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The Greater Horn: Strategic Brief

Issue No.13 | July 2026

By Horn Review

The Horn in July: Strategic Realignments in a Changing Regional Order

Issue No.13 | July 2026



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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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 July 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 policy making.

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The Horn in July: Strategic Realignments in a Changing Regional Order

Executive Summary

July 2026 marked a significant period of strategic transition across the Greater Horn of Africa, where domestic political developments, regional security challenges, economic reforms, and expanding international engagement increasingly intersected to reshape the region's geopolitical landscape. While armed conflicts and political instability continued to define parts of the Horn, governments simultaneously pursued diplomatic outreach, institutional reforms, infrastructure development, and economic integration, reflecting a region balancing immediate security concerns with longer-term strategic ambitions.

Ethiopia remained at the center of regional dynamics throughout the month. The federal government continued implementing post-conflict stabilization measures while navigating renewed tensions in Tigray and localized security challenges elsewhere. At the same time, Addis Ababa accelerated macroeconomic reforms through continued cooperation with international financial institutions, expanded digital and climate initiatives, and strengthened engagement with continental and global partners.

Across the wider Horn, political transitions and security developments continued to evolve. Sudan's civil war remained the region's most destabilizing crisis, with continued military operations and humanitarian consequences affecting neighboring countries and regional security calculations. Somalia advanced electoral and governance reforms while confronting persistent security threats and tensions within its federal framework. Somaliland continued expanding international engagement and economic cooperation, while Djibouti further consolidated its position as the region's principal logistics and maritime gateway. Eritrea pursued an active diplomatic agenda alongside continued domestic political control, while Kenya and South Sudan balanced internal political developments with broader regional security and economic priorities.

Beyond the Horn itself, the Red Sea and Middle East continued to exert a growing influence on regional affairs. Egypt, the Gulf states, Türkiye, and other external partners expanded diplomatic, economic, and security engagement throughout the region, highlighting the Horn's increasing strategic value.

Taken together, the developments of July illustrate a Greater Horn that is increasingly defined by interconnected rather than isolated challenges. Domestic political transitions, regional security dynamics, economic transformation, and intensifying external engagement are collectively reshaping the strategic landscape. As governments seek to strengthen resilience while navigating evolving regional and international partnerships, the Greater Horn continues to emerge as one of Africa's most consequential geopolitical theatres, with developments carrying implications far beyond the region itself.

Section One: Political Transitions, Security Dynamics, and Strategic Realignments

1.1 Ethiopia: Security, Economic Transformation, and Diplomatic Momentum

Throughout July 2026, the federal government of Ethiopia reaffirmed its constitutional mandate by balancing firm sovereign defense mechanisms with structured avenues for national reconciliation. Internal stability experienced friction due to unilateral political maneuvers and unlawful security mobilizations within the Tigray region. The European Union conducted an urgent diplomatic intervention calling for the immediate implementation of the Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, during which European delegates engaged regional and federal representatives to safeguard the peace process.¹

European Union criticized the Tigray People's Liberation Front for establishing an unauthorized parallel regional council and advancing unilateral measures, warning that such actions threaten long-term constitutional stability. Exacerbating these localized political dynamics, Human Rights Watch documented a systematic campaign of forced mobilization and mass conscription by regional authorities in Tigray, confirming that coercive operations targeted thousands of civilians, including children as young as 15 years old, through street abductions and nighttime house raids.² This widespread abuse generated pervasive public apprehension and triggered fresh displacement across neighboring communities. Demonstrators gathered in Addis Ababa to protest repression and forced recruitment in Tigray, while the Chairman of the Tigray Democratic Solidarity Party appealed for political unity to compel full implementation of the peace deal.³

In response to these localized security challenges, the federal government pursued multiple diplomatic and constitutional avenues to deter active conflict and preserve national integrity. Federal authorities emphasized that armed mobilization threatens national unity and put forward constructive proposals aimed at reconciliation, while maintaining that a sustainable resolution requires full regional disarmament and compliance with nationwide governance frameworks.⁴

During the 30th Regular Session of the House of Peoples' Representatives on July 7, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed outlined the government's progress under the Pretoria Agreement, which included demobilizing over 60,000 former combatants and rebuilding essential infrastructure across Tigray.⁵ The Prime Minister criticized disruptive political factions for

¹ European Union Delegation to Ethiopia. 2026. "EU Statement on the Implementation of the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Northern Ethiopia." Press Release, June 29, 2026.

² Human Rights Watch. 2026. "Ethiopia: Tigray Authorities Forcibly Recruiting Civilians." *Human Rights Watch*, July 6, 2026.

³ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026b. "Demonstrators in Addis Ababa Call for Adherence to Pretoria Agreement and End to Forced Mobilization in Tigray." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 20, 2026.

⁴ Office of the Prime Minister of Ethiopia. 2026. "Official Statement on Peace and Security Implementation Frameworks in Tigray." Press Release, July 5, 2026.

⁵ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026a. "House Approves Ethiopia's Carbon Market Proclamation." *Ethiopian News Agency*, June 30,

risking renewed conflict through daily provocations while affirming the government's military readiness to neutralize internal threats.

Parallel to these security enforcement measures, the state expanded peaceful civic channels through the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission. Having finalized its preparatory phase, the commission officially activated the final national conference stage by unveiling eight core thematic pillars designed to guide wide-ranging, structured consensus-building talks. On July 14, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed issued a public address urging all citizens to participate actively in the dialogue to secure sustainable peace.⁶ The commission conducted orientation sessions for incoming participants before officially opening the National Dialogue Conference on July 15, in Addis Ababa. The conference convened over 4,000 representatives from across the country to address foundational issues including state-building,⁷ federalism, and the rule of law. Delegates worked through small committees of 10 and 50 participants to synthesize perspectives supported by expert briefings. On July 19, the commission issued a stern warning against false information intended to undermine the proceedings, urging citizens to rely strictly on verified official updates. Through these combined measures, the state demonstrated that political dispute resolution belongs within peaceful constitutional structures rather than regional armed conflict.

Economic governance throughout July reflected a sustained commitment to macroeconomic transformation, fiscal discipline, and domestic revenue enhancement. On July 1, the International Monetary Fund finalized its fifth review of Ethiopia's Extended Credit Facility, immediately unlocking 464 million dollars in new funding and bringing total program disbursements to approximately 2.65 billion dollars.⁸ These front-loaded resources provided vital liquidity to cushion external macroeconomic shocks and support ongoing monetary adjustments. Building upon this international support, the House of Peoples' Representatives approved the Federal Tax Administration Reform Bill, introducing an independent mediation mechanism to resolve taxpayer disputes while strengthening accountability and efficiency. Parliament further expanded green financial frameworks by ratifying the Ethiopian Carbon Market Proclamation, establishing a comprehensive regulatory system under the National Carbon Market Strategy spanning 2025 to 2035 to enable carbon trading under the Paris Agreement.⁹

These legislative advances reinforced the Homegrown Economic Reform Agenda, whose milestone achievements were presented at the Ethiopia Delivers national summit, where senior officials displayed evidence of rising export performance, increased revenue

2026.

⁶ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026b. "Ethiopia Set to Begin Historic National Dialogue to Build Consensus on Key National Issues." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 11, 2026.

⁷ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "National Dialogue Conference Officially Opens in Addis Ababa with Over 4,000 Delegates." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 15, 2026.

⁸ Borkena. 2026. "Ethiopia Secures \$464 Million IMF Funding." *Borkena*, July 2, 2026.

⁹ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026a. "House Approves Ethiopia's Carbon Market Proclamation." *Ethiopian News Agency*, June 30, 2026.

collection, and disciplined public finance adjustments.¹⁰To diversify national revenue channels, the government designated tourism as a core economic driver under the strategic theme The New Economic Motor.

On July 3, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed inspected completed corridor development projects and the community-managed Dorze Lodge in Arba Minch, emphasizing that modern urban infrastructure improves local commerce and enhances regional tourism potential.¹¹ Corporate growth within state-adjacent sectors reflected similar strength, as Ethio Telecom announced on July 23, that it generated 215.8 billion Birr in annual revenue, representing a 33.2 percent increase driven by expanded 4G and 5G networks serving 90.1 million subscribers.¹²The telecom operator also reported registering nearly 32 million citizens under the national digital ID Fayda program.¹³Furthermore, on July 29, Ethiopia joined the UN Economic Commission for Africa's Transforming Health Financing in Africa Initiative as an early adopter to accelerate sustainable domestic health sector financing.

Long-term structural growth was further supported through human capital investments and strategic international integration. On July 24, Addis Ababa Mayor Adanech Abiebie launched the construction of Ethiopia's first Smart Polytechnic College in partnership with the Menschen fuer Menschen Foundation to provide technology-driven vocational training in advanced manufacturing.¹⁴Concurrently, the state expanded the flagship 5 Million Coders initiative, announcing plans to scale enrollment to seven million citizens by late 2026 to build digital capacity . To broaden sovereign funding sources beyond traditional Western credit arrangements, the Council of Ministers endorsed a draft proclamation for Ethiopia's official accession to the BRICS New Development Bank, detailing the acquisition of 2,945 operational shares valued at 100,000 dollars each .

Strategic defense and regional security policy in July 2026 focused on neutralizing cross-border threats, protecting maritime corridors, and reinforcing national sovereignty. Ethiopian National Defense Force Field Marshal Birhanu Jula issued a warning regarding security across the Red Sea corridor and the Horn of Africa, emphasizing that shifting geopolitical alignments and cross-border insurgencies pose complex risks to national stability.¹⁵The armed forces accelerated internal reforms, modernization programs, and defensive perimeters to counter potential proxy activities along vulnerable border zones.To solidify technological

¹⁰ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Parliament Approves €124.6 Million Concessional Loans from Italy and France for Budgetary Support and Administrative Modernization." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 18, 2026.

¹¹ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Prime Minister Abiy Highlights Corridor Development as Catalyst for Livable, Modern Cities." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 3, 2026. .

¹² Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Ethio Telecom Generates 215.8 Billion Birr in Revenue During Just-Ended Fiscal Year." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 23, 2026.

¹³ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Nat'l Dialogue Builds Momentum Through Inclusive Consultations: Chief Commissioner." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 23, 2026.

¹⁴ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Mayor Adanech Abiebie Launches Construction of Ethiopia's First Smart Polytechnic College." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 24, 2026.

¹⁵ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "ENDF Strengthened through Reforms Undertaken Amid Complex Security Environment: Field Marshal Birhanu." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 4, 2026.

sovereignty within national security, the Ministry of Defense inaugurated an advanced central defense laboratory on July 26, dedicated to artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and strategic research.¹⁶ Concurrently, bilateral defense cooperation expanded when Field Marshal Birhanu Jula held talks with U.S. AFRICOM Commander General Dagvin Anderson while co-hosting the African Logistics and Communications Symposium in Addis Ababa, focusing on joint counter-terrorism efforts and logistics sustainment. In parallel, the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) released its annual performance report detailing successful operations disrupting insurgent logistics networks, securing strategic infrastructure such as the GERD, protecting macroeconomic reforms, and achieving zero-finding ICAO aviation security audits.

Addressing parliament on July 7, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed articulated three core pillars for self-reliance to safeguard national sovereignty, stressing strong institutions, transforming external challenges into development opportunities, and independently setting national priorities.¹⁷ The Prime Minister affirmed that neighboring states pose no existential threat to Ethiopia's sovereignty, positioning the military posture as strictly defensive and stability-oriented.

To directly address shared regional threats, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud completed his fourth official working visit to Addis Ababa within six months, engaging in high-level consultations with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to synchronize counter-terrorism frameworks and disrupt Al-Shabaab operations along shared borders.¹⁸ Institutional police capacity was simultaneously expanded on July 9, 2026, when the Ethiopian Federal Police signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to enhance regional security cooperation. This agreement coincided with the launch of the Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu Scholarship Programme in Forensic Science at the Ethiopian Police University to train law enforcement personnel across member states in combating transnational crime.¹⁹

Multilateral security coordination was highlighted from July 10, when Ethiopia hosted the Parliamentary Intelligence-Security Forum in Addis Ababa, bringing together international lawmakers and intelligence experts. House Speaker Tagesse Chaffo called for renewed multilateralism to tackle terrorism, cyber threats, and human trafficking,²⁰ while United States Ambassador Ervin Massinga reaffirmed enhanced bilateral security cooperation and information sharing.²¹ On July 15, Ambassador Massinga visited Tigray to engage regional

¹⁶ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "New Central Lab Pivotal to Boost Ethiopia's Defense Capabilities, Says Minister Aisha." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 26, 2026.

¹⁷ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Ethiopia Pursuing Three-Pillar Strategic Self-Reliance to Safeguard Sovereignty: PM Abiy." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 7, 2026.

¹⁸ *Borkena*. 2026. "President Hassan Sheikh Arrives in Ethiopia for 4th Time in Six Months." *Borkena*, June 29, 2026.

¹⁹ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026e. "Ethiopia Launches Regional Forensic Science Scholarship Honouring IGAD Chief Workneh Gebeyehu." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 9, 2026.

²⁰ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026c. "Ethiopian House Speaker Calls for Renewed Multilateralism to Strengthen Collective Security." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 10, 2026.

²¹ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026d. "US Reaffirms Enhanced Security Cooperation with Ethiopia to Advance Regional Peace."

leaders and international aid agencies regarding the Pretoria Peace Agreement, emphasizing open dialogue, adherence to contractual terms, and a transition toward long-term regional stability.²²

Ethiopia leveraged its growing infrastructure capacity during July to consolidate its position as an energy and logistics hub across East Africa. On July 9, member states convened in Addis Ababa for the 22nd Eastern Africa Power Pool Council of Ministers meeting, where Ethiopia officially assumed the chairmanship from Egypt. Ethiopian Electric Power announced that physical infrastructure required for cross-border power trading had been fully completed across the regional grid. Energy integration deepened on July 10, when Kenya Power and the Ethiopian Electric Utility signed a renewed electricity supply agreement in Addis Ababa to supply cleaner power to northern Kenyan border areas like Moyale.²³ Domestic renewable capacity received a major boost on July 17, when the African Development Bank approved 110 million dollars for Ethiopia's first 300-megawatt independent wind power project in the Somali Region, developed by AMEA Power at a total cost of 508 million dollars.²⁴

Aviation and logistics infrastructure expanded concurrently to enhance domestic and continental connectivity. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed inaugurated the modernized King Tekle Haymanot Airport in Debre Markos on July 12, 2026, restoring air connectivity to East Gojjam through a 2,400-meter commercial runway after nearly 30 years out of service.²⁵ Internationally, Ethiopian Airlines launched direct passenger flights to Port Louis, Mauritius, on July 12, marking its 41st African destination and supporting African Continental Free Trade Area integration.²⁶ Global commercial integration achieved another major milestone on July 8, when Ethiopia signed a Bilateral Market Access Protocol with Thailand in Geneva as part of its World Trade Organization accession process.²⁷ Demonstrating the immediate impact of trade streamlining, Trade and Regional Integration Minister Kassahun Gofe announced on July 11, that Ethiopia exported 15 million dollars in goods under the AfCFTA framework during the fiscal year while generating record total national exports of 11.195 billion dollars.

Ethiopian foreign policy in July demonstrated a balanced non-aligned approach by expanding economic, political, and security partnerships across global powers and regional

Ethiopian News Agency, July 10, 2026.

²² *The Reporter Ethiopia*. 2026. "US Ambassador Visits Tigray to Review Pretoria Peace Agreement Implementation." *The Reporter Ethiopia*, July 17, 2026.

²³ TUKO.co.ke. 2026. "Inside Kenya Power's Renewed Deal to Buy Ethiopia Electricity at KSh 20/kWh." *TUKO.co.ke*. July 2026.

²⁴ *Borkena*. 2026. "AfDB Approves \$110 Million Financing for Ethiopia's First 300MW Wind Power Project." *Borkena*, July 17, 2026.

²⁵ *Ethiopian News Agency*. 2026. "PM Abiy Inaugurates Modernized Nigus Tekle Haimanot Airport in Debre Markos." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 12, 2026.

²⁶ AllAfrica. 2026. "Ethiopian Airlines Expands African Connectivity." *AllAfrica*. July 13, 2026.

²⁷ *Ethiopian News Agency*. 2026i. "Ethiopia, Thailand Sign Bilateral Market Access Protocol." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 8, 2026.

states. On July 7, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos held bilateral talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Addis Ababa, focusing on trade expansion, technology transfer, and coordination within the BRICS framework.^{28,29} Diplomatic engagement with European partners advanced significantly during visits by EU High Representative Kaja Kallas³⁰ and EU Commissioner Jozef Síkela,³¹ alongside talks with the German Federal Foreign Office State Secretary on July 16.³² European representatives reaffirmed support for Ethiopia's macroeconomic reforms, digital governance, and major infrastructure projects, including the Bishoftu Airport. Financial partnerships with European sovereign entities resulted in parliament approving 124.6 million euros in concessional loans from Italy and France for budget support and administrative modernization.³³ High-level commercial diplomacy was mirrored in technical alignment talks with Apple Incorporated executives in Addis Ababa to integrate global data architectures into domestic infrastructure.

Pan-African leadership remained central to Ethiopia's external posture throughout the month. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed received Senior Minister Romuald Wadagni of Benin in Addis Ababa on July 14, to expand bilateral trade, and consulted with former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo on applying historical lessons to contemporary African conflict resolution. This continental leadership was further highlighted when Addis Ababa hosted the 49th Ordinary Session of the AU Executive Council, during which Ethiopia and Kenya voluntarily elevated their statutory financial contributions to Tier-1 status to advance AU financial self-reliance. On the sidelines, PM Abiy Ahmed also held strategic bilateral talks with Azerbaijan's National Assembly Speaker Sahiba Gafarova to deepen diplomatic ties.

In Gulf diplomacy, Prime Minister Abiy traveled to Doha on July 13, to offer condolences to Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani following the passing of His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. Deputy Prime Minister Temesgen Tiruneh represented Ethiopia at the African Union Extraordinary Summit on Health in Ghana from July 21 to 23,³⁴ holding bilateral talks with Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama.³⁵ Additional diplomatic engagements included talks with Kyrgyz Ambassador Adylbek

²⁸ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "PM Abiy Holds High-Level Talks with Russian FM Lavrov on Strategic Cooperation." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 8, 2026.

²⁹ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Ethiopia, Russia Foreign Ministers Hold Talks." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 7, 2026.

³⁰ European External Action Service. 2026. "EU High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas Visits Addis Ababa." Delegation of the European Union to Ethiopia. July 20, 2026.

³¹ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Holds High-Level Discussions with EU High Representative and Delegation." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 16, 2026.

³² *Borkena*. 2026. "German Federal Foreign Office State Secretary Visits Addis Ababa to Strengthen Ties with Ethiopia and the African Union." *Borkena*, July 16, 2026.

³³ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Parliament Approves €124.6 Million Concessional Loans from Italy and France for Budgetary Support and Administrative Modernization." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 18, 2026.

³⁴ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Ethiopia's Deputy PM Arrives in Ghana for AU Extraordinary Health Summit." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 21, 2026.

³⁵ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Deputy PM Temesgen Holds Discussions with Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 23, 2026.

