Saudi calls for dialogue in Riyadh, the UAE urged restraint. By January 4, pro-government forces had secured full control of Al-Mahra province following the STC's withdrawal. The UN Security Council announced plans for a high-level debate on the Middle East, including Yemen, amid growing concern that renewed civil war dynamics were emerging despite the PLC's advances.

The first half of January saw a decisive shift. Following the disappearance of STC leader Aidarous al-Zubaidi ahead of proposed peace talks, the Saudi-led coalition launched airstrikes against STC positions. The PLC formally expelled al-Zubaidi on charges of high treason and referred him to the public prosecutor. An emergency PLC meeting resulted in the dismissal of several senior military commanders and ministers as the council moved to consolidate control in the south.¹⁴²

In early January, the STC announced its self-dissolution as part of preparations for a comprehensive southern dialogue in Riyadh, admitting failure to achieve its primary objectives. This announcement was later disputed by other STC figures, revealing internal fragmentation. Despite these contradictions, the STC rapidly lost territorial control. By mid-January, the PLC had regained authority over all non-Houthi-held territories, marking a major setback for the UAE's position in Yemen.¹⁴³

Reports later confirmed that al-Zubaidi fled Yemen by sea to Somaliland before being transferred to Abu Dhabi's Al Reef Air Base, further straining Saudi-UAE relations. Although the STC denied rumours of dissolution, it lost all its seats in the Presidential Council, with the final remaining position replaced on January 15. The PLC asserted full control over southern Yemen, even as thousands rallied in Aden in support of southern independence, demonstrating the persistence of local pro-STC sentiment.

¹⁴⁰ Al Jazeera. "UAE to Pull Forces out of Yemen as Tensions Rise with Saudi Arabia." News Agencies, December 31, 2025.

¹⁴¹ DW. "Yemen Separatists Plan Transition to Independence by 2028." January 2, 2026.

¹⁴² Al Jazeera. "Who Is Aidarous al-Zubaidi? Yemen's 'Traitor' Chief." January 7, 2026.

¹⁴³ Al Jazeera. "Yemen's Saudi-Backed Government Retakes Southern Areas from STC: What Next?" January 12, 2026.

Building on its momentum, the PLC signalled a potential strategic pivot northward. On January 10, it announced the formation of a Supreme Military Committee aimed at integrating all anti-Houthi forces under a unified command.¹⁴⁴ The PLC president emphasized the need for a monopoly on violence, fuelling speculation that preparations for renewed confrontation with the Houthis were underway. Shortly thereafter, PLC President Rashad al-Alimi met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the Saudi defence minister, as Riyadh reportedly expanded developmental assistance and investment support to the Yemeni government.¹⁴⁵

The Houthis responded rhetorically. On January 15 and again on January 22, Houthi leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi warned against any Israeli military presence in Somaliland and rejected the Trump-backed “Board of Peace” initiative. Houthi officials later threatened military action against U.S. aircraft potentially involved in strikes on Iran, reflecting growing anxiety over the future of Tehran, the group’s primary external backer.¹⁴⁶

2.3 Israel: Humanitarian Tensions, Ceasefire Dynamics, and Global Realignments

In early January 2026, Israel maneuvered through a volatile mix of humanitarian fallout in Gaza, a shaky ceasefire framework, persistent threats from Iran and its proxies in Lebanon, and shifting international partnerships. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government pursued security policies while leveraging renewed U.S. support under President Donald Trump.

Humanitarian Challenges in Gaza: Security Imperatives vs. Aid Imperatives

Israel's aid restrictions drew sharp international criticism in early 2026, exacerbating Gaza's crisis amid winter hardships. By January 4, this expanded to revoking permits for 37 foreign organizations, with a March deadline for Israeli-based entities to depart.¹⁴⁷ Officials claimed no disruption to aid volumes, projecting 4,200 trucks weekly, but critics argued the moves were politically motivated, tied to alleged militant links. UN reports highlighted catastrophic conditions: over 70,000 Palestinians killed since October 2023, with 414 post-ceasefire deaths by early January. Flooding displaced tens of thousands, and malnutrition affected one in four families.¹⁴⁸

Military actions further strained the truce. Israeli strikes in Khan Younis and Gaza City killed civilians,¹⁴⁹ labeled violations by locals. Those civilian deaths will intensify international

¹⁴⁴ *Saudi Gazette*. “Yemen Forms Supreme Military Committee under Arab Coalition Leadership, Al-Alimi Announces.” January 10, 2026.

¹⁴⁵ Saudi Press Agency. “Prince Khalid bin Salman and Al-Alimi Discuss Efforts to End Yemeni Crisis.” January 25, 2026.

¹⁴⁶ Press TV. “Yemen’s Houthi Leader Vows More Strikes as US Continues Aggression.” January 22, 2026.

¹⁴⁷ Zein Khalil. “Israel begins revoking licenses of 37 international organizations delivering aid to Gaza” *Anadolu Agency*. January 4, 2026.

¹⁴⁸ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). “Humanitarian Situation Update #351 - Gaza Strip.” *United Nations*. December 30, 2025.