Tultemirov on July 23,³⁶ dedicated consular interventions in Saudi Arabia to secure amnesties and repatriations for detained Ethiopian nationals, and hosting the US-Ethiopia Public-Private Dialogue on July 24.³⁷ Addis Ababa solidified its role as an international convening center by hosting the World Public Summit Africa on July 29,³⁸ and the African Logistics and Communication Symposium from July 27.³⁹

1.2 Eritrea: Diplomatic Recalibration, Sudan Entanglement, and Structural Repression

Eritrea's month was defined by a diplomatic setback it could not prevent. Despite a sustained campaign led by Foreign Minister Osman Saleh and Eritrea's mission in Geneva to terminate the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea, the Human Rights Council renewed the mechanism in the second week of July, adopting the resolution by twenty-three votes in favour, six against, and seventeen abstentions. The outcome placed Eritrea's international scrutiny on a fixed continuation footing for another year and demonstrated the limits of Asmara's lobbying capacity, even as eight candidates, drawn from a global pool of jurists and human rights specialists, prepared to succeed the outgoing mandate holder.

The vote unfolded against a diplomatic calendar that grew markedly busier through July. Osman Saleh met his Egyptian counterpart twice within the month, first by phone on 3 July and then in person in Cairo on 19 July, where he also held separate talks with US Senior Advisor for Arab and African Affairs Massad Boulos. Sudanese Armed Forces commander Abdel Fattah al-Burhan travelled to Asmara on 17 July, days after his forces recaptured the town of Kurmuk, extending a pattern of military coordination between Eritrea and Port Sudan that a reported drone strike earlier in the month, which allegedly wounded three Eritrean soldiers, had already thrown into sharper relief. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed responded to this convergence of actors along his country's periphery by telling parliament that Ethiopia faced no threat to its sovereignty, naming Eritrea directly in the process.

Internally, the government pressed ahead with measures that reinforce rather than loosen its hold over the population and the economy. A directive ordering all large Nakfa holders to deposit their cash by 31 July aims to draw currency back into formal channels amid signs of Nakfa circulation beyond Eritrea's borders. The 38th round of the Sawa National Service programme graduated under customary presidential attendance, a reminder that the system

³⁶ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan Pledge to Deepen Bilateral Cooperation Across Key Economic Sectors." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 23, 2026.

³⁷ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026h. "Ethiopia-U.S. Investment Dialogue Seeks to Strengthen Commercial Diplomacy." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 24, 2026.

³⁸ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Addis Ababa to Host First-Ever Inaugural World Public Summit." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 26, 2026.

³⁹ Ethiopian News Agency. 2026. "Ethiopia to Host First African Logistics and Communication Symposium, Bringing Together 40 Countries." *Ethiopian News Agency*, July 26, 2026.

fusing education, conscription, and ideological formation remains the state's principal instrument for channelling youth into national service. The month also closed a chapter in the country's post-secession political history with the death of Minister Semere Russom, a veteran of the liberation struggle whose nearly five decades of service illustrate how narrow and aging the governing elite has become.

Set against this, Eritrea's international engagement continued to widen in scope if not in depth, encompassing a Saudi medical cooperation arrangement, a UNESCO-Japan cultural heritage workshop, participation in an African Union health summit, and the mobilisation of diaspora communities in Scandinavia. None of these threads altered the fundamental character of the state that the renewed Special Rapporteur mandate exists to examine.

Egypt, Washington, and the Contest over Red Sea Security Architecture

Egypt's relationship with Eritrea moved from routine consultation to sustained coordination over the course of July. Foreign ministers Badr Abdelatty and Osman Saleh spoke by telephone on 3 July, reaffirming cooperation in language that leaned heavily on sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the principle that Red Sea security should remain the exclusive responsibility of littoral states, a formulation Eritrea deploys specifically to exclude Ethiopia, a landlocked state seeking maritime access, from the region's security conversation.⁴⁰ The two ministers met again in person in Cairo on 19 July, and this second encounter carried more weight than the language of the accompanying statement suggested. Osman Saleh's subsequent meeting with Boulos during the same visit signalled continued, if still limited, movement toward normalised contact between Washington and Asmara.⁴¹

Al Jazeera's analysis of the broader Cairo consultations, which had drawn in Somali officials alongside the Egyptian and Eritrean delegations and Boulos himself, situated the flurry of diplomacy within a strategic frame. Ethiopia's maritime ambitions, persistent Red Sea insecurity, and shifting regional alignments were converging, in the publication's assessment, into one contested theatre, and Egypt's outreach to Eritrea and Somalia forms part of an effort to construct a security architecture along Ethiopia's periphery that limits Addis Ababa's options.⁴² Eritrea's value to this architecture rests less on ideological alignment with any single partner than on its geography, a position that lets Asmara extract diplomatic and economic dividends from Cairo, Riyadh, and now Washington without committing itself irreversibly to anyone.

The month's lone friction point on the Red Sea itself was comparatively minor and handled without escalation. Eritrean authorities released fifteen Yemeni fishermen from Al-Khokha in mid-July after roughly three months in detention, following mediation by representatives

⁴⁰ State Information Service, "Egypt: Red Sea Security Remains Responsibility of Littoral States," July 3, 2026.

⁴¹ Eritrean Ministry of Information, "Minister Osman Saleh holds talks with his Egyptian counterpart," Shabait, July 19, 2026.

⁴² Al Jazeera Staff, "Who is driving diplomacy in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea, and why?" Al Jazeera, July 21, 2026.

of Yemen's fishing community.⁴³ The episode, one in a recurring pattern of detentions in disputed fishing grounds, produced no diplomatic confrontation, underscoring that Eritrea's assertiveness on Red Sea governance operates selectively, calibrated toward state-level actors whose alignment matters strategically rather than toward the low-stakes maritime disputes that periodically affect coastal livelihoods.

Sudan, the TPLF Nexus, and the Tensions with Addis Ababa

Eritrea's entanglement in Sudan's civil war deepened beyond the diplomatic support Asmara has publicly acknowledged. An early-July drone strike on a meeting of TPLF-affiliated Army 70 commanders in Kurmuk wounded three Eritrean soldiers, according to internal sources.⁴⁴ Asmara has not commented publicly on the casualties, consistent with its standing position of denying any military presence in Sudan, but the incident corroborates longstanding evidence that Eritrean personnel maintain an operational role among armed actors along the Sudan-Ethiopia frontier, an area where the war itself, the TPLF's fragmentation, and Eritrea's own security interests increasingly overlap.

The Sudanese Armed Forces recaptured Kurmuk shortly afterward, and General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan travelled to Asmara on 17 July for talks with President Isaias Afwerki, the latest in a series of high-level exchanges between the two bodies.⁴⁵ The visit reflected both the battlefield gain and a broader strategic convergence between Asmara and Port Sudan, rooted in their shared alignment with Egypt and common opposition to Ethiopia's regional ambitions. The relationship functions as a source of expanding leverage for Eritrea along Ethiopia's western frontier, though that leverage carries a structural vulnerability. Any renewed momentum toward a Sudanese ceasefire would weaken the strategic logic currently justifying Asmara's expanding involvement, since Eritrea's utility to Port Sudan depends substantially on the conflict's continuation.

Addis Ababa's had, in the early days of the month, addressed this dynamic. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's made remarks to parliament, in which he dismissed concerns over the alignment binding Eritrea, the TPLF, and Sudan, insisting Ethiopia faced no threat to its sovereignty while affirming that the country was strengthening its defensive capabilities.⁴⁶ Abiy's decision to name Eritrea directly, using the term Shabia that shorthand for the Isaias government, marked an explicit acknowledgment of how central Eritrea has become to Ethiopia's current security calculus. The remarks, read alongside the Kurmuk strike and the Burhan visit, point to a Horn of Africa security environment in which Eritrean, Sudanese, and Ethiopian political fortunes are now bound together through the unresolved conflict in Sudan and the unresolved status of the TPLF.

⁴³ Khabar News Agency, "Eritrea Releases 15 Yemeni Fishermen Detained for Three Months," Khabar News Agency, July 12.

⁴⁴ Mahder Nesibu, "Army 70, Tsimdo, and the Fight for Kurmuk," Horn Review, July 12, 2026.

⁴⁵ Eritrean Ministry of Information, "President Isaias Afwerki Meets and Holds Talks with Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan," Shabait, July 17, 2026.

⁴⁶ ENA English YT, "PM Abiy Ahmed's parliamentary address: Pretoria peace agreement, and Ethiopia's sovereignty," YouTube video, July 9, 2026.

The Human Rights Council Vote and the Limits of Eritrean Lobbying

Eritrea entered July already engaged in a campaign it had waged the previous year with equally little success. As the Human Rights Council's 62nd session convened in Geneva, Eritrean diplomats intensified lobbying among member states to terminate the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea, while Osman Saleh briefed Asmara's diplomatic community in Asmara, arguing the mandate was a politicised mechanism that should give way to engagement through the Universal Periodic Review and existing treaty bodies.⁴⁷ The campaign proceeded as eight candidates, a pool spanning Gambian, Jordanian, South African, Indian, Dutch, Tanzanian, Rwandan, and Egyptian human rights specialists, applied to succeed the outgoing mandate holder.⁴⁸

The Council renewed the mandate regardless, adopting the resolution by twenty-three votes in favour, six against, and seventeen abstentions.⁴⁹ Eritrea's delegation rejected the outcome and signalled it would cease engagement with the Council on the matter. The margin matters less than its composition. Seventeen abstentions, concentrated among African and other Global South states reluctant to confront Asmara directly but unwilling to shield it outright, demonstrate that Eritrea retains meaningful capacity to prevent consensus from forming against it even when it cannot secure an outcome in its own favour. That capacity is itself a form of diplomatic leverage, distinct from and considerably more durable than any single vote, and it helps explain why Asmara is increasingly investing on its diplomatic reach.

Currency Controls, National Service, and the Aging of the Liberation Generation

Three developments through July, disconnected on their surface, converge on a single structural theme, a governing system built during the struggle and sustained since through mechanisms of control rather than institutional renewal. The Bank of Eritrea's order that holders of large cash reserves deposit their Nakfa into formal accounts by 31 July, under threat of legal measures, echoes the currency reform Asmara carried out in 2015 and responds to the growing use of Nakfa in informal cross-border trade with Tigray and Sudan.⁵⁰ The directive functions as an instrument of monetary consolidation, an attempt to draw liquidity back within reach of the state at a moment when currency is migrating beyond its formal channels and, by extension, beyond its control.

The graduation of the 38th round of the Sawa National Service programme, attended by President Isaias Afwerki, reinforced a parallel mechanism of control operating over Eritrea's youth rather than its currency.⁵¹ Sawa has fused secondary education with military and

⁴⁷ Eritrean Ministry of Information, "Briefing by H.E. Osman Saleh, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Foreign Diplomatic Community in Eritrea," Shabait, July 1, 2026.

⁴⁸ "Eight candidates vie to become UN special rapporteur on human rights in Eritrea," Africa Intelligence, July 3, 2026.

⁴⁹ InDepthNews, "EEPA reports on Special Rapporteur mandate on Eritrea extended," IDN-InDepthNews, July 9, 2026.

⁵⁰ Borkena, "Eritrea Orders Citizens to Deposit All Nakfa Cash in Banks by End of July Under New Central Bank Directive," Borkena, July 1, 2026.

⁵¹ Eritrean Ministry of Information, "Graduation of 38th Round of National Service in Sawa," Shabait, July 11, 2026.

political training since the closure of the University of Asmara in 2006, and it continues to function as the principal channel through which the state absorbs young Eritreans into indefinite national service while foreclosing independent higher education. The ceremony's official framing as a celebration of youth development sits uneasily against the programme's role in sustaining the conscription system that has driven much of Eritrea's outward migration over the past two decades.

The death of Minister Semere Russom on 22 July, at eighty-three after nearly five decades in senior state and diplomatic roles, closed out a life that traced the arc of the system itself.⁵² A veteran EPLF fighter who served as ambassador to the United States, education minister, and, from 2018 to 2025, ambassador to Ethiopia, Semere belonged to the liberation-era cohort that has occupied Eritrea's political, diplomatic, and security institutions without meaningful renewal since secession. His death narrows that cohort further, and the government's announcement, focused entirely on his service record and silent on any question of succession, reflects a governing establishment that continues to draw its legitimacy from the war rather than from institutionalised processes of political transition.

Diaspora Diplomacy and the Boundaries of International Rehabilitation

Eritrea's international engagement in July extended across a wider range of institutions and partners than at any point in recent months, though the pattern remains one of sector-specific technical cooperation rather than political normalisation. A medical cooperation agreement signed between Eritrea's community in Saudi Arabia and Jeddah's Al Saqqaf Eye Center, overseen by the Eritrean consulate, was modest in scope but consistent with Asmara's evident interest in deepening ties with Riyadh as its previously close relationship with the UAE cools, opening space for a reorientation within Eritrea's Gulf partnerships.⁵³ A UNESCO workshop held in Asmara in early July, funded by Japan and conducted with Eritrea's Commission for Culture and Sports, reportedly strengthening the country's capacity to prepare nomination dossiers under the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, with Japan continuing to position itself as a facilitator of Eritrea's technical re-engagement with multilateral institutions.⁵⁴

Eritrea's delegation to the African Union's health summit in Accra, led by permanent representative Biniam Berhe, presented figures on maternal and child health, community healthcare access, and childhood vaccination coverage that the government says reaches 98 percent, part of a continued pattern of engagement with continental institutions after years of relative isolation.⁵⁵ The 28th Annual Eritrean Community Festival in Scandinavia, opened under the theme of resilience as guarantee, served a related but distinct function, sustaining

⁵² Eritrean Ministry of Information, "Veteran freedom fighter Minister Semere Russom passes away," Shabait, July 22, 2026.

⁵³ TesfaNews (@tesfanews), "SAUDI ARABIA — Eritrean Community in Jeddah signs medical cooperation agreement with Al Saqqaf Eye Center," X (formerly Twitter), June 30, 2026.

⁵⁴ UNESCO, "Eritrea strengthens national capacity to safeguard its living heritage," July 16, 2026.

⁵⁵ Eritrean Ministry of Information, "Eritrean Delegation Participates at AU Extraordinary Summit on Health," Shabait, July 24, 2026.

the PFDJ's longstanding strategy of maintaining political and financial influence over diaspora communities in Europe through cultural programming, seminars led by government representatives, and youth activities.⁵⁶

A more contentious diaspora-facing proposal surfaced in Switzerland, where Eritrea's "honorary consul", Toni Locher, floated financial incentives of up to CHF 15,000 to encourage Eritrean asylum seekers to return voluntarily, funds intended to support business creation through Eritrea's Development Bank.⁵⁷ The proposal forms part of a broader push to tighten Switzerland's approach to Eritrean asylum claims, and because it originates from an "honorary consul" closely aligned with the regime rather than from Swiss authorities, it should be read as advocacy rather than policy. Taken together, these engagements illustrate an expanding diplomatic footprint that international partners are increasingly willing to work with on discrete, sector-specific terms, even as the human rights concerns that produced the Special Rapporteur mandate remain wholly untouched by any of them.

Conclusion

July illustrated, with unusual clarity, the widening gap between Eritrea's diplomatic trajectory and the conditions that continue to define governance inside the country. Asmara's calendar filled with engagements that would have been difficult to imagine a decade ago, a sitting Egyptian foreign minister meeting his Eritrean counterpart twice in a single month, a Sudanese military leader travelling to Asmara for consultations, a senior US envoy holding direct talks with Eritrean officials, and multilateral institutions from UNESCO to the African Union incorporating Eritrea into technical, sector-specific programming. Each engagement, considered individually, reflects a narrow and legitimate interest of its own, whether Egypt's contest with Ethiopia over Red Sea governance, Sudan's need for military partners, or Japan's cultural diplomacy. Considered together, they describe a state steadily working its way back into regional and international structures from which it was long excluded.

This recalibration left the structural conditions the Human Rights Council's renewed mandate exists to monitor entirely untouched. The Bank of Eritrea's currency directive tightened state control over the economy. The Sawa graduation ceremony reaffirmed a system of indefinite conscription that continues to drive emigration. The death of Minister Semere Russom exposed a governing elite that has aged without renewing itself, still drawing legitimacy from a war fought more than three decades ago. And the Council's vote to renew the Special Rapporteur mandate, over Eritrea's objections and despite its lobbying, confirmed that the international human rights architecture still regards Eritrea's domestic governance as unresolved business, whatever momentum its foreign relations currently carry.

⁵⁶ Eritrean Ministry of Information, "Eritrean Community Festival in Scandinavian Countries Concludes," Shabait, July 28, 2026.

⁵⁷ Martin Plaut, "Switzerland: 'offer Eritreans bribes to go home,'" Martin Plaut, July 15, 2026.

The two realities operate on separate tracks, and the gap between them is the most consequential fact to emerge from July. Eritrea's regional partners are extending its diplomatic and commercial credit unconditioned on human rights performance, while Eritrea's governance model continues to generate the very abuses the Special Rapporteur mandate exists to document. A month that produced deeper Egyptian alignment, renewed Sudanese cooperation, tentative American engagement, and expanding multilateral participation also produced a currency crackdown, a fresh cohort pushed through the Sawa pipeline, and confirmation that the machinery of internal control remains fully intact. Diplomatic rehabilitation and structural repression are advancing in parallel, and any assessment of Eritrea's trajectory measuring one without the other will misread the month, and likely the years, that follow it.

1.3 Djibouti: Military Presence, Economic Integration, and Domestic Strain

Djibouti's July was marked by continued engagement from each of its principal external partners rather than by a single defining event. President Ismail Omar Guelleh sent a congratulatory message to President Trump on 4 July marking the 250th anniversary of American independence, describing Djibouti-US relations as privileged and strategic and citing cooperation across economic development, energy, defence, and security. Days later, US and French forces conducted a joint live-fire exercise at the Arta training range, while China's footprint expanded in parallel, both through the railway corridor it is developing with Ethiopia and Djibouti and through a reported deepening of ties between its port investments and its military base near Camp Lemonnier. By the third week of the month, the European Union and Italy had added further layers of their own, the EU formalising a legal basis for naval operations from Djiboutian territory and Italy opening a new channel of infrastructure cooperation through its Mattei Plan.

Economically, the month reinforced Djibouti's role as the principal conduit for Ethiopian trade while showing the government working to broaden the partners underpinning that role. Ethiopia's Awash Bank sought a licence to operate directly in Djibouti, the two governments advanced a joint roadmap for a one-stop border post at Galafi, and Chinese, Ethiopian, and Djiboutian officials continued technical work on expanding the existing railway into a broader industrial corridor. The Ports and Free Zones Authority also opened talks with a Turkish operator over the long-term management of Tadjourah Port, following earlier Saudi investment there and an unsuccessful attempt to bring Ethiopia into the port's administration, consistent with Djibouti's general preference for drawing on several external investors rather than concentrating dependence in one.

These developments coincided with two more difficult domestic developments. Defence Minister Hassan Omar Mohamed died on 16 July after six years overseeing the country's expanding defence partnerships, leaving a vacancy in a consequential ministry at a moment

of active foreign military engagement on Djiboutian soil. A food security assessment released the same week found that roughly a quarter of the population faces crisis-level insecurity, a figure the assessment linked to the same Red Sea trade disruptions that are drawing much of the foreign military and infrastructure interest described above. A separate episode in Somalia, where President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud invoked Greater Somali nationalism in terms that implicitly touched Djiboutian territory, added a lower-grade but still notable source of regional friction.

Washington, Paris, and Beijing: Parallel Military Engagement

Djibouti's relationship with the United States retained its established weight through July. Guelleh's message to Trump on the anniversary of American independence emphasised cooperation across economic development, energy, defence, and security, language consistent with Djibouti's longstanding effort to anchor its foreign policy in the US partnership even as its external relationships diversify.⁵⁸ That emphasis was reflected in practice the same week, when American Joint Terminal Attack Controllers worked alongside French Mirage 2000 jets and Gazelle helicopters in a combined close air support exercise at the Arta training range.⁵⁹ The drill served an interoperability purpose in its own right, but its setting, a few kilometres from China's only overseas military base, gave it added significance in a country hosting both the largest US military installation in Africa and China's sole base abroad.

China's presence continued to develop along a separate track. According to Meta-Defense's reporting during the second week of July, Beijing is increasingly integrating its military footprint with Djibouti's port and logistics infrastructure, treating the country as an anchor for its broader defence posture across Africa and the western Indian Ocean rather than as a standalone commercial hub.⁶⁰ Read alongside continued technical work by Ethiopian, Djiboutian, and Chinese officials on expanding the railway corridor into a wider trade and industrial platform under the Belt and Road Initiative, the month's evidence points to a Chinese approach in which economic investment and military access are being developed to reinforce one another.

European Deepening: the EU Status of Forces Agreement and Italy's Mattei Plan

Europe's engagement with Djibouti moved from routine contact to a more structural footing during the month. On 17 July, during a visit by EU High Representative Kaja Kallas, Djibouti and the European Union signed a Status of Forces Agreement establishing the legal framework for the EUNAVFOR ASPIDES mission to operate from Djiboutian territory.⁶¹ The agreement reflects the weight European states are placing on the Bab el-Mandeb as a

⁵⁸ Ismail Omar Guelleh (@IsmailOguelleh), "On behalf of my government and people, I congratulate the United States on the 250th anniversary of its independence," X (formerly Twitter), July 4, 2026.

⁵⁹ Colton Jones, "Elite US, French forces train together near Chinese base," Defence Blog, July 3, 2026.

⁶⁰ Fabrice Wolf, "In Africa, Chinese military and industrial presence is strengthening simultaneously," MetaDefense, July 12.

⁶¹ DefenceWeb, "EU commits to Status of Forces Agreement with Djibouti," DefenceWeb, July 21, 2026.

chokepoint for their own trade, a concern sharpened by continued Houthi attacks on commercial shipping and by wider regional volatility following the Iran conflict.

Italy added a narrower but distinct dimension to Europe's presence when the Med-Or Italian Foundation and Djibouti's Ministry of Economy and Finance signed a memorandum of understanding in Rome on 23 July, covering subsea digital connectivity, energy systems, and strategic dialogue.⁶² Concluded on the margins of a seminar on the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the agreement extends Rome's Mattei Plan into an area distinct from the naval and military cooperation that characterises Djibouti's relations with most external partners, positioning the country as a hub for telecommunications and energy infrastructure alongside its established maritime and logistics functions. Guelleh's condolence message to Qatar on the death of the Father Amir, sent during the same period, reflected the more routine diplomatic balancing Djibouti maintains toward Gulf monarchies.⁶³

The Ethiopian Corridor: Banking, Rail, and Border Integration

Djibouti's economic relationship with Ethiopia advanced on several fronts that point toward closer institutional integration rather than a single transaction. Awash Bank, Ethiopia's largest private lender, applied to Ethiopia's central bank for approval to open a branch in Djibouti, a step its leadership tied to Djibouti's role in Ethiopia's trade and logistics chains and to Addis Ababa's gradual financial liberalisation.⁶⁴ In parallel, the third meeting of the technical committee overseeing the Ethio-Djibouti Railway Corridor advanced plans to convert the existing line into a broader economic and industrial corridor, with discussions focused on transport capacity, logistics costs, and the integration of manufacturing and mining infrastructure along the route.⁶⁵

Later in the month, Ethiopian and Djiboutian officials agreed a joint roadmap, financed by the European Union through the Agence Française de Développement and implemented by TradeMark Africa, to operationalise a one-stop border post at Galafi, the crossing through which more than 95 percent of Ethiopia's maritime trade passes.⁶⁶ The roadmap's focus on legal, institutional, and digital measures rather than physical infrastructure alone suggests the corridor's next phase will centre on reducing administrative friction, a complement to the railway expansion and to the banking sector's growing direct presence in the country.

Port Diversification and New Investment

Djibouti's approach to its port sector continued to favour breadth over exclusivity. The Djibouti Ports and Free Zones Authority signed a memorandum of understanding with

⁶² Decode39, "Red Sea security drives new Italy–Djibouti partnership," Decode39, July 28, 2026.

⁶³ Ismail Omar Guelleh (@IsmailOguelleh), "Deepest condolences and sympathy to the sisterly State of Qatar, to its Amir, government, and people," X (formerly Twitter), July 12, 2026.

⁶⁴ Eyasu Zekarias, "Awash Bank Prepares to Expand into Neighboring Countries; Awaits Central Bank Approval," Capital, July 1, 2026.

⁶⁵ Borkena, "Committee Discuss Ethio-Djibouti Railway Corridor Dev.t Project Expansion," Borkena, July 10, 2026.

⁶⁶ "Ethiopia, Djibouti agree roadmap for Galafi One-Stop Border Post," Logistics Update Africa, July 23, 2026.

Tiryaki Agro, a Turkish agribusiness and logistics company, to explore a long-term concession for Tadjourah Port, with technical and commercial assessments to precede any formal negotiation.⁶⁷ The agreement follows earlier Saudi investment in the same port and an unsuccessful effort to bring Ethiopia into its administration, extending a pattern in which Djibouti draws on a widening set of investors for its port infrastructure rather than relying on a single partner.

The African Development Bank's announcement of a 10.75-million-dollar trade finance guarantee facility for the Intercontinental Investment Bank East Africa, intended to expand financing access for small and medium-sized enterprises and women-owned businesses, added a smaller but complementary layer of multilateral support aimed at improving the private sector's capacity to import equipment for renewable energy, manufacturing, and telecommunications.⁶⁸

Vulnerabilities Beneath the Strategic Profile

Djibouti's strategic prominence coexisted through July with signs of underlying strain. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification's 17 July assessment found that more than 256,000 people, close to a quarter of the population, are expected to face crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity in the coming months, attributing the outlook to worsening climatic conditions, inflation, and the disruptions to regional trade generated by continued Houthi activity in the Red Sea.⁶⁹ The finding shows a direct humanitarian dimension to the same maritime insecurity that is drawing much of the foreign military and infrastructure interest described elsewhere in this brief.

The death of Defence Minister Hassan Omar Mohamed on 16 July, after receiving medical treatment in France, removed a figure who had overseen the expansion of Djibouti's defence partnerships since 2019, leaving a vacancy in one of the government's most consequential portfolios at a time of active foreign military engagement on Djiboutian soil.⁷⁰ A separate and lower-grade source of friction came from Somalia, where President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's Independence Day reference to Djibouti as one of the "missing parts" of the Somali nation revived a strand of Greater Somali nationalism with a long history in the region, a remark Djibouti is likely to have registered with caution given its own sensitivity to irredentist claims.⁷¹

Conclusion

Djibouti's external relationships continued to broaden across military, commercial, and infrastructure lines during July, with the United States, France, China, the European Union,

⁶⁷ Muluken Yewondwossen, "Djibouti, Tiryaki Agro sign port MoU," Capital, July 26, 2026.

⁶⁸ African Development Bank Group, "Djibouti: African Development Bank Group signs \$10.75 million Trade Finance Facility with Intercontinental Investment Bank East Africa to support SMEs and women entrepreneurs," July 15, 2026.

⁶⁹ Samara Baboolal, "UN report: Djibouti faces severe food insecurity," JURIST, July 19, 2026.

⁷⁰ Hiiraan Online, "Djibouti defense minister dies in Paris while receiving treatment," Hiiraan Online, July 17, 2026.

⁷¹ Addis Standard (@addisstandard), "#Somalia's president names #Ethiopia, #Kenya and #Djibouti as 'missing parts' of greater Somalia — reviving a dream that once started a war," X (formerly Twitter), June 29, 2026.

Italy, and Turkey each advancing distinct forms of engagement over the course of the month. The government's own conduct, from the Tadjourah negotiations to the Ethiopian corridor agreements, points to a consistent preference for distributing dependence across multiple partners rather than concentrating it in one.

That external activity sat alongside two more immediate domestic pressures, the food security outlook tied to Red Sea disruption and the vacancy left by the defence minister's death, both of which will bear on how the government manages its external commitments in the coming months.

1.4 Somalia and Somaliland

The Federal Republic of Somalia: Electoral Transition Debates, Regional Autonomy Clashes, and Shifting International Support

Domestic Political and Governance

Somalia celebrated its 66th Independence Day on July 1 with military parades and nationwide celebrations conducted under heightened security measures. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud presided over official commemorations in Mogadishu. Security forces were deployed across major cities to prevent potential Al-Shabaab attacks during the festivities.⁷²

Additionally, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud addressed graduates of the 8th Officer Cadet Class at the Turkish run TURKSOM Military Academy in Mogadishu urging the newest military officers to safeguard peace and national unity. The President warned against those who incite conflict and emphasized that Somalia's security can only be guaranteed through strong state institutions. He called on the officers to remain disciplined, uphold their constitutional responsibilities and serve the Somali people with integrity. President Mohamud stated that true courage lies in understanding the devastating consequences of war and working to prevent it adding that a truly brave person respects the dangers of conflict, refrains from it and actively guards against anything that might provoke it.⁷³

The Somali Future Council presented the Transitional Direct Elections Model 2026 as a transitional electoral framework intended to bridge Somalia's current political realities with the constitutional goal of one person, one vote elections. According to a proposal document, the framework would for the first time in Somalia's modern electoral history introduce direct citizen voting for members of the Federal Parliament and Federal Member State legislatures while retaining the 4.5 clan power sharing formula during the transition. The proposal distinguishes the proposed direct elections from full one person, one vote elections, stating that the latter remains Somalia's constitutional end goal. The transitional framework would

⁷² Hiiraan Online. "Somalia Marks 66th Independence and Unification Day with Flag-Raising Ceremony." July 1, 2026.

⁷³ Hiiraan Online "President Mohamud attends graduation of Somali officers trained at TURKSOM academy." July 11, 2026.

be established through a negotiated political agreement under a Transitional Elections Implementation Framework governing both federal and state level elections. No political parties would participate in elections conducted under the transitional model with recognized traditional elders continuing to allocate parliamentary seats among eligible sub-clans during the transition.⁷⁴

Moreover Somalia's Defense Minister Ahmed Moalim Fiqi drew criticism after stating that only two parties are competing for control of Somalia, namely Al-Shabaab and the Justice and Social Party a comment that generated wide political debate.⁷⁵

The third Somalia Development Forum convened in Mogadishu on July 15 at the Jazeera Hotel organized by the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies and City University of Mogadishu. The forum held under the theme "Somalia at a Critical Juncture: Strengthening Stability, Unity and Development," brought together policymakers, academics, development partners and experts to discuss national priorities. Foreign Minister Abdisalam Abdi Ali delivered the opening keynote address emphasizing the importance of stronger institutions, national ownership, resilience, constructive international partnerships, peace, unity, sovereignty, sustainable development and inclusive dialogue.⁷⁶

On another front, The National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission set deadlines for political party registration by July 25 and candidate nominations closing July 30 for local council elections in Galmudug. These preparations represent continued efforts to advance direct elections at the local level.⁷⁷

On July 25, the federal government issued a call for an immediate end to clan fighting in Dawaco, Badhan district, Sanaag region. The Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs and Reconciliation stated that it was closely monitoring the conflict between communities in the Dawaco area and urged warring parties to exercise restraint and seek dialogue. The ministry called on both sides to cease fighting and gunfire to refrain from any actions or statements that could further inflame the conflict and emphasized that priority should be given to dialogue, mutual understanding and a lasting peaceful solution.⁷⁸

Federal-State Relations and Regional Tensions

Relations between the federal government and Puntland State deteriorated sharply amid military confrontations, verbal accusations and ultimatums. Puntland MPs and regional authorities formally accused the federal government of undermining the federal system citing what they described as encroachments on regional autonomy. The Puntland government

⁷⁴ Dawan Africa. "Breaking: Somali Future Council Proposes Transitional Direct Elections Model for 2026." July 12, 2026.

⁷⁵ Somali Guardian. "Somali Defense Minister Says Only Two Parties Compete for Somalia: Al-Shabaab and JSP." July 7, 2026

⁷⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Somalia. "Minister of Foreign Affairs Addresses Second Day of the Third Somalia Development Forum (SDF 2026).", July 15, 2026.

⁷⁷ allAfrica.com / Radio Dalsan. "Somalia: Electoral Commission Sets July 25 Deadline for Galmudug Elections." July 23, 2026.

⁷⁸ Dawan Africa. "Somali Government Calls for Immediate End to Clan Fighting in Sanaag Region." July 26, 2026.

subsequently banned the Turkish commercial fishing company SOMTURK from operating in its territorial waters asserting exclusive authority over maritime resources and requiring prior Puntland approval for all foreign activities in its jurisdictional waters.⁷⁹

On July 20, fierce fighting erupted in the port city of Bosaso between Puntland Darwish forces and Puntland Security Force troops aligned with the federal government. The clashes resulted in casualties and deepened the rift between Mogadishu and Garowe. The following day Puntland Darwish forces announced they had captured eight members of the PSF and seized multiple armed technical vehicles during operations in the aftermath of the Bosaso confrontations.⁸⁰

On July 23, Puntland authorities issued an ultimatum ordering federal government aligned security forces in Bosaso to surrender after they had allegedly seized positions within the city. This directive escalated the standoff with Puntland asserting its authority over security matters within its territory and rejecting federal military presence without regional authorization.⁸¹

The tensions expanded beyond Bosaso when on July 26 Puntland authorities issued a formal statement declaring they were closely monitoring what they characterized as military activities by federal government forces in Galkayo. The regional administration alleged that President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was pursuing a deliberate plan to dismantle Puntland's system of government. Puntland's statement further asserted that it was closely monitoring military activities allegedly backed by the Somali president describing these movements as a threat to peace and stability in areas under its administration. The regional government also clarified that no force officially known as the PSF legally forms part of the Puntland Defence Forces and it does not recognize troops recruited or registered by the federal government operating inside Puntland without authorization from the regional administration and its security institutions.⁸²

Whereas Security forces in the Southwest State experienced a disruption on July 16 when heavy fighting erupted in Baidoa, the regional capital. The clashes occurred between forces loyal to ousted former Southwest leader Laftagaren and Somali National Army positions, resulting in sustained exchanges of heavy weaponry throughout the night.⁸³

Electoral Process and Constitutional Disputes

Electoral negotiations continued in Mogadishu with a second round of Turkey facilitated talks convening on July 20. Participants included representatives of the Federal Government, opposition groups including the Somali Salvation Forum and Nabad iyo Nolol and

⁷⁹ Somali Guardian. "Somalia: Puntland Bans Turkish Fishing Firm SOMTURK." July 5, 2026.

⁸⁰ Somali Guardian. "Somalia: Fierce Fighting Erupts in Bosaso as Puntland Forces Clash with PSF Troops." July 20, 2026.

⁸¹ Somali Guardian. "Somalia's Puntland Orders Federal Forces in Bosaso to Surrender after Seizing Positions." July 23, 2026.

⁸² Somalia Today. "Puntland Accuses Hassan Sheikh of Provoking Armed Conflict." July 26, 2026.

⁸³ Somali Guardian. "Heavy Fighting Erupts in Baidoa after Forces Loyal to Laftagaren Attack Somali Army Positions." July 16, 2026.

international observers from the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union and the United Nations. The parties reached agreement on three basic principles: preserving clan quotas, maintaining the 30 percent women's quota and pursuing one person, one vote elections.⁸⁴

The second round of talks concluded on July 22 without a comprehensive settlement. Delegations from Puntland and Jubaland withdrew from the negotiations citing insufficient progress on electoral models, constitutional amendments and broader federal issues. Core disputes centered on the mechanics of transitioning to one person, one vote elections, the preservation of clan quotas, women's representation and concerns regarding potential presidential term extensions. Despite the lack of a final agreement, participants indicated that further sessions were expected in the future.⁸⁵

In a development concerning opposition unity, former Foreign Minister Mohamed Abdirizak Mohamud disclosed that former President Mohamed Farmajo was denied entry into the country's main opposition coalition, the Somali Future Council. According to Mohamud, certain members of the coalition threatened to withdraw their participation if Farmajo was admitted scoring divisions within the political opposition to President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's administration. Farmajo has consequently maintained a separate opposition bloc that recently participated in internationally mediated talks with the federal government, highlighting the fractured nature of political opposition in the country.⁸⁶

Despite underlying tensions, diplomatic engagement between the federal government and opposition factions continued to show signs of progress. Foreign Minister Abdisalan Abdi Ali Dhay reported on July 15 that the country's internationally mediated political negotiations were gaining momentum, with prospects for a breakthrough appearing increasingly plausible. The minister's remarks suggested that dialogue mechanisms were yielding constructive outcomes even as deep-seated differences remained on fundamental governance issues.⁸⁷

Counter-Terrorism and Security Operations

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud announced on July 3 that the government would present a comprehensive strategy for the next phase of military operations against Al-Shabaab in the coming weeks. Speaking at an official event in Mogadishu, the President stated that planning and preparations are underway for an offensive to liberate remaining Al-Shabaab controlled areas. He did not specify the timing, scope or operational focus of the planned campaign.⁸⁸

Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency carried out a security operation in the

⁸⁴ Hiiraan Online. "Somali Election Talks Resume in Mogadishu as Sides Agree on Three Basic Principles." July 20, 2026.

⁸⁵ Hiiraan Online. "Somali Election Talks Resume in Mogadishu as Sides Agree on Three Basic Principles." July 20, 2026.

⁸⁶ Somali Guardian. "Somalia Opposition Refused Farmajo Entry into Main Coalition, Former Foreign Minister Says." July 13, 2026.

⁸⁷ Al-Monitor. "Turkey Brokers Intra-Somalia Talks as Federal Rifts Test Ankara's Influence." July 2026 coverage

⁸⁸ Demócrata. "Somalia Prepares the Final Offensive against Al Shabaab." July 3, 2026.