¹⁴⁹ Santos, Sofia Ferreira. “Israeli Air Strikes Kill at Least 27 Palestinians in Gaza, Rescue Officials Say.” *BBC News*. January

scrutiny and raise the risk of reprisals, making a durable ceasefire and reconstruction far harder to achieve. Demographic shifts were evident: Israel planned to limit Palestinian returns via Rafah, aiming for net outflows.¹⁵⁰ This intersected with property reclamation, challenging return rights under international law but aligning with security goals. Critics accused ethnic engineering, risking isolation but underscoring Israel's use of borders as leverage.

Ceasefire Progress: Incremental Gains Amid Persistent Frictions

The October 2025 ceasefire, brokered under Trump's 20-point plan, transitioned into Phase Two by January 15, 2026, with a primary emphasis on Hamas disarmament and establishing stable governance in Gaza, setting the stage for broader regional stability.¹⁵¹ To facilitate this, Netanyahu appointed Nickolay Mladenov to head the U.S.-backed Gaza Peace Board, which seamlessly integrated oversight mechanisms with ongoing reconstruction efforts, while U.S. Envoy Steve Witkoff officially launched the phase, underscoring the need for de-escalation amid lingering ambiguities in authority that sparked concerns over impartiality. Despite these diplomatic strides, violations continued unabated, with Israel recording 1,193 breaches between October 10, 2025, and January 9, 2026, resulting in 451 Palestinian deaths,¹⁵² and Hamas leveling accusations against Israel for obstructing humanitarian aid and delaying troop withdrawals, underscoring the fragility of the truce. As regional involvement intensified, Turkish and Saudi ministers pushed for more collaborative aid initiatives,¹⁵³ thereby challenging the dominance of U.S.-centric mediation and advocating for a multilateral approach.

In a notable shift from his earlier critiques of the blockade, Trump endorsed the formation of a technocratic Palestinian government¹⁵⁴ even as the siege persisted, aiming to foster administrative efficiency. Further expanding the framework, Israel became a founding member of Trump's Board of Peace¹⁵⁵ alongside Azerbaijan and Kosovo, though Norway and Sweden's refusal to join¹⁵⁶ highlighted emerging geopolitical divides. Ultimately, the plan's incrementalist strategy relied heavily on tangible humanitarian advancements, illustrating the intricate balance between high-level diplomacy and the harsh realities on the ground.

31, 2026.

¹⁵⁰ Shaath, Ali. "Israel Aims to Ensure More Palestinians Are Let Out of Gaza Than Back In." *The Arab Weekly*. Jan 24, 2026.

¹⁵¹ Haddad, Mohammed, and Mohammad Mansour. "US Declares Phase Two of Gaza Ceasefire, but What Did Phase One Deliver?" *Al Jazeera*. January 16, 2026.

¹⁵² Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). "Gaza: Civilian Killings Continue After Ceasefire [EN/AR]." *ReliefWeb*. January 23, 2026.

¹⁵³ New Age Islam Edit Desk. "Middle East Press On: Turkey's Talks, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Palestinians NCAG, Gaza's Technocratic Genocide, Trump, Tehran, Kushner's Vision, UAE." *New Age Islam*. January 28, 2026.

¹⁵⁴ The White House. "Statement on President Trump's Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict." January 16, 2026.

¹⁵⁵ "Israel Agrees to Join Trump's Board of Peace." NPR, January 21, 2026.

¹⁵⁶ "Germany, Norway, Sweden Decline Trump's 'Board of Peace.'" *Daily Sabah*, January 21, 2026.

Iran and Regional Security: Deterrence Through Pressure and Restraint

Iran remained a focal threat. On January 5, Netanyahu voiced support for Iranian freedom amid unrest,¹⁵⁷ positioning Israel as a democratic advocate. This was paired with Netanyahu highlighting Trump's backing for Hezbollah disarmament¹⁵⁸ to boost leverage. Backchannels via Putin assured Iran of no immediate war, mixing caution with readiness, as Netanyahu advised Trump to delay strikes and exploit protests through pressure instead.¹⁵⁹

Israel's UN ambassador warned Iran against testing resolve for psychological deterrence, while Turkish Minister Fidan noted Trump's leverage to end the Gaza war but cautioned on Israeli strike plans. Naval warnings to an Egyptian ship near Gaza asserted control. This approach reflected assertive realism, balancing patience against impulsiveness, yet risking escalation if unrest faded.

Global Engagements: Leveraging U.S. Ties and Selective Alliances

Netanyahu congratulated Trump on the seizure of Venezuela's Maduro on January 3, framing it as a symbol of anti-tyranny solidarity¹⁶⁰ that bolstered optimism for renewed Venezuela-Israel ties in a post-Maduro era, thereby intertwining regional interests and exerting pressure on shared adversaries. This diplomatic momentum extended to other fronts, as Gideon Sa'ar's visit to Somaliland announced plans for an Israeli embassy, advancing anti-terror partnerships¹⁶¹ despite sharp criticism from Somalia, which viewed the move as undermining its sovereignty. In a further assertion of autonomy, Israel withdrew from seven UN agencies amid longstanding claims of bias,¹⁶² signaling a broader pushback against international bodies perceived as hostile. Meanwhile, Trump-Netanyahu meetings reinforced their strategic alignment, with Netanyahu joining the Board of Peace despite qualms from the Gaza Executive Board, highlighting a commitment to collaborative frameworks even as differences on Turkey and Syria emerged.