Basra area of Middle Shabelle region on July 4, targeting an Al-Shabaab network involved in bomb making and attack facilitation. NISA confirmed eight militants were killed including Ahmed Eybka Aalim, also known as Daqare, identified as a key figure in the militant network. Six other operatives linked to the group were also eliminated. The operation specifically targeted individuals responsible for manufacturing improvised explosive devices and coordinating attacks using heavy weapons.⁸⁹

United States forces in coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia conducted an airstrike targeting Al-Shabaab militants in the vicinity of Farsooley approximately 90 kilometers west of Mogadishu. The operation was part of US counterterrorism efforts to degrade Al-Shabaab's operational capabilities.⁹⁰ Residents on the western outskirts of Mogadishu reported that heavily armed Al-Shabaab militants have been openly patrolling populated neighbourhoods after sunset. These nocturnal patrols have occurred despite government claims of improved security in and around the capital indicating persistent militant presence in areas adjacent to Mogadishu.⁹¹

At least 26 Al-Shabaab militants were killed in airstrikes carried out in Adow Jilib, Gayfo and Qordheere in Somalia's Middle Shabelle region the Ministry of Defence announced. The strikes were conducted by the Somali National Army with the support of international partners and targeted locations where Al-Shabaab members were gathered. A military style pickup truck and a fuel tanker were destroyed in the strikes with the vehicles reportedly being used by Al-Shabaab to support its movements and carry out attacks. The Ministry of Defence thanked Somalia's international partners for supporting the fight against Al-Shabaab and stated that military operations against the group would continue. The Somali government recently announced it is increasing airstrikes against Al-Shabaab with support from international partners.⁹²

The United States Africa Command publicly reported on July 10 a strike conducted on July 8 targeting Al-Shabaab militants approximately ninety kilo meters northwest of Kismayo in the Jubaland region, continuing the pattern of coordinated U.S.-Somali operations to degrade militant capabilities. No civilian casualties were reported in official statements.⁹³ On July 14 the Somali Ministry of Defence reported that airstrikes in the region had killed 42 Al-Shabaab militants, injured an additional 12 and resulted in the destruction of a military vehicle along with multiple defensive positions held by the militant group.⁹⁴

In a follow up operation on July 18, Somali armed forces conducted additional airstrikes targeting Al-Shabaab hideouts in the Suullaay area of Hiraan approximately 17 kilometers south of Teedaan, where the militant group had reportedly established a base. This operation

⁸⁹ Hiiraan Online. "Somali Intelligence Agency Targets Al-Shabab Mortar Team in Middle Shabelle Region." July 4, 2026.

⁹⁰ U.S. Africa Command. "2026 Strikes" listing July 3 Farsooley strike

⁹¹ Somali Guardian. "Al-Shabaab Militants Will Find No Refuge... Patrols on Mogadishu Outskirts." July 4, 2026.

⁹² Somali army kills 26 Al-Shabaab militants in Middle Shabelle region." July 13, 2026.

⁹³ U.S. Africa Command. "2026 Strikes" July 8 northwest of Kismayo

⁹⁴ Hiiraan Online. "Somali Army Kills 42 Al-Shabab Militants in Hiiraan Region." July 15, 2026.

resulted in the deaths of 25 Al-Shabaab fighters with 18 others wounded in the strike. Significantly four suspected members of the group surrendered to government forces following the operation. The Ministry of Defence confirmed that the airstrike was carried out by the Somali National Army in coordination with international partners and that weapons and equipment were recovered from the targeted positions.⁹⁵

On July 21, the Somali National Army backed by international partners conducted a coordinated airstrike targeting an Al-Shabaab hideout in the Suullaay area approximately 17 kilometers south of Teedaan in Hiiraan region. The operation successfully killed 18 militants wounded 21 others and destroyed a technical combat vehicle, defensive positions and fortifications. This strike followed a similar operation conducted in the same area on July 17. The Ministry of Defence subsequently announced the operation on July 23 emphasizing that efforts continue to degrade Al-Shabaab capabilities while prioritizing civilian safety.⁹⁶

On July 26, Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency supported by international partners conducted joint operations in the Miirtaqwo and Tardo areas located in Middle Shabelle and Hiiraan regions. The operations resulted in the deaths of 16 militants including two key figures: Abdisamad Mohamed, identified as the head of Al-Shabaab's Radio Andalus propaganda unit and operative Ali Salad. One additional militant was seriously injured. The strikes targeted a Security House used for propaganda equipment including Radio Andalus facilities and destroyed vehicles and equipment. The operations were specifically designed to disrupt militants mobilizing for attacks in nearby areas including Goobo and Waabweyn.⁹⁷

International Engagements and Diplomacy

The United States informed the African Union via diplomatic note on July 1 that it will not support the renewal of United Nations logistical and operational support for the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia beyond the end of 2026. The United States indicated it would not block the mandate renewal but formally opposed the continuation of UN backing which currently provides approximately \$500 million annually for logistics including food, fuel, medical care and transportation for nearly 12,000 AUSSOM troops.⁹⁸

Somalia and Turkey signed two maritime cooperation agreements in Istanbul on July 3. Ports and Marine Transport Minister Abdulqadir Mohamed Nur signed on behalf of Somalia. The first agreement signed with Piri Reis University, advances maritime education and professional training by providing ministry staff and personnel across Somalia's ports with access to higher education and specialized training programs. The second agreement signed

⁹⁵ Xinhua / China.org.cn. "Somali Forces Kill 25 Al-Shabaab Militants in Central Region." July 19, 2026.

⁹⁶ Hiiraan Online. "Somali Army Kills 18 Al-Shabab Militants in Hiiraan Region." July 23, 2026.

⁹⁷ New Kerala. "Somali Forces Kill 16 Al-Shabaab Militants." July 26, 2026.

⁹⁸ Reuters. "Somalia Peacekeeping Mission at Risk as US Blocks UN Support, Sources Say." July 2, 2026.

with DEHUKAM focuses on strengthening Somalia's maritime legal framework and governance systems through technical assistance, legal capacity building and institutional development.⁹⁹

The United States Embassy in Mogadishu issued a statement on July 12 warning that anti-American acts could undermine its partnership with Somalia following a video circulating showing individuals in Somali National Army uniforms desecrating an American flag. The Embassy stated that such actions threaten bilateral cooperation on security, development and counterterrorism and ultimately harm the Somali people.¹⁰⁰ The Embassy welcomed the Federal Government of Somalia's prompt and decisive response to the incident noting that the United States has provided Somalia with billions of dollars in taxpayer funded assistance over many years to support security forces and operations against terrorist groups. The Embassy added that individuals seeking to undermine U.S.-Somalia relations should be held accountable because their actions hurt ordinary Somalis who benefit from American assistance.¹⁰¹

Somalia's Ministry of Defence separately confirmed that all individuals accused of taking part in the flag desecration incident have been arrested. The Ministry condemned the act and warned it would not tolerate anything that undermines the dignity, reputation or integrity of the Somali National Armed Forces, stating that those responsible would be held accountable.¹⁰²

Turkish intelligence officials held preliminary talks on July 7 with representatives of Somalia's federal government and opposition leaders ahead of internationally mediated negotiations.¹⁰³ On another front Turkey played an active role in launching and sustaining dialogue between Somalia's government and the opposition during a period of debate about the Constitution and electoral system. Talks began in Mogadishu following initiatives by Turkey's National Intelligence Organization after disagreements about proposed changes to the Constitution and election system. Representatives of the Somali Federal Government and the opposition agreed to continue talks, with the process being conducted in close coordination with the Turkish Foreign Ministry. Turkey conveyed to the parties that lasting peace and stability in Somalia can only be achieved through dialogue, compromise and an inclusive political process, while emphasizing that the future can only be shaped by the will of Somalis. The Somali government thanked Turkey for its mediation role, stating that government and opposition representatives met in Mogadishu in a friendly atmosphere,

⁹⁹ Canlı Gaste. "Somali ile Ankara ve Piri Reis Üniversiteleri Arasında Denizcilik Alanında İşbirliği Protokolü İmzalandı." July 3, 2026.

¹⁰⁰ Somali Guardian. "U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu Says American Flag Desecration by Somali Security Forces Harms U.S.-Somalia Relations." July 12, 2026.

¹⁰¹ Mustaqbal Media. "U.S. Embassy Condemns Desecration of American Flag, Commends Somalia's Swift Response." July 12, 2026.

¹⁰² Somali Guardian. "Somalia Detains Soldiers after Viral US Flag Desecration Video." July 11, 2026.

¹⁰³ Somali Guardian. "Turkey Holds Somalia Government-Opposition Pre-Talks as Puntland, Jubaland Boycott." July 7, 2026.

enabling the parties to exchange their views openly, sincerely and constructively.¹⁰⁴

Following that, Puntland and Jubaland declined to participate in the Turkey mediated talks, citing concerns over Turkey's neutrality and perceived bias toward the federal government in Mogadishu, highlighting deepening federal and regional rifts. Prominent Somali senator and scholar Abdi Ismail Samatar criticized Somalia's political opposition for allowing Turkey's deputy intelligence chief as mediator, calling it a serious mistake and doubting Ankara's impartiality.¹⁰⁵ Foreign Minister Abdisalam Abdi Ali engaged in a series of high-level international meetings. On July 19, the minister met in Cairo with Massad Boulos, Senior Adviser to US President Donald Trump on Arab and African Affairs. The discussions focused on strengthening bilateral relations between Somalia and the United States, with both sides reaffirming support for Somalia's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. The meeting also reviewed ways to deepen cooperation on counterterrorism and security.¹⁰⁶

The United States commended Somalia's federal government on July 19 for continued law enforcement cooperation following Mogadishu's extradition of Somali American Abdikerm Eidle, an alleged ringleader in the \$250 million Feeding Our Future fraud scheme in Minnesota. Eidle, who was accused of helping orchestrate one of the largest pandemic relief fraud schemes in Minnesota history, was extradited on July 17 to face charges in the United States. The extradition was praised by Washington as an example of Somalia's commitment to governance, anticorruption and accountability.¹⁰⁷

On another front Turkey's parliament approved a two-year extension of its military deployment in Somalia, authorizing continued support for counterterrorism, training, maritime security and other threats until July 2028. This decision approved around July 21, shows Turkey's commitment to Somalia's security sector.¹⁰⁸

Reports on or around July 25 noted that the Turkish navy continued to escort a drilling fleet off Somalia's coast tied to hydrocarbons exploration efforts. However, former Puntland minister and political commentator Ali Haji Warsame publicly questioned Turkey's ability to commercially develop Somalia's offshore oil resources. He described current activities as limited to exploration and test drilling rather than full commercial production and criticized the agreement's terms, alleging profit-sharing arrangements providing up to 90 percent to Turkey and citing a lack of transparency. Warsame suggested that commercial production was unlikely before 2034.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Yeni Şafak. "Türkiye Facilitates Somalia Government-Opposition Dialogue in Mogadishu." July 8, 2026.

¹⁰⁵ Somali Guardian. "Somalia Opposition Made 'Serious Mistake' by Accepting Turkey's Deputy Intelligence Chief as Mediator, Senator Samatar Says." July 8, 2026

¹⁰⁶ Somali Today. "Abdisalam Abdi Ali Holds Talks with Massad Boulos..." July 20, 2026.

¹⁰⁷ U.S. Department of Justice. "Successful Transfer of Abdikerm Eidleh from Somalia to Minnesota..." July 16, 2026.

¹⁰⁸ TRT Afrika. "Türkiye's Parliament Approves Two-Year Extension of Military Mission in Somalia." July 22, 2026.

¹⁰⁹ Hiiraan Online. "Turkish Naval Vessels Escort Drilling Fleet off Somalia." July 22, 2026.

Regional Diplomacy and Horn of Africa Dynamics

The Horn of Africa intensified diplomatic engagement with Egypt at the center of regional security discussions. Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty held separate talks on July 19 with his Eritrean counterpart Osman Saleh on enhancing the partnership and with Somali Foreign Minister Abdulsalam Abdi Ali focusing on strengthening bilateral relations. Both discussions also touched on coordinating positions and addressing the latest developments in the Horn of Africa. Egypt, Eritrea and Somalia have each endorsed the position that the security and management of the Red Sea remain the exclusive responsibility of its littoral states, reflecting an emphasis on the role of Red Sea coastal countries.¹¹⁰

The United States stepped up engagement with governments including Eritrea and Somalia regarding Red Sea security. Senior White House Adviser for Arab and African Affairs Massad Boulos met with the foreign ministers of Somalia and Eritrea in Cairo alongside Egyptian officials to discuss security in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea. This diplomatic initiative reflects Washington's renewed attention to the African side of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait amid a widening campaign of attacks on shipping in the Red Sea.¹¹¹

The regional security environment was also affected by a suspected maritime piracy incident on July 17 when pirates hijacked the Tanzanian-flagged chemical and general tanker MT Asana in the Gulf of Aden approximately 65 nautical miles south of Al Mukalla, Yemen. The vessel, which was en route toward the Somali port of Bosaso in Puntland, was moved toward waters off Somalia's northeastern Bari region near Caluula. This marked the second such hijacking in three months, raising concerns about renewed piracy activity in the Gulf of Aden. A South Korean warship was reported to be in the vicinity and Puntland security officials were involved in tracking and response efforts.¹¹²

Somalia's efforts to arrange an official visit by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to Uganda during his recent regional diplomatic tour reportedly stalled amid indications of a rift with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. The inability to secure the visit suggested underlying tensions in bilateral relations, though specific details regarding the nature of the disagreement were not immediately available.¹¹³

In maritime and economic diplomacy, Somalia signed a tax free fish export agreement with China on July 14, opening the Chinese market to Somali seafood. The agreement allows Somali businesspeople to export the country's fish products to China without customs duties, representing a significant economic opportunity for the fisheries sector and broader economic diversification efforts.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Middle East Eye. "Egypt Deepens Horn of Africa Maritime Alignment with Somalia MoU." July 10, 2026

¹¹¹ Somali Today. "US Steps Up Somalia, Eritrea Talks amid Red Sea Threats." July 25, 2026.

¹¹² Reuters. "Suspected Pirates Seize Tanker off Yemen Coast in Gulf of Aden." July 17, 2026.

¹¹³ Garowe Online. "Somalia Attempts to Mend Uganda Relations After Reported Dispute: Sources." July 7, 2026

¹¹⁴ Somali Guardian. "Somalia Signs Tax-Free Fish Export Agreement with China." July 14, 2026.

Somaliland: Political Consensus and Divisions, International Cooperation, and Maritime Security Coordination

Domestic and Political Developments

The Cabinet unanimously approved the joint statement signed by President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu paving the way for the agreement to be submitted for further legislative and procedural action. This approval formalized the executive branch's endorsement of the diplomatic understanding reached between the two parties.¹¹⁵ The decision drew criticism from the KAAH political party which described the move to establish a diplomatic mission in Jerusalem as insufficiently considered, arguing that the decision does not adequately reflect national interests and calling for greater consultation on foreign policy matters of importance.¹¹⁶

In contrast, the opposition Kulmiye Party reaffirmed its support for Somaliland's international recognition and its diplomatic relationship with Israel, including the recently established Somaliland embassy in Jerusalem, providing cross party backing for the government's foreign policy direction though standing in opposition to KAAH's critical stance.¹¹⁷ Former President Muse Bihi Abdi publicly raised questions regarding the current administration's handling of the Israel relationship, specifically concerning the embassy in Jerusalem and related diplomatic steps sparking internal political debate on foreign policy transparency and priorities and highlighting divisions within the political elite regarding the pace and nature of engagement with Israel.¹¹⁸

On media governance, the Ministry of Information, Culture and Awareness announced new regulations tightening oversight of media activities, stipulating that only licensed media organizations and accredited journalists would be permitted to conduct journalistic activities within Somaliland. The new rules represented a shift in media governance, requiring all media entities to obtain proper licensing and all journalists to secure accreditation before practicing their profession, though the Ministry did not provide specific details regarding the implementation timeline or penalties for non-compliance.¹¹⁹

Institutional adjustments occurred in the House of Elders where the long-serving Speaker, Hon. Saleebaan Maxamuud Aadan, formally announced and submitted his resignation on July 12 citing health issues and fatigue after more than two decades of service. The House held an extraordinary session, unanimously accepted the resignation, and elected Hon. Muse Haji Abdi Ducaale as the new Speaker by acclamation. The Speaker of the Upper House had

¹¹⁵ allAfrica.com / Horn Diplomat. "Somalia: Somaliland Cabinet Approves Joint Declaration With Israel." July 3, 2026.

¹¹⁶ Hiiraan Online. "Somaliland Opposition Party Rejects Jerusalem Embassy Plan as Contrary to International Law." June 29, 2026.

¹¹⁷ Somali Dispatch. "Opposition Party Kulmiye Backs Somaliland's Recognition and Embassy in Jerusalem." July 3, 2026

¹¹⁸ Somalia Today. "Cracks Emerge in Somaliland over Israel Recognition Row." July 4, 2026.

¹¹⁹ Somali Dispatch. "Somaliland Introduces New Rules Restricting Media Activities to Licensed Journalists." July 4, 2026.

been expected to officially announce his resignation from the speakership and membership citing health challenges and fatigue after long service since his election in 2004. This transition represented a key institutional adjustment within Somaliland's hybrid political system, where traditional clan elders and modern governance structures intersect, with the upper house playing a crucial role in matters of constitutional significance, conflict resolution, and the mediation of political disputes.¹²⁰

Preparations and announcements continued for the Somaliland Diaspora Week Conference 2026, scheduled for early August with events in Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and aiming to engage the diaspora in investment, development, innovation, and nation-building.¹²¹ On the matter of prisoner exchanges, Deputy Minister of Education Mr. Mohamed Muuse Abdi, widely recognized as Galayr, confirmed that a coordinated release and exchange of prisoners is imminent, articulating that the resolution of this sensitive issue has been designated a paramount priority by the President of the Republic of Somaliland. He clarified that operational oversight has been formally delegated to the National Peace Committee, tasked with finalizing the terms of the agreement, and in a public address appealed for patience from the citizenry, stating that upon the conclusion of the Committee's deliberations and the finalization of an agreement, all prisoners held by both parties those detained in Las Anod and those within Somaliland's custody are scheduled to be released or exchanged on the same day.¹²²

Contributing to the national dialogue on sovereignty, veteran traditional elder King Osman Aw Mohamud also known as Buurmadow, publicly articulated his perspective on the future of Somaliland and Somalia relations in an interview with Dirane Television, advocating for genuine dialogue between the two parties as the sole viable mechanism for resolving the political discord. While asserting that Somalia remains Somaliland's closest potential partner, the elder proposed a conditional framework for reunification, stating that should a political settlement grant Somaliland the national flag and designate the city of Hargeisa as the capital of a unified state, he would strongly advocate for reunification. He further expressed confidence in the leadership of Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, identifying him as a suitable counterpart for such high-level negotiations.¹²³

International Engagements and Diplomacy

A Le Monde report published July 6 detailed discreet UAE-led expansion and construction at Berbera Airport for potential use by the United States and Israel, with satellite images revealing major excavation work underway in at least three locations south of the runway

¹²⁰ HornDiplomat. "Somaliland House of Elders Elects New Speaker After Saleban Steps Down." July 12, 2026.

¹²¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Republic of Somaliland. "Somaliland Diaspora Week Conference 2026." July 2026 announcements.

¹²² Somaliland Standard. "Somaliland Issues a Statement Regarding the Release of Prisoners Captured During the Las Anod Conflict." July 25, 2026.

¹²³ Hiiraan Online. "Somaliland Traditional Leader Says Somaliland Should Review Israel Ties if Somalia Opens Serious Talks." July 25, 2026.

and at least eighteen trenches dug in the sandy soil between October 2025 and March. The development includes underground facilities for ammunition and fuel and possible air-defense systems amid Red Sea security concerns including Houthi threats. The construction coincides with Israel's recognition of Somaliland's independence, announced on December 26, 2025, which ultimately aims to establish a forward Israeli outpost in the Gulf of Aden close to the Yemeni coast where Houthi rebels operate, and aligns with a 2017 UAE-Somaliland defense agreement aimed at providing alternatives to bases in Djibouti. According to a European security source, the location of Berbera at the southern entrance to the Red Sea is attracting interest due to its position near the Bab al-Mandab Strait, a red line for both Israel and the United States amid threats to block maritime traffic.¹²⁴

The period witnessed intensive engagement between Somaliland authorities and the United Kingdom reflecting the depth of bilateral ties that Hargeisa maintains with London. On July 14, President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdillahi Irro received United Kingdom Ambassador to Somalia Charles King at the presidential palace in Hargeisa for high-level discussions covering a comprehensive range of cooperation areas, including development cooperation, security sector collaboration, democratic governance support, economic infrastructure development, institution-building initiatives, water resource management, climate adaptation strategies, energy sector development, education reform, healthcare improvement, trade facilitation, and investment promotion. During the discussions, President Irro urged greater United Kingdom support for Somaliland's international recognition, a priority for the Hargeisa administration that has sought to formalize its self-declared independence through bilateral diplomatic engagement, while Ambassador King praised Somaliland's stability and democratic progress, acknowledging the region's relative peace and the functioning of its electoral processes compared to other parts of the Horn of Africa.¹²⁵

In a separate diplomatic engagement, a delegation from Somaliland's Ministry of Health Development, led by Director General Dr. Ahmed Mahmoud Jama, conducted official working visits and meetings in Taiwan with senior officials at Taiwan's Ministry of Health, focusing on strengthening bilateral cooperation in the health sector with particular emphasis on healthcare reforms, technical collaboration, capacity building, and the exchange of expertise between Taiwanese and Somaliland health professionals.¹²⁶

Additionally, the Republic of Somaliland intensified its diplomatic engagement with the United States through a high-level official visit to Washington, D.C., by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Hon. Abdirahman Dahir Adan, who arrived in the U.S. capital to undertake a series of meetings designed to engage with U.S. government officials and leading American institutions with the core objective of advancing bilateral

¹²⁴ Le Monde. "UAE Discreetly Builds Military Base in Somaliland for US and Israel." July 6, 2026.

¹²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Republic of Somaliland. "The President of the Republic of Somaliland Holds a Strategic Meeting with the Ambassador of the United Kingdom." July 13–14, 2026.

¹²⁶ Somaliland Standard. "Somaliland Strengthens Global Health Partnerships at International Summit in Taiwan." July 22, 2026.

relations and expanding cooperation. The Foreign Minister's agenda was expected to focus on advancing shared interests, enhancing diplomatic engagement, and exploring avenues for collaboration in areas of mutual importance.¹²⁷

Security and Counterterrorism

Security forces in Beledweyne city thwarted a raid that two Al-Shabaab operatives were planning to conduct in Haawo-taako village, with Somali security forces shooting dead one operative while capturing another alive. A statement posted in state-run media confirmed that the security forces thwarted a terror attack where two armed Al-Shabaab operatives planned to conduct operations. The Spokesman of Hiraan administration, Mr. Liibaan Omar Hassan, further disclosed that information provided by the city's residents played a crucial role in thwarting the alleged attack, and he called upon Beledweyne local residents to continue their cooperation with security forces while stating that action would be taken against anyone who attempts to cause trouble in the city.¹²⁸

1.5 Sudan: Genocide Formal Documentation, Battlefield Momentum Shifts, and the Gap Between Evidence and Enforcement

July 2026 was defined by four developments of lasting consequence in Sudan's war: the UN Human Rights Council's formal emergency mobilization over El Obeid, the UN Fact-Finding Mission's conclusion that the RSF committed genocide in El Fasher, a landmark joint investigative disclosure confirming the UAE's Libya-based supply network for the RSF with the RSF's own political spokesperson acknowledging the support on camera, and the SAF's most significant sequence of territorial gains in 2026, culminating in the recapture of Kurmuk in Blue Nile and a cluster of North Kordofan localities reconnecting Khartoum to its western supply corridor. Against these, the US five-pillar peace proposal remained under contested negotiation, chemical weapons sanctions entered into force, the Sudanese pound's structural decline continued against a backdrop of 51 percent annual inflation, and the United Kingdom imposed new designations targeting Sudan's gold sector. None of July's developments produced a ceasefire or any enforceable commitment from either belligerent. They produced instead a sharpened and better-documented picture of a war whose costs, causes, and external enablers are increasingly visible while its resolution remains structurally blocked.

El Obeid dominated the month's international attention from its opening. On July 3, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk addressed a rare urgent debate at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, issuing what he described as a formal red alert: his office had documented fifteen drone strikes on El Obeid and surrounding areas over three weeks, killing

¹²⁷ Somaliland Standard. "Somaliland Foreign Minister Begins High-Level Washington Visit to Deepen U.S. Ties." July 25, 2026.

¹²⁸ Hiiraan Online. "Beledweyne security forces foil suspected al-Shabab attack." July 12, 2026.

at least 45 civilians and striking markets, schools, fuel stations, water infrastructure, and civilian vehicles.¹²⁹ Residents reported RSF control over all routes out of the city except eastward, with military build-up documented in RSF-affiliated social media accounts. Türk drew an explicit parallel with Zamzam camp and El Fasher, where his office had issued the same warnings to no effect, and called on heads of state to act and on the Security Council to limit the use of the veto, citing the decade-old France-Mexico proposal. Britain, which had requested the urgent debate, presented a draft resolution with Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Norway condemning the RSF assault and calling for a complete ceasefire,¹³⁰ while Human Rights Watch, addressing the Council, described the situation as eerily reminiscent of the weeks before El Fasher fell and highlighted the role of hundreds of Colombian private military contractors — hired through a UAE-based company and transited through UAE military facilities — in the El Fasher offensive.¹³¹ A former UN official who had led the El Fasher response warned that this time could be worse. By mid-month the Human Rights Council established a formal inquiry into reported abuses around El Obeid, and the European Union warned that any attack on the city's civilian population would lead it to consider robust measures against those responsible, calling on foreign actors to immediately end direct or indirect support enabling the conflict.¹³²

The humanitarian consequences of the siege deepened sharply across the month. RSF attacks on water infrastructure created a deficit estimated at approximately 70 percent of El Obeid's capacity, forcing humanitarian organizations and local authorities to rely on emergency water trucking, well drilling, and solar-powered pumping systems. Local authorities reported that the city's population had swelled from approximately 750,000 before the war to more than 3.4 million due to successive displacement waves, placing extraordinary pressure on residual infrastructure still functioning under siege conditions.¹³³ The International Organization for Migration warned that RSF attacks risk turning El Obeid into another El Fasher, with displacement rising across North and South Kordofan, while the General Coordination for Displaced Persons in Darfur warned of catastrophic camp conditions with malnutrition rising, health facilities shutting, and water and sanitation systems failing as the rainy season intensified.¹³⁴

¹²⁹UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, address to the UN Human Rights Council urgent debate on El Obeid, Geneva, July 3, 2026.

¹³⁰Draft resolution presented at the UN Human Rights Council urgent debate by the United Kingdom, co-sponsored by Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Norway, July 2026.

¹³¹Human Rights Watch, statement to the UN Human Rights Council urgent debate on El Obeid, July 2026, documenting the role of Colombian private military contractors hired through a UAE-based company and transited through UAE military facilities in the El Fasher offensive.

¹³²UN Human Rights Council, establishment of an inquiry into reported abuses around El Obeid, July 2026; European Union statement warning of robust measures against those responsible for any attack on El Obeid's civilian population and calling on foreign actors to end direct or indirect support enabling the conflict, July 2026.

¹³³Local authorities and humanitarian organizations, reporting on El Obeid water infrastructure deficit estimated at approximately 70 percent and population figures of more than 3.4 million due to successive displacement waves, July 2026.

¹³⁴International Organization for Migration (IOM), warning on displacement from RSF attacks and risk of El Obeid becoming another El Fasher, July 2026; General Coordination for Displaced Persons in Darfur, warning on catastrophic camp conditions, July 2026.

The month's most significant investigative disclosure provided the evidentiary infrastructure behind what the UN and Human Rights Watch had been alleging for months. A joint investigation by Lighthouse Reports, Evident, Der Spiegel, and Sudan War Monitor — drawing on satellite imagery, phone data, social media analysis, and interviews with RSF defectors and Libyan National Army sources — identified four previously unidentified RSF training camps in Libya operating under UAE logistical support: at Seweidiya near Kufra, Sabha, al-Jufra, and Camp 17 outside Benghazi.¹³⁵ The camps train RSF fighters on heavy machine guns, drones, and rocket launchers before they return to Sudan; purpose-built armoured vehicles bearing UAE markings enter Libya by sea through Benghazi or by cargo flights into interior bases, while Colombian mercenaries conduct training at Camp 17 alongside Libyan National Army personnel, with Russian personnel described at the Jufra facility. The investigation's most consequential moment came when the RSF-Tasis Alliance's spokesperson in Nairobi, pressed on UAE weapons flows, acknowledged on camera: 'The Emirates gave it to us.' The UAE denied all involvement. Lighthouse Reports director Klaas van Dijken told Dabanga that what the investigation uncovered is 'really just the tip of the iceberg,' and that without UAE support the RSF would quickly be unable to sustain its operations.¹³⁶ Sudan's Justice Minister Abdallah Dirif simultaneously announced that Khartoum had finalized preparations to pursue additional legal action against the UAE in US courts and other international jurisdictions, covering allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, illegal arms transfers, and mercenary recruitment.¹³⁷

The UN Fact-Finding Mission published its final report on July 9, formally concluding that the RSF's systematic campaign in El Fasher constituted genocide. Investigators documented mass killings, gang rape committed with bodies of recently killed family members present in the same rooms, and the deliberate starvation of the city's population through a prolonged siege blocking relief supplies and destroying food production systems.¹³⁸ Mission Chairman Mohamed Chande Othman stated explicitly that the patterns documented in El Fasher encirclement, attacks on civilian infrastructure, restrictions on humanitarian access, and widespread atrocities serve as a stark warning for El Obeid, moving the mission's February finding of genocide hallmarks to a formal conclusion of intent and systematic conduct. The RSF denied all systematic abuse accusations throughout. A Port Sudan counter-terrorism court issued a complementary accountability development on July 12, sentencing RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, his brothers Abdelrahim and Al-Qoni Hamdan Dagalo, and thirteen co-defendants to death in absentia for crimes committed during the

¹³⁵Lighthouse Reports, Evident, Der Spiegel, and Sudan War Monitor, joint investigation identifying four RSF training camps in Libya — at Seweidiya near Kufra, Sabha, al-Jufra, and Camp 17 outside Benghazi — operating under UAE logistical support, July 2026.

¹³⁶RSF-Tasis Alliance spokesperson, Nairobi, on-camera acknowledgment of UAE weapons transfers, cited in Lighthouse Reports investigation, July 2026; Klaas van Dijken (Lighthouse Reports director), interview with Dabanga Radio TV Online, July 2026.

¹³⁷Justice Minister Abdallah Dirif, announcement of finalized preparations for additional legal action against the UAE in US courts and other international jurisdictions, July 2026.

¹³⁸UN Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan, final report formally concluding that the RSF's systematic campaign in El Fasher constituted genocide, July 9, 2026; statement by Mission Chairman Mohamed Chande Othman, July 9, 2026.

RSF's assault on El Geneina and the killing of West Darfur Governor Khamis Abakar in June 2023, convicting all sixteen of crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes, and the use of prohibited methods of warfare.¹³⁹ The court ordered the confiscation of all RSF assets in favour of the state and instructed authorities to seek Interpol notices for the convicted individuals, with the presiding judge stating that the crimes are not subject to statute of limitations and cannot be subject to political pardons under Sudan's international obligations. The verdict carries limited immediate enforcement capacity given that Dagalo remains in control of most of Darfur, but it materially complicates any negotiated settlement requiring his participation as a political actor rather than a defendant.

The SAF's battlefield performance in July represented its most consequential sequence of territorial gains in 2026. On July 4 the army launched a large-scale offensive against RSF and SPLM-N positions around Kurmuk which had remained under the alliance's control since March following a June 23 operation to clear a corridor near the Ethiopian border at Al-Bar in Geissan.¹⁴⁰ By July 8 the SAF had recaptured Kurmuk, ending more than three months of RSF-SPLM-N control over the strategic border town in southeastern Blue Nile. Mada Masr's reconstruction of the campaign described an initial containment phase, the isolation of RSF forces inside the city, and a final assault in which ground forces breached defensive lines and conducted street-by-street clearing operations before the alliance withdrew.¹⁴¹ Kurmuk's recapture removed the RSF's primary southeastern foothold and eliminated direct pressure on the Roseires Dam and the road to Damazin, though the city's water, electricity, and health infrastructure sustained extensive damage and neighborhoods remained littered with explosive remnants of war making civilian return a phased prospect. SAF-aligned joint forces separately captured the Kulbus locality in West Darfur near the Chadian border, partly produced by RSF defections cultivated through the SAF's standing amnesty offer. By the month's final week the SAF extended this momentum into North Kordofan, recapturing Bara, Um Sayala, Al-Baraka, and surrounding localities, and reopening the Omdurman–El Obeid Export Road after nearly two years of RSF control, a strategic corridor reconnecting Khartoum with North Kordofan and creating more favorable conditions for potential operations toward Darfur.¹⁴² Following these gains, Burhan rejected any prospect of renewed accommodation with the RSF, vowing military elimination of the group, while senior officials announced plans to extend operations westward toward the Central African Republic border, statements indicating that Khartoum increasingly views recent successes as grounds for pursuing a decisive military outcome rather than re-engaging

¹³⁹Port Sudan counter-terrorism court, death sentences in absentia against Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, his brothers Abdelrahim and Al-Qoni Hamdan Dagalo, and thirteen co-defendants for crimes committed during the RSF assault on El Geneina and the killing of West Darfur Governor Khamis Abakar in June 2023, July 12, 2026.

¹⁴⁰Anadolu Agency, reporting on SAF large-scale offensive against Kurmuk, July 4, 2026.

¹⁴¹SAF recapture of Kurmuk, July 8, 2026; Mada Masr, reconstruction of the three-stage Kurmuk campaign, July 2026; SAF capture of Kulbus locality in West Darfur near the Chadian border, July 2026.

¹⁴²SAF recapture of Bara, Um Sayala, Al-Baraka, and surrounding localities in North Kordofan; reopening of the Omdurman–El Obeid Export Road after nearly two years of RSF control, July 2026; Sovereign Council Chairman Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, statement rejecting renewed accommodation with the RSF; senior SAF officials, announcement of plans to extend operations westward toward the Central African Republic border, July 2026.

stalled mediation.

The US five-pillar peace proposal, presented to Khartoum following a June 21 Cairo meeting between Sovereign Council member Kabbashi and US Senior Advisor Massad Boulos, remained under contested negotiation throughout the month. The proposal calls for an immediate 90-day humanitarian truce, a UN-AU-Arab League mechanism to oversee limited military withdrawals and deploy international observers, civilian-led national dialogue toward a transitional period, and an economic stabilization and reconstruction fund. Sudan's Security and Defence Council issued a statement on July 12 confirming positive engagement,¹⁴³ but two structural points of contention remain unresolved: Khartoum insists political talks must occur inside Sudan and include all factions without exception, while the US proposal explicitly excludes the National Congress Party and groups with violent Islamist ties; and the SAF demands comprehensive RSF withdrawal from all territory seized after May 11, 2023, while the US advocates a phased pullback beginning in North Darfur and North Kordofan. Burhan conditioned acceptance on alignment with what he described as the aspirations of the Sudanese people, confirming that the military campaign would continue regardless. At the multilateral level, the Arab League and the United States agreed during the month to establish a structured framework for regular coordination on Sudan, focusing on securing a ceasefire, protecting civilians, expanding humanitarian access, and supporting an inclusive political process, one of the clearest efforts in recent months to synchronize regional and international initiatives after repeated mediation failures.¹⁴⁴ Sudan's Democratic Bloc reiterated its support for inclusive Sudanese-led dialogue involving all political actors without exclusion,¹⁴⁵ and Uganda's external intelligence chief Joseph Owet, delivering a message from President Museveni, told Burhan that Kampala recognizes the military-led government as Sudan's sole legitimate authority and rejects the establishment of any parallel state structures, a notable regional diplomatic endorsement for Khartoum's isolation campaign.¹⁴⁶

The accountability record expanded beyond the genocide finding during the month. The Reckoning Project published a report documenting seventeen air and drone strikes across Darfur between October 2024 and April 2026, including a February 2025 SAF airstrike on Cinema Street in Nyala killing at least 22 civilians, a March 2025 strike on the Tora weekly market estimated to have killed up to 450 people, and an alleged September 2025 RSF drone strike on a mosque in El Fasher killing over 70 worshippers, describing the use of double-tap tactics by both sides and characterizing Sudan as having evolved into a drone-dominated conflict sustained by foreign supply chains.¹⁴⁷ The Khartoum state government separately

¹⁴³US five-pillar peace proposal; Sovereign Council member Kabbashi and US Senior Advisor Massad Boulos, Cairo meeting, June 21, 2026; Sudan Security and Defence Council statement confirming positive engagement, July 12, 2026.

¹⁴⁴Arab League and United States, agreement to establish a structured framework for regular coordination on Sudan, July 2026.

¹⁴⁵Sudan Democratic Bloc, statement reiterating support for inclusive Sudanese-led political dialogue, July 2026.

¹⁴⁶Uganda External Intelligence Chief Joseph Owet, message from President Yoweri Museveni delivered to Sovereign Council Chairman Abdel Fattah al-Burhan recognizing the military-led government as Sudan's sole legitimate authority, July 2026.

¹⁴⁷The Reckoning Project, report documenting seventeen air and drone strikes across Darfur between October 2024 and April

began exhuming and transferring the remains of 27 war victims from makeshift graves in markets and residential areas ahead of the rainy season, with hundreds of mass graves discovered across Khartoum state, most believed to contain victims of enforced disappearance and mass killings during the RSF's occupation of the capital.¹⁴⁸ Reports also emerged in the final week alleging that an SAF drone strike struck a gathering of internally displaced civilians in Blue Nile State, causing significant casualties unverified through official channels but consistent with broader patterns of aerial warfare affecting civilian populations documented across the month.¹⁴⁹

Sudan faced a dual expansion of international sanctions pressure during July. US measures entered into force under the Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act following Washington's determination that Khartoum had failed to meet statutory requirements, requiring the United States to oppose international financial assistance to Sudan, restrict most US goods and technology exports, and suspend aviation permissions, with humanitarian assistance exempted.¹⁵⁰ Sudan rejected the sanctions as politically motivated, reiterating its denial of chemical weapons use and insisting that it remains compliant with the Chemical Weapons Convention while repeatedly requesting that the United States provide evidence through established verification mechanisms. The United Kingdom simultaneously imposed new sanctions designations targeting individuals, companies, procurement networks, and mining enterprises linked to both the RSF and the SAF, identifying illicit gold exports through Dubai and Hong Kong as central components of the war economy.¹⁵¹ Khartoum moved concurrently to tighten its own wartime financial perimeter, revoking the operating license of Al-Asjad for Smart and Digital Solutions — a newly launched fintech firm whose UAE links triggered an investigation — and issuing a freeze directive requiring all banks and licensed fintechs to halt new partnerships without prior central bank approval.¹⁵²

Sudan's economic trajectory continued to deteriorate across the month. Annual inflation stood at 51.28 percent as of June, driven by continued currency depreciation and rising food prices, with economists warning that expanding sanctions could further weaken reconstruction prospects and accelerate inflationary pressures.¹⁵³ Finance Minister Gibril

2026, including the February 2025 Cinema Street strike in Nyala, the March 2025 Tora weekly market strike, and the alleged September 2025 RSF drone strike on a mosque in El Fasher, July 2026.