Although these divergences surfaced, a robust consensus on Gaza and Iran ultimately prevailed, with Trump's threats against Iran aligning closely with Netanyahu's objectives and potentially paving the way for targeted strikes. Israel's posture in early 2026 thus embodied an assertive realism, characterized by tightened controls over Gaza, intensified pressure on Iran through proxies and internal unrest, and deepened U.S. ties amid evolving multilateral dynamics. While these measures enhanced national security, they carried risks of international isolation and escalation, underscoring that long-term success would depend on skillfully calibrating force with diplomacy in a rapidly realigning global landscape.

¹⁵⁷ "Netanyahu: Israel Backs Iranian Protest Movement." Christians for Israel International, January 4, 2026.

¹⁵⁸ "Netanyahu Received Trump's 'Green Light' for War Against Hezbollah in Lebanon." PNN, January 7, 2026.

¹⁵⁹ "Netanyahu Reportedly Asks Putin to Assure Iran of No Israeli Attack Plans." Middle East Monitor, January 6, 2026.

¹⁶⁰ "Israeli Leaders Praise Trump After US Captures Venezuela's Maduro." The Jewish Chronicle, January 4, 2026.

¹⁶¹ "Israeli FM Sa'ar Lands in Somaliland for First Visit." The Jerusalem Post, January 6, 2026.

¹⁶² "Israel Exits Seven UN Agencies Citing Bias." GKToday, January 14, 2026.

2.4 Türkiye: Strategic Humanitarian Diplomacy and Regional Mediation

In early 2026, Turkey strategically navigated complex regional and global dynamics through multifaceted diplomacy. Under President Erdogan and Foreign Minister Fidan, Ankara forged coalitions for humanitarian aid in Gaza, mediated conflicts in Yemen and Syria, and pursued economic ties with partners like China and Somalia. These efforts balanced assertive security stances with pragmatic alliances, enhancing Turkey's influence amid Middle Eastern tensions, Horn of Africa rivalries, and broader geopolitical shifts, while prioritizing stability and soft power expansion.

Gaza and Humanitarian Diplomacy

In early January 2026, Turkey intensified its humanitarian diplomacy in Gaza, forging unlikely coalitions to address the crisis. On January 2, Ankara united with Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, Indonesia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar in urging Israel to lift aid restrictions amid harsh weather impacting 1.9 million displaced Palestinians.¹⁶³ The group advocated for NGO access, infrastructure repairs, an open Rafah crossing, and Palestinian self-determination, positioning Turkey as a leader in collective Muslim-majority responses. This multilateral push transcended rivalries, enhancing Turkey's soft power, though success hinged on Israeli concessions to ease suffering.

Building on this, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan conducted phone calls with Egyptian and Saudi counterparts in early January,¹⁶⁴ aligning on Gaza's developments and the US-backed peace plan's second phase. Discussions emphasized a temporary Palestinian technocratic committee and an international stabilization force under UN Security Council Resolution 2803, aiming to consolidate truces and accelerate reconstruction. These exchanges challenged fragmented approaches, revealing Turkey's strategic mediation amid interdependent regional interests, despite hurdles like force composition potentially stalling progress.

Further advancing its role, Turkey endorsed the Palestinian National Committee for the Administration of Gaza alongside Egypt and Qatar in early January.¹⁶⁵ This Cairo-based technocratic body, led by Dr. Ali Abdel Hamid Shaath, focused on civil affairs, security, and reconstruction during the transition to self-rule. Ankara's involvement bridged stakeholder divides, countering power vacuums through inclusive governance, though resistance from factions highlighted the challenges in legitimizing such processes.

Complementing these efforts, an Ankara meeting in early January reaffirmed support for the

¹⁶³ "Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Türkiye, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE." Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 2, 2026.

¹⁶⁴ "Fidan Discusses Gaza Peace Plan with Arab Counterparts." *Hürriyet Daily News*, January 19, 2026.

¹⁶⁵ "Joint Statement from the Mediators on the Formation of the Palestinian Technocratic Committee to Administer the Gaza Strip." Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 14, 2026.

Palestinian cause and UNRWA's neutrality against aid disruptions.¹⁶⁶ President Erdogan's public solidarity, including aid offers via UN channels and criticisms of Israel's blockade, rallied domestic and regional support while pressuring for accountability. Despite Israeli rejections of delivery mechanisms, this blend of rhetoric and action underscored Turkey's persistent humanitarian advocacy in early January 2026.

Regional Mediation and Security Efforts

Transitioning from Gaza, Turkey extended its mediation to other regional hotspots in early January 2026. On January 2, Fidan discussed Yemen's crisis with Saudi and UAE officials, addressing the Southern Transitional Council's province seizures to stabilize Red Sea routes and counter proxy conflicts.¹⁶⁷ The next day, Ankara endorsed Yemeni President Rashad al-Alimi's conference for southern factions,¹⁶⁸ supporting Saudi-led initiatives for unity and constitutional solutions, thereby enhancing Turkey's credibility in Gulf dynamics amid sovereignty threats.

In Syria, Turkey ramped up civilian-protection efforts amid resumed fighting in Aleppo's Sheikh Maqsood and Achrafieh neighborhoods in early January.¹⁶⁹ Turkish intelligence facilitated dialogues and evacuations against YPG/PKK resistance and Syrian operations, while Fidan criticized the YPG's separatist agenda, accusing coordination with actors like Israel and calling for withdrawals to restore government authority.¹⁷⁰ He also suggested potential Damascus military action against US-backed forces if talks failed, advocating peaceful Kurdish integration to combat ISIS remnants and prevent fragmentation.