¹⁴⁸Khartoum state government, exhumation and transfer of remains of 27 war victims from makeshift graves in markets and residential areas, July 2026.

¹⁴⁹Reports of an SAF drone strike on a gathering of internally displaced civilians in Blue Nile State, July 2026. Note: this report has not been independently verified through official channels and is attributed as reported by international media.

¹⁵⁰US Government, sanctions entering into force under the Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act, July 2026; Sudan's rejection of the sanctions as politically motivated, July 2026.

¹⁵¹United Kingdom, sanctions designations targeting individuals, companies, procurement networks, and mining enterprises linked to both the RSF and SAF; identification of illicit gold exports through Dubai and Hong Kong as central components of Sudan's war economy, July 2026.

¹⁵²Sudan Central Bank, revocation of Al-Asjad for Smart and Digital Solutions operating license and issuance of freeze directive on new fintech partnerships, July 2026.

¹⁵³Annual inflation figure of 51.28 percent recorded in June 2026, cited in weekly reporting; economist warnings on the inflationary impact of reduced international financing access, July 2026.

Ibrahim attributed a partial currency recovery to the Central Bank's 400-million-dirham injection rather than any foreign deposit, while official sources confirmed Sudan is developing BRICS-aligned alternative banking mechanisms and shifting to local currencies in bilateral trade to bypass anticipated expansions of Western measures.¹⁵⁴ Against this deteriorating backdrop, Khartoum pursued reconstruction partnerships with non-Western actors: officials engaged Chinese solar manufacturer JA Solar on renewable energy and post-war infrastructure reconstruction,¹⁵⁵ and signed a memorandum of understanding with Turkey's Ergaz to construct Sudan's first dedicated gas terminal at Suakin Port under a Build-Operate-Transfer model aimed at strengthening energy security and reducing recurring fuel shortages.¹⁵⁶ Gold retained its position as the backbone of Sudan's wartime economy, with Prime Minister Kamil Idris calling for stronger regulation of artisanal mining and greater environmental oversight while positioning the sector as a pillar of long-term reconstruction financing, with 17 companies reported to have entered commercial gold production in South Kordofan.¹⁵⁷ A power barge was introduced at Port Sudan to alleviate chronic nationwide blackouts, though officials acknowledged that damaged infrastructure, suspended electricity imports from Ethiopia, and wartime disruptions continue to undermine energy security.¹⁵⁸ Sudan's Ministry of Agriculture separately attributed a temporary decline in Nile water levels to reduced discharge from the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, highlighting the continuing strategic salience of Nile water management even as the country remains consumed by internal conflict.¹⁵⁹

The International Organization for Migration reported that more than 4.6 million internally displaced Sudanese have returned to areas of origin since the conflict began, though these returns remain fragile given destroyed infrastructure, limited services, and continuing insecurity across most return areas.¹⁶⁰ The figure coexists with continued new outflows: displacement from Kordofan accelerated as El Obeid's siege deepened, and fresh displacement linked to the Kurmuk campaign in Blue Nile added pressure on humanitarian systems already operating at the limits of their capacity and funding.

July 2026 tightened rather than resolved Sudan's core contradictions. The genocide finding, the death sentences, the Libya supply-network investigation, and the Reckoning Project's drone documentation assembled the most comprehensive public evidentiary record of the

¹⁵⁴Finance Minister Gibril Ibrahim, statement on currency recovery and Central Bank 400-million-dirham injection, July 2026; reporting on Sudan's development of BRICS-aligned banking mechanisms and local-currency bilateral trade arrangements, July.

¹⁵⁵Sudanese officials, engagement with Chinese solar manufacturer JA Solar on renewable energy and post-war infrastructure reconstruction, July 2026.

¹⁵⁶Sudan, memorandum of understanding with Turkey's Ergaz for construction of Sudan's first dedicated gas terminal at Suakin Port under a Build-Operate-Transfer model, July 2026.

¹⁵⁷Prime Minister Kamil Idris, statement on artisanal mining regulation and environmental oversight; announcement that 17 companies had entered commercial gold production in South Kordofan, July 2026.

¹⁵⁸Sudan, introduction of a power barge at Port Sudan to address chronic nationwide blackouts, July 2026.

¹⁵⁹Sudan Ministry of Agriculture, statement attributing a temporary decline in Nile water levels to reduced discharge from Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, July 2026.

¹⁶⁰International Organization for Migration (IOM), figure of more than 4.6 million internally displaced Sudanese who have returned to areas of origin since the conflict began, July 2026.

war's character since its outbreak — one in which the identities of perpetrators, the architecture of external support, and the scale of atrocity are no longer matters of reasonable dispute. The SAF's battlefield gains in Blue Nile and North Kordofan were the most tangible territorial progress of 2026, reopening the Omdurman–El Obeid corridor and shifting momentum in central Sudan, yet they do not alter the fundamental balance in Darfur, where the RSF retains its strongest territorial presence and where El Obeid continues to absorb the same trajectory of encirclement that preceded El Fasher's fall. The five-pillar peace proposal advanced incrementally without resolution, the negotiating gap between Khartoum's demand for comprehensive RSF withdrawal and Washington's phased approach remaining structurally wide. The death sentences against Dagalo close the political space for any settlement including him as a participant rather than a defendant — a constraint that, combined with Burhan's stated intent to pursue military elimination, suggests both leaderships have concluded that the costs of negotiation now exceed the costs of continuation. Sudan ends July with its genocide formally documented, its principal western city still under siege, its currency in structural decline past 51 percent inflation, and its two belligerents no closer to any framework placing civilian protection above strategic calculation.

1.6 South Sudan: Fifteen Years of Independence, Compounding Collapse, and an Election Date Without a Foundation

July 2026 opened with South Sudan's humanitarian system absorbing another blow to what little operational capacity remained. On June 30, armed men ambushed a clearly marked humanitarian convoy operated by the John Dau Foundation in Duk County, Jonglei State, killing five humanitarian workers and injuring four others as the convoy transported staff returning from an Action Against Hunger training session along the route between Payuel Payam and Pajut in Panyang Payam; several civilians were also reportedly killed or wounded. UN Humanitarian Coordinator Ramanathan Balakrishnan described the attack as deliberate and brutal and called for a prompt impartial investigation. UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher noted that the killings brought the total number of humanitarian workers and contractors killed in South Sudan in 2026 to 29.¹⁶¹ UNMISS head Anita Kiki Gbeho called on all parties to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law; a simultaneously published UNMISS report documented more than 760 civilians killed between January and March of 2026, an 89 percent increase on the previous quarter, alongside a significant increase in conflict-related sexual violence — framing the Duk County ambush not as an aberration but as a data point in a trend.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Statement by UN Humanitarian Coordinator Ramanathan Balakrishnan on the Duk County Convoy Ambush," OCHA, June 30, 2026; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Statement by Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher on Humanitarian Worker Casualties in South Sudan," OCHA, July 2026.

¹⁶²United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), "Report on Civilian Casualties in South Sudan: January–March 2026," UNMISS, July 2026; UNMISS Head Anita Kiki Gbeho, statement calling on all parties to uphold obligations under

Fighting in Akobo County continued in parallel. SPLA-IO forces launched an attack on Walgak in the early hours of Sunday, briefly overrunning the area before government reinforcements from Waat retook it. The government-appointed commissioner of Akobo County, James Kueth Makuach — who had defected from the SPLM-IO to the ruling SPLM in April and been reappointed following the SSPDF's March offensive — was reported killed in the engagement, though state authorities said his whereabouts remained formally unknown at the time of reporting. His death, if confirmed, would remove a figure whose appointment was itself contested under the R-ARCSS, which allocates the Akobo commissioner position to the SPLM-IO. Bol Deng Bol, chairperson of the Jonglei Civil Society Network, stated that the renewed fighting underscored the need for inclusive dialogue including Riek Machar's participation, warning that continued opposition exclusion risks producing more violence.¹⁶³ Fighting resumed in Walgak again in the second week of July, drawing a strong condemnation from RJMEC, which called on all parties to immediately cease hostilities and resolve differences through dialogue consistent with R-ARCSS provisions.¹⁶⁴

Fifteen Years of Independence: An Accountability Reckoning

South Sudan's fifteenth independence anniversary on July 9 arrived under conditions that made celebration largely performational. The government declared the day a public holiday but scaled back major national events, citing severe economic instability and active conflict; the Ministry of Culture instructed citizens across states to host localized festivities, acknowledging that a budget sufficient only for Juba would not constitute a national celebration.¹⁶⁵ In its place, the anniversary became an occasion for stocktaking, and the stock was bleak across every indicator examined. The most precise single measure of where the country stands came from assessments placing R-ARCSS implementation below 25 percent. Security sector reform has not advanced; unified forces have not been deployed; the permanent constitution remains unfinished; and elections have been postponed five times since 2015, with December 2026 as the latest scheduled date. ACLED documented 13,256 armed incidents between independence and the fifteenth anniversary, averaging more than two attacks per day across fifteen years. ICRC reported that in the first six months of 2026 it conducted 266 medical evacuations, a 50 percent increase over the same period in 2025, with Juba Military Hospital now operating beyond capacity. GDP per capita has fallen from approximately \$1,400 at independence to under \$500, with oil financing between 90 and 95 percent of the national budget. A UN panel of experts found in 2026 that South Sudan continued to sell oil months ahead of delivery, with disputes over undelivered cargoes and

international humanitarian law, July 2026.

¹⁶³UNMISS, reporting on fighting in Walgak, Akobo County, and the reported death of government-appointed Commissioner James Kueth Makuach, July 2026; Bol Deng Bol, Chairperson, Jonglei Civil Society Network, public statement on the need for inclusive dialogue including Riek Machar's participation, July 2026.

¹⁶⁴Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), "Statement Condemning Renewed Violence in Walgak, Akobo County," RJMEC, July 2026.

¹⁶⁵Government of South Sudan, Ministry of Culture, directive on fifteenth independence anniversary observances citing severe economic instability and active conflict, July 9, 2026.

oil-backed debts reaching UK commercial courts.¹⁶⁶

Research published during the anniversary week offered the most structurally compelling reading of this record: that South Sudan's successive peace agreements have not so much failed as worked, in the sense that they stabilize elite order precisely by preserving the extraction systems that make violence profitable. The argument, grounded in revenue tracing from 1899 across colonial, rebel, and independent rule, is that each settlement reshuffles who profits from the machinery without dismantling it.¹⁶⁷ This analytical frame lends additional significance to a development reported on July 11: the SPLM announced that it had received a donation of five billion South Sudanese pounds from a company called Digital Dots Interior Designing Ltd ahead of the December elections. The party's Secretary General received the funds and issued a statement praising the contribution as a demonstration of comradeship. Digital Dots is not unknown to SPLM financing — the company had sponsored the party's SPLA Day celebrations in May 2025 — but what remains unknown is the company's ownership, its shareholders, and the source of its capacity to make a contribution of this scale to a ruling party preparing for the country's first general election. Political party financing disclosure requirements in South Sudan are limited, and the SPLM statement addressed none of the questions the announcement raised.¹⁶⁸

Electoral Preparations, Institutional Deficits, and the Abyei Dispute

The National Elections Commission acknowledged throughout the month that preparations for December 22, 2026 remain severely constrained by financial shortfalls, logistical challenges, and the continuing deterioration of the security environment. Officials stressed that voter registration, civic education, electoral infrastructure, and deployment of electoral personnel cannot proceed effectively without additional funding and improved stability.¹⁶⁹ These constraints reinforced concerns among regional and international observers regarding the credibility of a vote held under the present conditions, compounded by the fact that the three R-ARCSS prerequisites for elections — a permanent constitution, a national population census, and unification of armed forces — remain unfinished, while the SPLM-IO, a principal peace agreement signatory, continues to be excluded from political consultations, and First Vice President Riek Machar remains on trial in Juba on treason charges his faction describes as politically motivated.

The unresolved status of Abyei re-emerged as a significant source of bilateral tension during

¹⁶⁶Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), South Sudan conflict data documenting 13,256 armed incidents between independence and the fifteenth anniversary, cited in independence anniversary reporting, July 2026; International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), "South Sudan: Humanitarian Update, First Half of 2026," ICRC, July 2026; United Nations Panel of Experts on South Sudan, report findings on oil-backed debt disputes, 2026; World Bank, South Sudan GDP per capita assessment, 2026.

¹⁶⁷Research publication on the structural political economy of South Sudan's successive peace agreements, grounded in revenue tracing from 1899 through colonial, rebel, and independent rule, cited in weekly reporting, July 2026.

¹⁶⁸Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), "Statement on Receipt of Donation from Digital Dots Interior Designing Ltd," July 11, 2026.

¹⁶⁹South Sudan National Elections Commission (NEC), Chairperson Professor Abednego Akok Kacuo, "Statement on Electoral Preparations and Funding Constraints for December 22, 2026 Elections," NEC, July 2026.

the month following Sudan's objection to the inclusion of Abyei residents in South Sudan's planned elections, on the grounds that the territory's final status remains unresolved under previous bilateral agreements. Juba rejected these objections, defending the inclusion of Abyei voters and maintaining that residents should exercise their political rights despite the territory's disputed status. Local protests erupted after residents reported being prevented from participating in electoral processes because of Sudan's objections.¹⁷⁰ The controversy illustrates how unresolved territorial disputes inherited from the 2011 independence process continue to intersect with South Sudan's internal political transition, carrying implications for bilateral relations and future negotiations over Abyei's final status at a moment when the Sudan-South Sudan security channel remains active.

The enforcement of South Sudan's controversial Cybercrime Act attracted renewed concern during the month as authorities began actively implementing the legislation. Journalists, civil society organizations, and human rights advocates warned that several provisions could be used to restrict freedom of expression and limit online criticism of public officials, with broad legal definitions and expanded enforcement powers risking a narrowing of civic space at a time when political openness remains essential for any credible electoral transition.¹⁷¹ Analysts separately identified illicit arms trafficking as one of the most significant threats to electoral security, pointing to the continued militarization of politics as a structural challenge that could undermine confidence in the electoral process if security sector reforms remain incomplete.¹⁷²

Regional Diplomacy and Economic Pressures

Regional diplomatic engagement offered partial counterweight to the domestic pressures. A high-level delegation from Kenya's United Democratic Alliance visited Juba for discussions with the SPLM focused on inter-party cooperation, governance, and regional political collaboration,¹⁷³ while Agriculture Minister Josephine Lagu met Ethiopian counterparts in what her office described as a key bilateral meeting; Minister Aleu publicly described Ethiopia as the 'father of South Sudan' in recognition of Addis Ababa's role during the liberation struggle — a diplomatically fulsome formulation carrying context given the ongoing fighting in Jonglei, where cross-border movement of people and supplies has been a recurring security concern.¹⁷⁴ South Sudan and Uganda reaffirmed commitments to

¹⁷⁰Government of the Republic of Sudan, diplomatic objection to inclusion of Abyei residents in South Sudan's planned elections on grounds of unresolved territorial status, July 2026; Government of the Republic of South Sudan, response rejecting Sudan's objections and affirming voters' rights, July 2026.

¹⁷¹Government of South Sudan, Cybercrime Act enforcement notifications, July 2026; civil society organizations and human rights advocates, statements on provisions risking restriction of freedom of expression and online criticism of public officials, July 2026.

¹⁷²Reports on illicit arms trafficking as a threat to electoral security; analysts' assessments of the militarization of politics as a structural challenge to the electoral process, cited in weekly reporting, July 2026.

¹⁷³Kenya United Democratic Alliance, statement on delegation visit to Juba for discussions with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement on inter-party cooperation, governance, and regional political collaboration, July 2026.

¹⁷⁴Government of South Sudan, Ministry of Agriculture, "Statement by Minister Josephine Lagu on Bilateral Meeting with Ethiopian Counterparts," July 2026.

improving cross-border coordination and accelerated discussions on border demarcation, reflecting continued efforts to reduce cross-border tensions,¹⁷⁵ while South Sudan and Saudi Arabia held separate bilateral discussions on ties and regional issues.¹⁷⁶

Economic pressures remained pronounced across the month. Fuel shortages and rising transportation costs continued to affect domestic markets, prompting the government to announce the arrival of approximately 200 fuel trucks destined for South Sudan in an effort to stabilize supply and reduce soaring pump prices.¹⁷⁷ The government also announced consideration of urgent rehabilitation of the Juba-Nimule highway, with the customs chief separately warning clearing agents against revenue fraud as a systemic problem undermining state finances. Development cooperation with Egypt advanced through the inauguration of the Egyptian-funded SOMBA groundwater station at the University of Juba, intended to strengthen access to clean water while enhancing scientific and technical cooperation,¹⁷⁸ and China reaffirmed its commitment to expanding military cooperation with South Sudan, reinforcing Beijing's position as one of Juba's principal international partners.¹⁷⁹ South Sudan launched its first drought response plan during the month, a pre-emptive measure aimed at addressing emerging drought conditions before they reach crisis threshold — notable as a departure from the country's historically reactive humanitarian posture, though its implementation depends on the same fiscal and institutional constraints that have limited all previous emergency responses.¹⁸⁰

Analysts examined South Sudan's policy of neutrality in the Sudan conflict, warning that Juba's balancing strategy may become increasingly difficult to sustain as the conflict evolves and regional actors face mounting pressure to align with competing interests.¹⁸¹ Humanitarian agencies continued warning that insecurity has pushed South Sudan's health sector toward a breaking point, limiting access to essential medical services and worsening conditions in conflict-affected areas, a deterioration whose trajectory, in the absence of political breakthrough, shows no sign of reversal.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁵Governments of South Sudan and Uganda, joint statements on cross-border coordination commitments and border demarcation discussions, July 2026.

¹⁷⁶Government of South Sudan and Saudi Arabia, communiqué on bilateral discussions covering ties and regional issues, July 2026; Government of South Sudan, "Announcement on Urgent Rehabilitation of the Juba-Nimule Highway," July 2026; South Sudan Revenue Authority, customs chief statement on revenue fraud, July 2026.

¹⁷⁷Government of South Sudan, "Announcement on Fuel Truck Imports to Stabilize Domestic Supply," July 2026.

¹⁷⁸Government of Egypt and University of Juba, "Inauguration of the Egyptian-Funded SOMBA Groundwater Station," July 2026.

¹⁷⁹Government of the People's Republic of China, statement reaffirming commitment to expanding military cooperation with South Sudan, July 2026.

¹⁸⁰Government of South Sudan, "Launch of National Drought Response Plan," July 2026.

¹⁸¹Analysis of South Sudan's policy of neutrality in the Sudan conflict and sustainability of Juba's balancing strategy, cited in weekly reporting, July 2026.