However, Turkey stepped back from mediating between Afghanistan and Pakistan in early January after failed rounds involving Qatar and Saudi Arabia, citing unresolved demands.¹⁷¹ This pragmatic withdrawal preserved diplomatic capital, illustrating selective engagement in intractable disputes and linking to broader security strategies.

Bilateral Relations and Economic Initiatives

Turkey's regional mediation seamlessly connected to bilateral economic pursuits in early January 2026, diversifying its influence. On January 2, Ankara waived visa requirements for Chinese citizens to boost tourism,¹⁷² a non-reciprocal move praised for deepening ties but criticized for security risks to Uyghur communities. In Somalia, a joint labor commission protocol and 2026-2027 action plan were signed, emphasizing inspections, health, migration,

¹⁶⁶ "UN Palestinian Refugee Agency to Open Office in Türkiye's Capital Ankara." Daily Sabah, January 8, 2026.

¹⁶⁷ "Turkish Foreign Minister Discusses Yemen Developments with Saudi, UAE Counterparts." Middle East Monitor, January 2, 2026.

¹⁶⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Yemen. "Turkey Welcomes Invitation of President Al-Alimi to Hold Conference for Southerners, Supports Saudi Efforts." January 3, 2026.

¹⁶⁹ Al Jazeera. "Updates: Syria to Launch Military Operation Against SDF in Aleppo." January 7, 2026.

¹⁷⁰ MacDonald, Alex. "Syrian Army Shells Kurdish Areas of Aleppo Declared 'Closed Military Zones.'" *Middle East Eye*, January 7, 2026.

¹⁷¹ "Turkey Withdraws from Afghanistan-Pakistan Mediation amid Rising Tensions." Ariana News, March 10, 2026.

¹⁷² "Türkiye Grants 90-Day Visa-Free Entry for Chinese Citizens Starting Jan 2." VisaHQ, January 2, 2026.

and training for mutual growth in the Horn of Africa.¹⁷³

Fidan's early January discussions with his Egyptian counterpart extended to Sudan and Somalia tensions, rejecting Israel's Somaliland recognition to uphold regional stability against external interference. Meanwhile, Admiral Cihat Yaycı defended the Libya-Turkey maritime deal in an interview, claiming 39,000 km² for cooperation amid disputes from Greece, Egypt, and Libyan figures,¹⁷⁴ highlighting resource diplomacy in the Mediterranean.

Domestically, Erdogan's early January legislative agenda addressed child protection online, social reforms, and fiscal discipline under the "Century of Turkey" program,¹⁷⁵ reinforcing internal resilience. Fidan's UAE visit in early January, meeting President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and others, deepened relations amid global challenges, with overlaps involving Israeli officials sparking speculation on discreet dialogues.

Global Stances and Defense Partnerships

Extending beyond regional ties, Turkey asserted global positions in early January 2026. On January 3, Ankara condemned US actions capturing Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, offering mediation and rejecting oil-grab claims to safeguard economic links.¹⁷⁶ Seeking membership in the September 2025 Saudi-Pakistan defense pact, Turkey attended naval cooperation meetings at its Naval Forces Command Headquarters,¹⁷⁷ marking concrete steps in military deepening post-rapprochement.

These pursuits aimed to integrate into security alignments, bolstering capabilities amid geopolitical shifts. Overall, Turkey's maneuvers in early January 2026, from humanitarian coalitions to defense pacts, demonstrated a cohesive strategy to expand influence, navigating risks of overextension while asserting autonomy in a multipolar world. In sum, Turkey's January 2026 maneuvers showcased calculated diplomacy, from leading Gaza aid coalitions and endorsing Palestinian governance to mediating Yemen and Syrian crises.

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

January marked a critical inflection point in Gulf regional dynamics, driven primarily by a decisive shift in Yemen's balance of power. A rapid Saudi-backed offensive enabled the Presidential Leadership Council to dismantle the UAE-aligned Southern Transitional Council's territorial control, marginalize its leadership, and consolidate authority across southern Yemen. Riyadh moved quickly to institutionalize these gains through the formation of a unified Supreme Military Committee, while signalling the possibility of a renewed

¹⁷³ "Türkiye, Somalia Sign Joint Labor Commission Protocol, 2026-27 Action Plan." Anadolu Agency, January 2, 2026.

¹⁷⁴ "Libya-Turkey Maritime Deal Secures 39,000 sq. km, Says Admiral Cihat Yaycı." Libya Observer, January 2, 2026.

¹⁷⁵ "Erdogan Says 2026 Will Be 'Year of Reform' for Türkiye." Hürriyet Daily News, January 7, 2026.

¹⁷⁶ "US Senator Backs Reports Maduro Was Offered Exile in Turkey Before Raid." Turkish Minute, January 5, 2026.

¹⁷⁷ "Turkey Will Not Join Saudi-Pakistan Defense Agreement, Sources Say." Times of Israel, January 5, 2026

strategic focus on the Houthi-controlled north. The Houthis responded by widening the scope of their threats, linking Yemen's trajectory to developments involving Israel, Somaliland, and potential U.S. action against Iran.