¹⁸²Humanitarian agencies, warnings on South Sudan's health sector approaching a breaking point due to insecurity, displacement, and weak public services, July 2026.

Overall Assessment

July 2026 compressed South Sudan's fifteen years of independence into a single analytical frame that was difficult to misread. The R-ARCSS implementation figure below 25 percent, the ICRC evacuation volume up 50 percent, GDP per capita below \$500, elections postponed five times, Machar on trial for treason, the Jonglei food tipping point warning, 29 aid workers killed since January, and a five-billion-pound donation to the ruling party from a company of unclear ownership ahead of the country's first general election are not independent data points. They describe the same political economy, in which governing arrangements have proven more durable than the institutions they were supposed to build. The December 22 election date, announced under conditions where the three R-ARCSS prerequisites remain unfinished and the principal opposition leader remains on trial, stands as the most consequential deadline in South Sudan's post-independence history and also the one with the weakest institutional foundation beneath it. The gap between that date and the conditions required to make it credible is the central fact of South Sudan's political situation as the country enters the second half of 2026.

1.7 Kenya: Political, Economic and Security Landscape

July 2026 presented Kenya as a country seeking investment, external financing and wider diplomatic partnerships while facing growing scrutiny over debt, governance, sovereignty and public confidence. The government secured a Sh97 billion World Bank reform loan, strengthened foreign exchange reserves and promoted major projects in energy, irrigation, telecommunications and regional trade. However, these positive developments were accompanied by declining diaspora remittances, criticism of debt focused economic policies and public concern over the sale of a further government stake in Safaricom. Kenya also expanded its relationships with Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Belgium, France, the United Kingdom and Jamaica, suggesting a strategy of diplomatic and commercial diversification.

At the same time, relations with traditional Western partners became more complicated. Disagreement over a United States supported Ebola quarantine centre raised questions about consultation, judicial authority and national sovereignty. Kenya's eligibility under the African Growth and Opportunity Act also came under review amid concerns regarding governance and human rights. Relations with the United Kingdom faced a more direct disruption when Kenya withheld licences for a British military exercise, forcing the training to be moved elsewhere. Subsequent talks on trade, infrastructure, healthcare and regional security indicated that both governments wanted to contain the dispute rather than allow it to damage the wider relationship. Domestically, tensions surrounding the Saba Saba demonstrations reflected continuing disagreement between security institutions and civil society over the management of public protest.

Domestic news from the month of July starts with the Saba Saba¹⁸³ protests, where organisers and police disputed whether the required notice had been properly submitted. The demonstrations reflected continuing concerns about police accountability, disappearances and constitutional rights. Later, hackers briefly defaced the president's official website¹⁸⁴, raising further questions about the security of government digital systems.

Kenya began July with a substantial financial gain after the World Bank¹⁸⁵ approved a \$750 million facility, approximately Sh97 billion, to support fiscal sustainability and governance reforms. The financing had been delayed as the World Bank sought stronger commitments concerning transparency, public financial management, procurement and conflicts of interest. Its eventual approval gave the government access to financing that was cheaper than commercial borrowing and offered some relief at a time when debt service costs were consuming a large share of public revenue. Nevertheless, the loan also demonstrated how strongly Kenya's access to external finance had become linked to reforms demanded by international lenders. A separate report on the International Monetary Fund¹⁸⁶ argued that fiscal consolidation and debt repayment continued to restrict spending on health, education and social protection.

Kenya's external financial position nevertheless showed signs of resilience. Foreign exchange reserves reached approximately \$14.17 billion¹⁸⁷, equivalent to six months of import cover and comfortably above the Central Bank of Kenya's minimum requirement. The stronger reserve position gave Kenya a larger buffer for imports, foreign debt payments and possible pressure on the shilling. This improvement was balanced by weaker diaspora inflows. Remittances declined from \$394.2 million in May to \$375.6 million in June, while cumulative inflows over the previous twelve months were also below the equivalent period in 2025. The two developments therefore offered a mixed economic picture. Kenya's official reserves were strengthening, but one of its most important and socially distributed sources of foreign currency was showing signs of slowing.

The restructuring of Safaricom's¹⁸⁸ ownership was among the most significant corporate developments of the month. Reports on the same transaction confirmed that Vodacom completed the acquisition of an additional 20 percent stake, raising its total ownership to 55 percent and giving it majority control. The \$2.1 billion transaction included a 15 percent stake purchased from the Kenyan government and a further 5 percent acquired from Vodafone. Kenya retained a 20 percent shareholding, while the government said proceeds from the sale would be directed towards infrastructure such as roads, airports, water and

¹⁸³ Peter Obuya, "Activists Notify Police about Saba Saba Demonstrations," *The Star*, July 5, 2026.

¹⁸⁴ Reuters, "Kenya Investigating Cybersecurity Incident Affecting President's Website," July 18, 2026.

¹⁸⁵ World Bank, press release on the Second Kenya Fiscal Sustainability and Resilient Growth Development Policy Operation, June 29, 2026.

¹⁸⁶ Capital FM, reproduced by AllAfrica, reported on criticism of IMF fiscal consolidation and its effects on public spending, July 6, 2026.

¹⁸⁷ *The Star*, report on Kenya's foreign exchange reserves and import cover, July 16, 2026.

¹⁸⁸ Vodacom Group, announcement completing the additional 20 percent Safaricom acquisition, June 30, 2026

energy systems. The transaction provided the government with substantial immediate revenue, but it also transferred majority ownership of one of Kenya's most strategically important telecommunications and financial technology companies to a foreign corporate group. Safaricom's importance goes beyond mobile communications because M Pesa, digital payments, enterprise services and its expansion into Ethiopia have made the company part of Kenya's economic influence in East Africa.

Energy and infrastructure policy reflected the government's ambition to reduce Kenya's dependence on imported petroleum while positioning the country as a regional supply centre. An initial report indicated that Aliko Dangote¹⁸⁹ planned to develop a refinery in Kenya with a stated thirty month construction target. A later report provided progress on the proposal, with President William Ruto saying the project was ready to move forward following discussions with Dangote. The planned Lamu¹⁹⁰ refinery was presented as a project capable of supplying several African markets and creating tens of thousands of jobs. Its scale would make it a major industrial project, although its eventual impact will depend on financing, construction, regional demand and implementation. Other energy related stories pointed to Kenya's wider search for supply security, including cooperation with Rwanda¹⁹¹ on fuel imports, the temporary continuation of the 8 percent fuel tax and debate over nuclear¹⁹² energy plans that were facing opposition from affected communities.

Regional trade remained one of Kenya's strongest economic advantages. Exports to East African Community¹⁹³ partners rose to Sh351 billion in 2025, while Kenya maintained a trade surplus with the other member states. However, the government also identified county charges and local regulations as barriers to the movement of cargo, demonstrating that regional integration can be weakened by restrictions within Kenya itself. Relations with Ethiopia received particular attention later in the month. The two countries promoted deeper cooperation in trade, tourism, manufacturing, energy and transport, supported by the Moyale border¹⁹⁴ facility, the Nairobi to Addis Ababa road network, direct air connections and the longer term potential of the Lamu corridor. Bilateral trade remained modest compared with the size of the two economies, but electricity exports from Ethiopia, Safaricom's operations there and emerging tourism investments illustrated a relationship that was gradually moving beyond traditional border and security concerns.

¹⁸⁹ Reuters, report on Dangote Industries' proposed Lamu refinery and financing plans, July 7, 2026.

¹⁹⁰ Anadolu Agency report on President Ruto's employment and regional supply projections for the Lamu refinery, July 10, 2026.

¹⁹¹ Reuters, report on the Kenya and Rwanda fuel agreements, June 30, 2026; Ecofin Agency, report on the extension of the reduced petroleum tax, July 15, 2026.

¹⁹² Mongabay, report on community opposition to Kenya's proposed nuclear power plant, May 26, 2026; Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute, statement concerning protests and community rights, July 28, 2026.

¹⁹³ Kenya News Agency, report on Kenya's trade with EAC partners, its regional trade surplus and county transit charges, July 14, 2026.

¹⁹⁴ *The Star*, report on Kenya and Ethiopia's trade, tourism, infrastructure, electricity and investment links, July 24, 2026.

Kenya also widened its diplomatic and commercial engagement beyond its immediate neighbourhood. Saudi Arabia and Kenya¹⁹⁵ held their first formal political consultations and signed agreements covering investment, customs cooperation, export financing and the employment of Kenyan workers. Other supplied reports recorded trade and diplomatic initiatives with Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Belgium, China, France and Jamaica. The opening of a resident mission in Jamaica expanded Kenya's formal presence in the Caribbean¹⁹⁶, while discussions with European, Asian and Gulf partners focused heavily on trade, agriculture, logistics, investment and security. These engagements suggest that Kenya was attempting to avoid dependence on any single external partner by developing multiple channels for financing, employment, trade and political support.

Relations with the United States were more sensitive. The proposed Ebola¹⁹⁷ quarantine facility in Nanyuki sparked opposition over sovereignty, consultation and police conduct, while Kenya's Cabinet separately approved a health agreement with Washington on disease surveillance. At the same time, Kenya's eligibility for duty free access under AGOA¹⁹⁸ was reviewed against governance, corruption and human rights standards. Together, these developments showed how domestic accountability increasingly shaped Kenya's relationship with the United States.

Kenya's relationship with the United Kingdom¹⁹⁹ combined cooperation with growing disagreement. A dispute over renewing the defence agreement, including questions of legal immunity, accountability and financial terms, led Kenya to withhold licences for a planned British Army exercise in Laikipia. However, wider ties remained active, with continued discussions on trade, infrastructure, regional security and health cooperation²⁰⁰. The episode showed Kenya asserting greater control over defence relations without abandoning its broader partnership with Britain.

Health, agriculture and climate resilience formed another important part of the month's policy agenda. A Kenyan scientist received a Sh187 million Gates Foundation grant to develop an artificial intelligence system using clinical information, wastewater surveillance and genomic data to predict disease outbreaks and identify antimicrobial resistance. The government and the Gates Foundation²⁰¹ also launched a long term irrigation programme intended to expand irrigated land by one million acres, improve food security and increase

¹⁹⁵ Saudi Press Agency, report on the inaugural Saudi and Kenyan political consultations, July 5, 2026; Saudi Gazette, report on the agreements signed during the consultations.

¹⁹⁶ Kenya Ministry of Foreign Affairs, announcement of the resident High Commission in Jamaica, July 16, 2026.

¹⁹⁷ Associated Press, report on the Ebola quarantine facility, the court order, local protests and allegations that American personnel were already being quarantined, July 20, 2026.

¹⁹⁸ United States government notice concerning the 2026 annual AGOA eligibility review; *People Daily*, report on the implications for Kenya's market access.

¹⁹⁹ *The Guardian*, report on the cancellation of British military training and the dispute over jurisdiction and accountability, July 23, 2026.

²⁰⁰ AllAfrica, report on President Ruto's discussions with the British High Commissioner; Capital FM, report on Kenya and United Kingdom health cooperation, July 2026.

²⁰¹ International Livestock Research Institute, announcement of Samuel Oyola's \$1.45 million Gates Foundation grant, June 25, 2026.

climate resilience. Later in the month, Kenya, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa²⁰², the African Union livestock agency and IGAD began a three year initiative focused on livestock value chains, climate insurance, land tenure and climate information systems.

Security developments showed that Kenya continued to face both domestic and regional risks. A suspected Al Shabaab²⁰³ attack damaged a Safaricom telecommunications mast in Garissa, illustrating how armed groups can target civilian infrastructure to disrupt communication and weaken state presence in remote areas. Another supplied report alleged that military communications equipment intended for Somaliland had travelled through Nairobi, placing Kenya within the contested security politics surrounding Somalia, Somaliland and outside powers. Reports on closer defence ties with France²⁰⁴ and a possible increase in European Union military assistance further demonstrated Kenya's importance as a regional security partner. These relationships may provide resources and training, but the disputes involving the American quarantine facility and the British military presence also showed that external security cooperation can become politically costly when questions of accountability and sovereignty are not adequately addressed.

Overall, July 2026 showed Kenya pursuing an ambitious but difficult balancing strategy. The government attracted loans, corporate investment and major infrastructure proposals while expanding relationships across Africa, Europe, Asia, the Gulf and the Caribbean. At the same time, debt pressures, declining remittances, disputes over foreign military and health projects, local opposition to infrastructure and tensions surrounding demonstrations exposed weaknesses in public trust and institutional legitimacy. Kenya's position as East Africa's commercial and diplomatic centre remained strong, but the month demonstrated that the durability of this position will depend not only on attracting external capital and partnerships, but also on ensuring transparency, consultation, accountability and visible benefits for the Kenyan public.

Section Two: MENA Region, Gulf, and Global Engagement

2.1 Egypt: Deepening Horn of Africa Security Ties

Egypt spent July deepening a strategy of maritime and diplomatic encirclement aimed at constraining Ethiopia's ambitions for direct Red Sea access, using a widening network of port and defense agreements with Somalia, Eritrea, and Djibouti. Somalia's cabinet approved a memorandum of understanding with Egypt on maritime transport and ports, extending a pattern of agreements that, together with an earlier Egypt-Eritrea maritime accord and a prior

²⁰² United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, announcement of the three year livestock, land, insurance and climate information initiative, July 22, 2026.

²⁰³ *The Star*, report on the suspected Al Shabaab attack against a telecommunications mast in Garissa, July 26, 2026.

²⁰⁴ DefenceWeb, report on the Kenya and France defence agreement; Africa Intelligence, report on possible additional European Union military support, July 27, 2026.

Egypt-Djibouti agreement, gives Cairo standing across the length of the corridor Ethiopian trade would need to reach the sea.²⁰⁵

Egyptian and Eritrean officials have jointly maintained that governance of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden should remain the exclusive responsibility of littoral states,²⁰⁶ a formulation that explicitly excludes landlocked Ethiopia and that Ethiopia's foreign ministry denounced in May as an “encirclement” strategy; Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has separately described direct sea access as an “existential question” for his country. Cairo's posture carries a military as well as a diplomatic dimension.

Egypt's formal contribution to the African Union's AUSSOM mission in Somalia is set at 1,091 troops, but this runs alongside a separate bilateral track, under a 2024 defense agreement, that reportedly allows Egyptian personnel to operate with greater independence, including in Hiiraan, a region bordering Ethiopia. That bilateral track gained new urgency after Washington notified the African Union Commission that it would not support renewing AUSSOM's mandate past December if the mission continued to depend on United Nations logistics support,²⁰⁷ a funding threat that Mogadishu answered eight days later by finalizing its maritime agreement with Egypt.

Egypt's regional posture found physical expression in the inauguration of the Octagon, a new State Strategic Command Headquarters in the New Administrative Capital that President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi described as reflecting the state's readiness to confront “exceptional circumstances.”²⁰⁸ Covering roughly 22,000 acres, the complex is described by Egyptian officials as the largest facility of its kind in the Middle East, with a floor area several times that of the Pentagon, and is designed to fuse military command, intelligence, and crisis-management functions under a single roof equipped with artificial-intelligence and cyber-secure communications systems.

Cairo paired this buildup with a continued rejection of any recognition of Somaliland, restating its position in a call between Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty and his Somali counterpart that took place as the Somali cabinet finalized the Egypt maritime memorandum, and condemning Somaliland's opening of a diplomatic presence associated with Israel.²⁰⁹

Egypt's Horn of Africa strategy is now reinforced by a rapidly deepening defense relationship with Turkey. The two militaries held their fifth Egyptian-Turkish Military Cooperation Committee meeting in Cairo,²¹⁰ led by Turkish army chief General Selcuk Bayraktaroglu, and conducted the Golden Eagle 2026 joint exercise at Egyptian Airborne

²⁰⁵ “Egypt Deepens Horn of Africa Maritime Alignment with Somalia MoU.” Middle East Eye, July 2026.

²⁰⁶ “Egypt, Eritrea Reject Non-Littoral States’ Imposition of Security Role.” Egypt Today, 2026.

²⁰⁷ “Somalia Peacekeeping Mission at Risk as U.S. Blocks UN Support Lifeline.” SDG News, July 3, 2026.

²⁰⁸ “Egypt Launched the World’s Largest Military Command Complex.” Military Africa, July 2026.

²⁰⁹ “Egypt Rejects Recognition of Somaliland in Talks with Somali Foreign Minister.” Daily News Egypt, July 11, 2026.

²¹⁰ “Unprecedented Egypt-Turkey Military Cooperation: Intensive Drills and High-Level Coordination.” Egypt Independent, 2026.

and Thunderbolt Commands facilities, continuing a pattern that included the two countries' first joint naval drill in thirteen years in September 2025. That cooperation was formalized further when Egyptian Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief and Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ashraf Salem Zaher traveled to Ankara, where he and Turkish Defense Minister Yasar Guler signed a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation,²¹¹ and where Zaher's delegation separately signed a letter of intent on defense-industry cooperation with Turkey's Defense Industries Secretariat.

Sudan's civil war continues to strain Egypt as both a humanitarian and a strategic burden. UNHCR's 2026 regional response plan describes more than 4.4 million people as having crossed international borders since the war began in April 2023, and appeals for 1.6 billion dollars to support 5.9 million refugees and host-community members across seven countries, including Egypt. Egypt hosts the largest registered population of Sudanese refugees of any single host country: UNHCR Egypt recorded roughly 1.1 million refugees and asylum-seekers overall by mid-2026, a fourteenfold increase in the Sudanese caseload since 2023, even as per-refugee funding has fallen sharply.

Egypt closes July still gripped by anxiety over the Nile that is inseparable from its reading of the Horn of Africa. Cairo's port agreements, its new Octagon command center, and its expanding defense ties with Turkey are, in significant part, instruments aimed at constraining Ethiopia's options as Addis Ababa continues to operate the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and to pursue the sea access it regards as existential to its own development. Ethiopia, for its part, continues to describe its position as a legitimate assertion of sovereign rights within its own borders and has accused Cairo of pursuing encirclement rather than genuine partnership, a framing dispute neither side shows signs of abandoning.

The costs of Egypt's posture are real and compounding. A fourth year of war in Sudan, a Gaza conflict that continues to draw humanitarian resources through Egyptian territory, and the wider Iran-Israel confrontation disrupting Red Sea shipping have combined to strain Cairo's finances even as the European Union continues to disburse installments of its macro-financial assistance package, with a further 1.5 billion euro tranche approved in late July as part of a broader 5 billion euro program tied to continued economic reform.¹⁰ Egypt's response has been to position itself as an indispensable security and logistical actor across multiple fronts simultaneously, a strategy whose durability will depend on whether Cairo's finances can absorb the compounding costs of Sudan, Gaza, and the Horn at once.

²¹¹ "Türkiye-Egypt Defense, Security Ties Bolster Regional Stability." *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 2026.