Beyond Yemen, the month highlighted accelerating recalibration across the Gulf. Saudi Arabia combined military consolidation with diplomatic and economic outreach while managing, rather than resolving, mounting tensions with the UAE. Abu Dhabi pivoted away from direct engagement in Yemen toward a maritime-focused and diplomatically defensive posture across the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, while elevating its role as a global mediator. Qatar reinforced its positioning as a diplomatic and humanitarian interlocutor, expanding technology cooperation with the United States and deepening engagement in Somalia, while Kuwait and Bahrain maintained more cautious but aligned postures. Collectively, January underscored a pattern of selective coordination alongside deepening competition, pointing to a more fragmented and contested Gulf regional order.

UAE: Gulf Rivalries and the Horn of Africa as Inflection Point

January marked a strategic inflection point for the UAE. Following its full withdrawal from Yemen, Abu Dhabi shifted away from direct military engagement toward a maritime-focused and diplomatically defensive posture. Analysts noted a reassessment of Emirati interests across the Bab el-Mandeb and the wider Horn of Africa following the collapse of STC territorial control.

Saudi Arabia accused the UAE of facilitating Aidarous al-Zubaidi's escape to Abu Dhabi via Somaliland, further aggravating bilateral tensions. The UAE called for restraint and avoided public escalation while recalibrating its regional footprint.¹⁷⁸

Across Africa, the UAE deepened engagement with the African Union on Agenda 2063, AfCFTA implementation, water resilience, and its \$1 billion "AI for Development" pledge. Reports published by Middle East Eye alleged that Emirati cargo flights to Ethiopia were supplying arms to Sudan's Rapid Support Forces, with Ethiopia emerging as a logistical corridor.¹⁷⁹ Unconfirmed claims also suggested the UAE might donate Mirage 2000 fighter jets to Ethiopia, coinciding with the Ethiopian Air Force's 90th anniversary celebrations attended by Emirati military assets.¹⁸⁰

Globally, the UAE sought to bolster its diplomatic profile. It hosted Ukrainian and Russian delegations for trilateral talks¹⁸¹, reinforcing its mediator ambitions, and President Mohammed bin Zayed visited Moscow to deepen ties with Russia.¹⁸² Despite reports that it

¹⁷⁸ Al Jazeera. "Yemen's Saudi-Led Coalition Says STC's al-Zubaidi Fled to UAE via Somaliland." January 8, 2026.

¹⁷⁹ Hooper, Simon, and Oscar Rickett. 2026. "Exclusive: UAE Flights Linked to Sudan War Tracked from Israel to Ethiopia." *Middle East Eye*, January 21, 2026.

¹⁸⁰ Ekanem, Solomon. "The UAE Is Transferring Fighter Jets to African Nations, but France Decides Who Benefits." *Business Insider Africa*, January 29, 2026.

¹⁸¹ Al Jazeera. "Russia-Ukraine War Updates: Talks End in Abu Dhabi without Breakthrough." January 24, 2026.

¹⁸² Reuters. "Russian President Putin to Meet UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan." January 29, 2026.

might support U.S. military action against Iran, Abu Dhabi formally stated that it would not allow its airspace to be used for such an attack.¹⁸³

Qatar: Regional Visibility

Regionally, Qatar edged closer to Saudi Arabia as interests converged around containing UAE influence. On January 20, Doha signed a defence cooperation agreement with Somalia covering training, capacity-building, and security collaboration, widely interpreted in the context of Israel's recognition of Somaliland.¹⁸⁴

On January 13, Qatar and the United States signed the "Pax Silica" Declaration, a landmark agreement on advanced technology and AI cooperation that positioned Doha as a key U.S. technology hub. On January 14, Qatar announced the launch of the second phase of the Gaza ceasefire process, further consolidating its mediation role.¹⁸⁵

Regional Context

By late January, several Gulf monarchies, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, had joined the Trump-backed "Board of Peace," reflecting a shared interest in maintaining access to Washington while engaging the Palestinian issue within a U.S.-led framework.¹⁸⁶ At the same time, divergent positions on Yemen, Iran, and the Horn of Africa underscored persistent intra-Gulf fractures, even as pragmatic coordination continued on select diplomatic and economic fronts.

Saudi Arabia: Gulf Rivalry and Iran's Future

Throughout January, Saudi Arabia consolidated its position as the central external actor shaping Yemen's trajectory. Riyadh advanced plans to convene a comprehensive settlement conference, extending invitations to multiple actors, including the STC, even as it decisively marginalized UAE-aligned factions following the PLC's military victories.

Saudi diplomacy remained highly active. In early January, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman held calls with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan¹⁸⁷, while Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan met counterparts from Somalia and Egypt to "reaffirm commitments to sovereignty and regional stability". On January 7, Prince Faisal travelled to Washington for talks with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio¹⁸⁸, followed by defence-focused engagements with Pakistan and Turkey, including the inaugural Saudi Turkish Naval Forces Cooperation Meeting and discussions on converting Saudi loans to Pakistan into a JF-17

¹⁸³ Reuters. "UAE Bars Use of Its Airspace for Military Action against Iran." January 26, 2026.

¹⁸⁴ Beatrice Farhat, "Somalia, Qatar Sign Defense Pact after Mogadishu Scraps UAE Deals: What to Know," *Al-Monitor*, January 20, 2026.

¹⁸⁵ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "The United States Welcomes Qatar's Signing of Pax Silica Declaration," media note, January 12, 2026.

¹⁸⁶ "Qatar, Saudi Arabia among Nine Countries Joining Trump's 'Board of Peace'," *Al Jazeera*, January 21, 2026.

¹⁸⁷ *Middle East Monitor*. "Erdogan Offers to Mediate with bin Salman to Ease Dialogue in Yemen." January 5, 2026.

¹⁸⁸ *Asharq Al-Awsat*. "Saudi FM Arrives in Washington on Official Visit." January 7, 2026.

fighter jet deal.¹⁸⁹

Saudi Arabia also witnessed developments on the economic front. On January 11, the Capital Market Authority announced that Saudi equity markets would be fully opened to all non-resident foreign investors by February 1.¹⁹⁰

Tensions with the UAE remained significant. Following Abu Dhabi's withdrawal from Yemen on January 9, Riyadh reportedly pressured UAE-aligned figures within the PLC to align with a unity agenda or face political exclusion.

Saudi Arabia also remained active in Sudan¹⁹¹, seeking to curb what it considers to be UAE-linked supply routes to the Rapid Support Forces, and in the Horn of Africa, where it opposed Israel's recognition of Somaliland and reaffirmed Somalia's territorial integrity.

On Iran, Saudi messaging appeared increasingly ambiguous. While Riyadh publicly stated it would not allow its airspace or bases to be used in a U.S. strike on Iran, reports suggested that Saudi defence officials privately warned Washington that inaction could embolden Tehran, raising questions about a potential recalibration of Saudi risk tolerance.¹⁹²

By late January, Saudi officials publicly emphasized the importance of maintaining strong relations with the UAE. Speaking alongside Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Prince Faisal bin Farhan described the bilateral relationship as critical to regional stability and welcomed the UAE's decision to leave the Yemen file largely in Saudi hands.¹⁹³

Section Three: International/Regional Organizations and Global Powers Engagement

African Union Leadership Amid Multiple Crises

In January 2026, the African Union's engagement in Somalia remained a central pillar of regional security as the newly created African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) continued coordinated action against militant threats and faced evolving strategic challenges. AUSSOM¹⁹⁴ forces, working alongside the Somali National Army, conducted a joint operation in the Lower Shabelle region in mid-January that resulted in more than 30 Al-Shabaab militants being killed. This engagement, supported by ground and air assets, demonstrated that, despite ongoing resource constraints, AU-backed operations

¹⁸⁹ Mishra, Neerja. "What Is 'Islamic NATO'? Turkey in Talks to Join Pakistan-Saudi Defence Bloc, Raising Regional Stakes." *Firstpost*, January 14, 2026.

¹⁹⁰ *Asharq Al-Awsat*. "Saudi Stock Market Opens Its Doors to Direct Foreign Investment." January 30, 2026.

¹⁹¹ Al-Faroug, Omar, Hassan Alnaser, Mashair Idris, and Mohamed Alagra. "Sudan Nashra: Somalia Enters Sudan-Egypt-Saudi Arabia-Turkey Axis | Sudanese, Ethiopian Sources: Trump's GERD Initiative Could Pave Way for Further Talks with Addis Ababa." *Mada Masr*, January 22, 2026.

¹⁹² Ravid, Barak. "Saudi Defense Minister Warns Trump Inaction on Iran Would Strengthen Regime." *Axios*, January 31, 2026.

¹⁹³ *Arab News*. "Prince Turki Al-Faisal Reaffirms Strong Saudi-UAE Ties, Urges Reliance on Official Sources." January 30, 2026.

¹⁹⁴ Ethiopian News Agency, "Over 30 Al-Shabaab Militants Killed in Joint Operation in Bulunagaad, Lower Shabelle, Somalia," *allAfrica*, January 16, 2026.

remain a key instrument for degrading insurgent capabilities and stabilizing contested areas.

At the same time, Uganda¹⁹⁵, historically the largest troop contributor to AU peace missions in Somalia, announced its intention to withdraw its forces after nearly 19 years of deployment. The announcement by Uganda's military leadership in late January signals a substantial shift in the Horn's security landscape and could materially affect AUSSOM's force posture and operational capacity. As Kampala did not provide a detailed timetable, the implications of this planned exit remain uncertain but are widely seen as a potential structural shift in regional peacekeeping dynamics.

Political-diplomatic efforts also featured prominently in January. On January 6, the African Union Peace¹⁹⁶ and the Security Council issued a communique strongly rejecting Israel's unilateral recognition of Somaliland's independence, emphasizing that such actions undermine the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Somalia, core principles of the AU's Constitutive Act and continental peace architecture. This stance reaffirmed AU commitment to maintaining state boundaries and countering unilateral moves that could destabilize the Horn.

These developments occurred amid broader concerns about AUSSOM's¹⁹⁷ sustainability. Mission leadership and regional partners have flagged funding shortfalls and logistical constraints as risks that could undermine progress against Al-Shabaab if not addressed, pointing to the need for sustained international support to preserve operational momentum

United Nations: Escalating Humanitarian and Atrocity Alarms

In January 2026, the United Nations intensified its response to humanitarian and security crises in Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia. Early January missions to El-Fasher uncovered widespread destruction, killings, and shortages of essentials, labeled a "crime scene" by UN observers. By late January, UNHCR noted massive displacement, with the High Commissioner for Human Rights calling it an unrelenting "horror and hell."¹⁹⁸ This underscores ongoing atrocities in Darfur and the need for urgent humanitarian access.

In South Sudan¹⁹⁹, early reports showed fewer conflict deaths but rising abductions. Mid-month warnings from UNMISS highlighted risks of mass violence and ethnic targeting, fueled by inflammatory rhetoric. From January 29–31, Secretary-General Guterres addressed escalated fighting in Jonglei State, displacing 180,000–250,000 people and prompting evacuations. These trends emphasize persistent civilian threats despite reduced fatalities.

¹⁹⁵ "Uganda Announces Plans to Withdraw Troops from Somalia after 19 Years," *Hiiraan Online*, January 26, 2026,

¹⁹⁶ Peace and Security Council, "Communique of the 1324th Meeting of the PSC Held on 6 January 2026 at the Ministerial Level, on the Preservation of the Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, Unity, and Stability of the Federal Republic of Somalia," African Union - Peace and Security Department, January 6, 2026,

¹⁹⁷ Shire Abdi, "AU's Somalia Peacekeeping Mission Warns Funding Gaps Threaten Gains Against Al-Shabaab," *Dawan Africa*, January 14, 2026,

¹⁹⁸ "Sudan's People Endure 'Horror and Hell' in War, Says UN Rights Chief," *Al Jazeera*, January 18, 2026,

¹⁹⁹ "South Sudan: UN and Rights Experts Warn Against Risk of Mass Violence in Jonglei," *UN News*, January 26, 2026,

In Somalia, assuming the UN Security Council²⁰⁰ presidency on January 1 allowed Mogadishu to focus on Red Sea stability, counterterrorism, and opposing Somaliland recognition. January meetings in Nairobi with opposition figures advanced constitutional reforms and elections. This role amplified attention on regional security and governance.

Humanitarian funding saw²⁰¹ Ethiopia included in a \$2 billion UN–US agreement for 2026, aiding displacement, food insecurity, and climate issues in 17 countries. Overall, January 2026 highlighted UN efforts in protection, dialogue, and funding amid intersecting crises.

IGAD: Regional Integration Under Strain

Despite internal fractures, IGAD pursued deeper cooperation. The organization condemned the HirShabelle assassination attempt²⁰². It rejected Israel's Somaliland recognition, and urged dialogue. It advanced consultations on its 2026–2030 Peace and Security Strategy²⁰³. Eritrea's formal withdrawal took effect on January 29, prompting expressions of regret and appeals for reconsideration from the Secretariat.

European Union, ICC, and Multilateral Platforms

EU envoys participated in Nairobi opposition talks focused on constitutional reform and national unity (January 26–30). The International Criminal Court continued to document RSF war crimes in Darfur²⁰⁴, highlighting the use of mass graves to conceal atrocities and providing briefings to the UN Security Council. The Horn of Africa²⁰⁵ Initiative's 27th Ministerial Meeting (late January) concentrated on energy access, regional power trade, and East Africa Power Pool reforms, building on \$13.6 billion already mobilized by partners including the African Development Bank, European Union, and United Kingdom.

United States

On January 3, 2026, US special forces conducted a targeted operation in Caracas, capturing Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, on charges of narco-terrorism and drug trafficking.²⁰⁶ They were extradited to the US for trial in New York, where Maduro pleaded not guilty, claiming he was "kidnapped." Trump announced the US would "run" Venezuela temporarily to ensure a "safe transition," prioritizing American oil

²⁰⁰ "Somalia: Somali Opposition Bloc Meets Foreign Diplomats in Nairobi Amid Political Tensions," allAfrica, January 26, 2026.

²⁰¹ "U.S. Approach to Humanitarian Action," U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, January 12, 2026.

²⁰² Mary Wambui, "IGAD's Deputy Executive Secretary, Mohamed Abdi Were, Condemns Assassination Attempt on HirShabelle Leader," *Eastleigh Voice*, January 3, 2026.

²⁰³ Intergovernmental Authority on Development, "Consultancy to Develop a CEWARN Regional Strategy Framework for Integrating Climate Security into National Peace and Security Policies," IGAD, January 12, 2026.

²⁰⁴ United Nations, "Sudan: Atrocities 'Repeated Town by Town', ICC Prosecutor Tells UN Security Council," UN News, January 19, 2026.

²⁰⁵ Pulse of Africa, "Horn of Africa Initiative Ministerial Meeting Highlights Regional Energy Integration," POA News, January 29, 2026.

²⁰⁶ **Evans, Gareth.** "Spies, Drones and Blowtorches: How the US Captured Maduro." *BBC News*, January 4, 2026.

companies' access to reserves and imposing tariffs on Venezuelan exports. This marked the first major US military intervention in Latin America since Panama in 1989. Trump explicitly invoked the 1823 Monroe Doctrine—originally aimed at preventing European colonialism in the Americas—to justify the action, framing it as protection against "foreign adversaries" like Russia, China, and Cuba in the Western Hemisphere.

On the diplomatic front, Trump attended the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, leading a US delegation. In his keynote speech on January 21, he outlined a "bold vision" for American prosperity, emphasizing transatlantic strength, NATO reforms, and US acquisitions like Greenland bases.²⁰⁷ He also reiterated offers to mediate the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute, claiming US financing of the dam and proposing "fair negotiations" during a bilateral with Egyptian President Al-Sisi.²⁰⁸ This illustrates the influence of Egypt's lobbying efforts on U.S. perception, rather than a reflection of the dam's true financing and reality.

From January 24–27, US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau and AFRICOM Commander Lt. Gen. Dagvin Anderson visited Ethiopia as part of an East Africa tour (including Egypt, Kenya, and Djibouti). Accompanied by US Ambassador Ervin Massinga, they met Ethiopian officials, including at the African Union, to discuss economic ties, regional peace, security, and humanitarian issues. The trip demonstrated US efforts to strengthen defense and commercial partnerships in the region. The delegation visited Ethiopian Air Force Headquarters and attended the Black Lion Air Expo (January 23–27, 2026) in Bishoftu, commemorating the Ethiopian Air Force's (ETAF) 90th anniversary (ETAF90).²⁰⁹ The expo featured air shows, technology displays, and forums on aviation hubs and skills development. Landau attended the closing ceremony, touring exhibits and delivering remarks on "mutual security objectives" and "shared commitment to regional stability." He reaffirmed US commitment to Ethiopia, highlighting deepening defense ties amid regional tensions.

Separately, the US formally exited the World Health Organization, ending funding and participation,²¹⁰ fulfilling Trump's pledge and signaling retreat from multilateral health pacts.

Trump has launched a new "Board of Peace" to address the Gaza conflict, bypassing the UN. Several Muslim-majority countries—including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Qatar—joined, along with Israel. Russia may participate and offered \$1 billion from frozen assets.²¹¹ The board, led by Trump and U.S. officials, aims to achieve

²⁰⁷ Magee, Caolán, Tim Hume, and Stephen Quillen. "Trump Live News: US President in Davos as Greenland Threats Spark Outrage." *Al Jazeera*, January 21, 2026.

²⁰⁸ Endale, Ashenafi. "GERD in Spotlight Again as Ethiopia Searches for Footing in Trump's New World." *The Reporter Ethiopia*, January 24, 2026.

²⁰⁹ "US Officials Join Ethiopia's Air Force 90th Anniversary Celebrations." *EBC English*, January 27, 2026.

²¹⁰ Goodman, Brenda and Allen Isabella. "Trump Administration Completes US' Split From the World Health Organization." *CNN*, January 22, 2026.

²¹¹ Gritten, David, and Rachel Hagan. "Seven More Countries Agree to Join Trump's Board of Peace." *BBC News*, January 21, 2026.

a permanent Gaza ceasefire, reconstruction, and lasting peace.

In mid-January, the United States announced that Phase Two of the Gaza ceasefire plan, embedded in President Trump's 20-point peace framework. It had formally begun with the aim of moving beyond the initial ceasefire toward demilitarization, transitional governance, and reconstruction of Gaza.²¹² U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff stated the second phase would establish a transitional technocratic Palestinian administration to manage daily affairs and advance reconstruction, though implementation remained challenging amid ongoing disagreements and continuing violence on the ground.

In late January, tensions between the United States and Iran escalated sharply as a U.S. naval carrier strike group, led by the USS Abraham Lincoln, was deployed to the Middle East amid renewed threats by President Trump of military action if Iran did not curb its nuclear activities and respond to protest-related violence; Tehran rejected talks under what it described as a “threatening” atmosphere and warned against military intervention, while regional actors pushed for de-escalation to avoid broader conflict. Iran's foreign minister and Saudi counterparts also publicly cautioned that any escalation could have “dangerous consequences” for regional stability, highlighting the risk of confrontation even as behind-the-scenes diplomacy continued to avert outright war.²¹³

United Kingdom

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer conducted an official three-day visit to China (January 28–31, 2026)—the first by a UK prime minister in eight years—aiming to reset bilateral relations, deepen economic cooperation, and expand trade and security dialogue with President Xi Jinping and other senior Chinese officials. He led a large UK business and cultural delegation to Beijing in pursuit of stronger trade links, cooperation on issues such as migrant smuggling and national security, and a more “consistent, pragmatic” partnership despite domestic criticism over human rights and strategic concerns, reflecting London's effort to balance ties with Beijing alongside its traditional Western alliances.²¹⁴

China also designated 2026 as the *China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges* and continued the long-standing practice of starting the year with high-level engagement in Africa. Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited several African countries, including Ethiopia, to deepen political trust, implement outcomes from the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and expand strategic cooperation. China reaffirmed its support for African partners and emphasized mutual development and cultural exchange.²¹⁵

²¹² **Borger, Julian, and Lorenzo Tondo.** “US Announces Start of Second Phase of Gaza Ceasefire.” *The Guardian*, Jan 14.

²¹³ Ali, Faisal, Caolán Magee, Urooba Jamal, and Jillian Kestler-D'Amours. “Updates: US, Iran Ramp Up Rhetoric as Carrier Lincoln Forms in Middle East.” *Al Jazeera*, January 27, 2026.

²¹⁴ Hale, Erin, and News Agencies. “China's Xi Jinping, UK's Keir Starmer Agree to Deepen Economic Ties.” *Al Jazeera*, January 29, 2026.

²¹⁵ “China–Africa ‘Year of People-to-People Exchanges’ Launched at AU Headquarters as Wang Yi Begins Four-Nation Tour.” *Capital Ethiopia*, January 8, 2026.



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