2.2 Yemen: Houthi Escalation, Red Sea Leverage, and Coalition Rivalry

The Houthi-Saudi Confrontation and the Reopening of the Red Sea Front

The first sign that Yemen's post-2022 equilibrium was eroding came in Hodeidah on 4 and 5 July, when Houthi forces launched a surprise offensive against government-aligned positions in the Jabal Dabbas area, briefly overrunning outposts before being repelled.²¹² Yemeni officials reported sixteen soldiers killed and claimed more than fifty Houthi fighters killed in return, with a government-aligned officer describing the exchange as the most lethal in years. The timing was not incidental. Two days earlier, Houthi spokesperson Yahya Saree had threatened strikes on Saudi airports and infrastructure over what the group called an airspace violation tied to the attempted landing of an Iranian aircraft in Sanaa, a warning that read less as a stand-alone threat than as the opening move in a broader campaign of pressure directed simultaneously at Riyadh and at Tehran's regional audience.

The following weeks bore out that reading. Fighting spread to Hays district and mobilisation was reported in Marib, Taiz, Al-Dhale, and Al-Jawf, while a commercial vessel came under attack near Hodeidah and the collapse of a prisoner exchange involving more than 1,600 detainees compounded a parallel dispute over control of Sanaa airport. Al Jazeera's assessment of the period captured the underlying logic well, noting that the Houthis appeared to be combining calibrated military operations with pressure over humanitarian and sovereignty issues to strengthen their negotiating position without committing to a nationwide offensive, even as the government and Saudi Arabia continued trying to preserve a truce whose mechanisms were visibly weakening.

By mid-July the confrontation had acquired an explicit Iranian dimension. Reuters, citing Iranian and regional sources, reported that Tehran had instructed the Houthis to prepare to close the Bab el-Mandeb Strait should the United States strike Iranian power infrastructure, with the group reportedly positioning missiles and drones near the waterway while awaiting authorisation.²¹³ On 13 July the UN Security Council convened an emergency session at Yemen's request over "unauthorised" Iranian flights to Sanaa, with the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and several regional states arguing the flights breached Yemeni sovereignty and possibly UN sanctions, while Russia maintained the flight in question served a humanitarian purpose.²¹⁴

The airport dispute then produced the month's sharpest exchange. The Presidential Leadership Council said it struck the Sanaa runway to prevent an unauthorised Iranian aircraft from landing, a claim the Houthis rejected, attributing the strike instead to Saudi Arabia and retaliating with ballistic missiles and drones against Abha International Airport,

²¹² Al Jazeera Staff and AFP, "Houthi rebels kill 16 Yemeni government troops in fiercest clashes in years," Al Jazeera, July 5, 2026.

²¹³ Parisa Hafezi, Samia Nakhoul, and Jonathan Saul, "Iran tells Houthis to close Red Sea gateway if US hits power network, sources say," Reuters, July 16, 2026.

²¹⁴ United Nations, "Security Council, 10193rd Meeting (PM) Yemen," July 13, 2026.

all of which Riyadh said it intercepted. Saudi forces reported additional interceptions in the following days, and on 19 July the PLC reiterated, through Transport Minister Mohsen Al-Amri, that no Sanaa flight would proceed without government authorisation. The exchange functioned on both sides as a demonstration rather than an escalation for its own sake, the PLC asserting sovereign control over Yemeni airspace as a check on Iranian access to the Houthis, and the Houthis confirming their capacity and willingness to reach Saudi territory without exhausting that capacity in the process. A hijacking of the oil tanker ASANA off the Hadramout coast on 17 July, alongside a separate UKMTO advisory covering an unauthorised boarding in the Gulf of Aden, added a piracy dimension to an already crowded maritime picture.²¹⁵

The month closed with the clearest assertion yet of the Houthis' capacity to convert battlefield leverage into economic pressure. On 20 July the group declared an immediate naval blockade barring Saudi-linked vessels from the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb, framing it as retaliation for the airport strike and pairing the announcement with threats against Saudi energy infrastructure and reported attacks on oil facilities.²¹⁶ President Trump warned on 23 July of major military punishment for the Houthis and Iran, and the Saudi-led coalition struck Houthi targets in Hodeidah on 24 July, while pointedly noting that Hodeidah port itself remained open to traffic.²¹⁷ The blockade announcement, read against that restraint, is best understood as an attempt to raise the cost of continued pressure on the Houthi administration rather than a move toward open confrontation, a distinction consistent with a movement that has spent the month escalating in ways precisely calibrated to expand its leverage without inviting the kind of response that would put its territorial position at risk.

The Contest Within the Anti-Houthi Camp

A separate axis of competition, largely obscured by the Houthi-Saudi confrontation, runs through the coalition nominally arrayed against the Houthis. An analysis by the Middle East Research and Information Project²¹⁸ argued that Yemen's conflict is increasingly shaped by rivalry between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates rather than by the war against the Houthis alone, with Riyadh consolidating political and military control over non-Houthi territory following a reported Emirati withdrawal, while Abu Dhabi retains influence through local partners, chiefly the Southern Transitional Council. The rivalry has stalled previous military initiatives and sharpened competition over Hadhramaut and Socotra.

The same analysis characterised Saudi strategy as a managed exit, consolidating southern influence while maintaining what it described as an apparent understanding with the Houthis

²¹⁵ Al Jazeera Staff, AFP, and Reuters, "Tension rising as Yemen gov't attacks Sanaa airport, Houthis fire missiles," Al Jazeera, July 13, 2026.

²¹⁶ David Gritten, "Yemen's Houthis announce 'maritime embargo' on Saudi Arabia," BBC, July 20, 2026.

²¹⁷ Saim Dušan Inayatullah, Wesley Dockery, and Ramisha Ali, "US threatens 'major military punishment' for Houthi attacks," Deutsche Welle, July 23, 2026.

²¹⁸ James Ryan and Susanne Dahlgren, "NEW: Yemen After the Saudi-Emirati Split," Middle East Research and Information Project, July 8, 2026.

to preserve the existing military balance rather than pursue a decisive outcome. The unresolved question of southern independence, layered onto competing Saudi and Emirati visions for Yemen's future, continues to complicate any prospect of a comprehensive settlement, leaving regional power competition and control of strategic territory functioning as a second front running alongside, rather than beneath, the confrontation with the Houthis.

2.3 Israel-Iran War

This month fused two conflicts once treated as distinct. Ceasefire frameworks across Lebanon, Gaza and the Hormuz corridor each advanced diplomatically while military operations continued underneath them, producing a widening gap between declared restraint and documented conduct. Iran answered containment by dispersing risk across Gulf shipping lanes, Syrian territory and covert financial networks, while Jerusalem, Tehran and Washington each used wartime conditions to tighten domestic control. These brief traces those parallel tracks thematically, showing how diplomacy, proxy warfare, direct escalation and internal politics reinforced rather than restrained one another.

The Diplomatic Front

The month's diplomatic architecture rested on three separate frameworks, each showing signs of erosion by late July. The Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire, brokered by Washington on June 19, held in broad terms even as Israeli forces continued operations inside a designated ten-kilometer security zone and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu maintained that troops would remain in southern Lebanon so long as Hezbollah retained its arsenal. That posture found a partial diplomatic complement in Rome, where Israeli ambassador Yechiel Leiter and Lebanese counterparts, with American mediation, agreed on a phased withdrawal plan covering pilot zones in Froun, Burj Qalaouiyah and Zawtar al-Sharqiyah, contingent on those areas being cleared of Hezbollah weapons.²¹⁹ Within a day of that agreement, however, Israeli strikes on Nabatieh al-Fawqa, Beit Yahoun and Rashaf undercut the framework's credibility, and the Lebanese Army later stated that continued Israeli demolitions and artillery activity were obstructing its own planned deployment.²²⁰ A subsequent trilateral mechanism involving American observers sought to structure an initial phase of Hezbollah disarmament, a diplomatic track proceeding alongside continued strikes rather than in place of them.⁴

The Gaza ceasefire, dated to October 2025, proved similarly nominal. Central Command chief Avi Bluth publicly acknowledged that Israeli forces controlled more than sixty percent of the Strip, beyond the boundary permitted under that agreement, while internal cabinet estimates placed the figure closer to seventy percent.²²¹ Egyptian and Qatari mediation toward a longer-term settlement remained stalled throughout the period.

²¹⁹ Daoud, David A. "Analysis: The Israel-Lebanon Framework Agreement Explained." FDD's Long War Journal, July 13.

²²⁰ "Lebanon Army Condemns Israeli Attacks Preventing Deployment." Oman Observer, 2026.

²²¹ "Netanyahu Hails Lebanon Deal as 'Major Blow' to Iran, Hezbollah." Ynetnews, June 27, 2026.

The Iran track collapsed most decisively. The Islamabad memorandum, which had established a sixty-day ceasefire window, unraveled after Tehran suspended its commitments and President Trump declared the truce over amid mutual accusations of violation. Subsequent efforts, including a ten-day ceasefire framework Iran transmitted through Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi and an American proposal conveyed through the same channel, were both rejected,²²² though a forty-eight-hour lull emerged by month's end as an Omani delegation negotiated Hormuz transit rules in Tehran. Oman also advanced a Malacca-style proposal, developed with British legal input, to convert Iran's demand for compulsory transit tolls into voluntary contributions funding navigational safety,²²³ a model Qatar and other Gulf states resisted as a potential grant of de facto Iranian sovereignty over the strait.

Washington separately addressed Netanyahu's International Criminal Court exposure, with Trump stating the prime minister would face no arrest on American soil,²²⁴ a position that drew criticism from figures including New York's Zohran Mamdani.²²⁵ In Brussels, EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas convened ministers to weigh trade restrictions on West Bank settlement goods, while UNESCO's addition of West Bank and Lebanese heritage sites over Israeli objection added a further point of friction with multilateral institutions.

Proxy Networks and Regional Ripple Effects

Iran's regional network absorbed and redirected pressure across several theaters. In Lebanon, Israeli military disclosures of a Hezbollah command complex beneath Beaufort Ridge underscored the scale of infrastructure that remained intact despite months of strikes, even as the disarmament track opened in Rome. Houthi forces extended the crisis toward Saudi Arabia, first announcing a maritime embargo after air engagements over Yemeni airspace,²²⁶ then formalizing a blockade against tankers near Jizan and Yanbu before expanding operations into the Bab el-Mandeb corridor. The Revolutionary Guard struck partner installations across Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan on multiple occasions, including the Ali Al Salem and Camp Arifjan bases and the Muwaffaq Salti Air Base,²²⁷ indicating a willingness to widen retaliation geographically rather than confine it to direct exchanges with American forces. In Syria, the Guard struck the Al-Tanf facility, a base recently transferred to the new Syrian government, framing it as an active headquarters despite its formal removal from American control, a claim complicating Damascus's effort to distance itself from the wider confrontation.

Iran's covert reach extended beyond conventional proxy channels. American legal filings indicated that Hadi Matar, charged in the 2022 attack on author Salman Rushdie, had

²²² "Iran Dismisses Report of Iraqi-Mediated Ceasefire Proposal." Shafaq News, July 24, 2026.

²²³ "Oman Proposes Hormuz Mechanism Modelled on Strait of Malacca." The Arab Weekly, 2026.

²²⁴ "Trump Vows Netanyahu Won't Be Arrested While Visiting US, Despite Mamdani's Wishes." The Times of Israel, July 20.

²²⁵ "Israel Headed for October Election as Parliament Dissolved." BBC News, July 17, 2026.

²²⁶ "Yemen's Iranian-Backed Houthis Announce a Maritime Embargo Against Saudi Arabia." PBS NewsHour, July 20, 2026.

²²⁷ "Iran Military Says It Targeted US Bases in Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait." Euronews, July 24, 2026.

communicated with an Iranian handler to confirm a religious ruling before the assault, while cybersecurity researchers identified Trojanized VPN applications used to surveil Persian-speaking dissidents abroad.²²⁸ Mossad disclosed that it had disrupted a plot to infiltrate Israel for surveillance and the assassination of senior officials, and separately warned of recruitment campaigns targeting informers inside the country. The United States Treasury froze roughly one hundred thirty million dollars in cryptocurrency wallets linked to Iran's central bank, targeting networks Tehran had used to circumvent the naval blockade.

The United Kingdom's House of Commons approved regulations designating the Revolutionary Guard a hostile foreign entity, criminalizing financial ties to the organization. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi reaffirmed Tehran's coordination with Moscow and Beijing as a means of blunting Western pressure, a statement issued days after the European Union sanctioned five Iranian judges and a cyber official over domestic human rights conduct. Israeli strategic planning showed early signs of looking past the Iranian proxy network altogether, with the military's formal receipt of American amphibious landing craft intended to address a longer-term naval posture concern involving Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean.

These developments reflect an Iranian strategy of horizontal escalation designed to convert localized containment into widespread regional instability. By leveraging maritime blockades, proxy strikes on sovereign territory, and covert global networks, Tehran effectively distributes operational risk across neighboring states and international commerce. This multi-layered posture allows Iran to sustain strategic leverage while circumventing Western economic and legal sanctions through decentralized financial mechanisms. The persistence of these proxy and intelligence structures complicates regional diplomatic normalization and forces opposing states into long-term defensive realignments. Regional powers now treat Iranian asymmetric reach as a catalyst driving broader structural adjustments across the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern security architecture.

Military Escalation and Security Actions

The Hormuz campaign's trajectory across July reveals an escalation logic that moved well past deterrence into sustained degradation. CENTCOM's strikes against coastal installations near Sirik, Qeshm Island, Jask and Bandar Abbas expanded within days to roughly three hundred sites spanning radar networks, drone batteries, naval facilities and port logistics,²²⁹ a scope that suggests Washington shifted from punishing specific attacks on shipping toward systematically dismantling Iran's capacity to threaten the strait at all. The nightly cadence, sustained across thirteen consecutive nights and extending to western cities including Ahvaz, Ramshir and Andimeshk, indicates a campaign designed for cumulative attrition rather than a bounded retaliatory episode, and that duration itself became a form of signaling,

²²⁸ "US Freezes \$130M in Crypto, Says Iran Used It to Evade Sanctions." Iran International, 2026.

²²⁹ "Explosions Reported Across Southern Iran amid Renewed US Strikes." Anadolu Agency, 2026.

communicating to Tehran that American engagement would not taper absent a change in Iranian conduct. The reimposition of a comprehensive naval blockade, followed by the interdiction of the tanker *Belma* near Kharg Island,²³⁰ marked a further threshold, converting the conflict's economic dimension from indirect sanctions pressure into direct physical enforcement against Iran's oil exports.

That the *Belma* had already moved thirty-eight million barrels of Iranian crude before interception speaks to the scale of the shadow fleet Tehran had built²³¹ to sustain revenue under prior sanctions regimes, and its disruption signals that Washington now regards economic strangulation as inseparable from the military campaign rather than a parallel track. Iran's own interception of foreign vessels, reaching six additional ships, functioned less as retaliation than as a competing claim to control over the strait itself, an assertion of sovereignty that Human Rights Watch's warning about infrastructure threats implicitly treated as symmetrical in risk to the American blockade, even though the two campaigns originate from starkly different legal postures regarding freedom of navigation.

The extension of strikes to nuclear-adjacent sites carries particular weight for how the conflict's endpoint is understood by both parties. The Darkhovin strike, against a facility the International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed held no nuclear material and remained in early construction,²³² suggests Washington and Jerusalem are treating symbolic proximity to nuclear infrastructure as sufficient justification for targeting, a standard considerably lower than one requiring demonstrated weapons-relevant activity. Paired with imagery showing Iran hardening the Taleghan 2 facility at Parchin, the exchange illustrates a familiar escalation paradox, in which strikes intended to delay or deter nuclear advancement instead accelerate the target's incentive to harden and disperse the very capabilities under threat.

Iran's warning that any strike on the Pickaxe Mountain site, now reportedly housing relocated centrifuges, would trigger direct retaliation against American assets should be read less as bluff than as an attempt to establish a red line before Washington tests it, a dynamic that leaves both sides operating on imperfect information about the other's actual capabilities and true tolerance for further escalation.

Set against this, the continuation of strikes in Gaza and the West Bank throughout July demonstrates that the Israeli Palestinian conflict now operates on a separate clock from the Iran confrontation, one that neither accelerates nor pauses in response to regional developments. The strikes on Islamabad Jihad and Hamas infrastructure, the killing of civilians at a funeral procession in Nuseirat, and the West Bank killings near Hebron occurred amid a period when public attention and diplomatic bandwidth were overwhelmingly consumed by Hormuz, a divergence that arguably created more permissive

²³⁰ "US Forces Disable Non-Compliant Vessel in Arabian Gulf." U.S. Central Command, 2026.

²³¹ Iran International English. X post. July 2026.

²³² "Iran International Report." Iran International, July 19, 2026.

conditions for the territorial and operational expansion documented elsewhere this month, including the acknowledged expansion of Israeli control inside Gaza beyond ceasefire boundaries.

The pattern of settler activity in Awarta, al-Mughayyir and Tayasir occurring alongside documented coordination between military units and settlers' points to an erosion of the operational distinction between state and non-state actors in the territory, a development monitors have flagged as bearing directly on questions of command accountability. Netanyahu and Katz's announcement of expanded ground operations, arriving as the Iran campaign continued in parallel, suggests a government treating simultaneous multi-front engagement as sustainable rather than as a constraint requiring prioritization, a posture that will be tested by both military capacity and domestic political tolerance in the months ahead.

Geopolitical Implications and Domestic Politics

The consolidation of executive authority proceeding simultaneously in Jerusalem and Tehran during July, despite the two governments' adversarial posture toward one another, points to a structural pattern common to states under acute external pressure rather than to any convergence of political systems. Israel's coalition used its final legislative session before dissolution to curtail the Attorney General's binding authority over ministers and to expand government regulatory reach over broadcast and digital media, measures that opposition figures characterized as reshaping the institutional and informational terrain ahead of an October election²³³ held while the country remains at war.

Tehran's extension of the Majlis suspension²³⁴ served a comparable function, foreclosing open political debate at a moment when the leadership assessed that visible dissent, even among loyalist factions, posed a greater risk to the war effort than its suppression. Read together, both governments treated institutional checks as a cost the war effort could not afford, a judgment that carries different implications in each system but reflects a shared wartime logic of prioritizing executive latitude over deliberative constraint.

The timing of Israel's electoral calendar against the unresolved state of the Iran conflict introduces a further analytical complication. Netanyahu's framing of regime collapse or permanent nuclear abandonment as the only acceptable endpoint sets a benchmark that virtually guarantees the war extends past the October 27 vote,²³⁵ and Israeli defense officials' own expectation that Trump will be compelled to resume strikes regardless of the current pause suggests that even within Israel's security establishment, the diplomatic track is understood as a pause in hostilities rather than a path toward resolution.

Whether this maximalist framing reflects a genuine strategic assessment or is calibrated in

²³³ "Israel Headed for October Election as Parliament Dissolved." Al Jazeera, July 17, 2026.

²³⁴ "Iranian Parliament Resumes Work after 4 Months, Opens with Revenge Chants." IranWire, 2026.

²³⁵ "Israel Sets October Date for First Elections since Hamas Attacks 2023." The Guardian, July 13, 2026.

part to consolidate a wartime electoral coalition is not resolved by the available evidence, but the coincidence of hardening rhetoric with an approaching election is itself analytically significant, since it narrows Netanyahu's room to accept a negotiated outcome that could be portrayed domestically as falling short of total victory. The same session's passage of the Torah study Basic Law and the freeze on prosecuting draft evaders, secured as the price of coalition survival, sharpens a burden sharing tension that has persisted throughout the war, in which reservists sustain the combat tempo while a politically protected constituency remains exempted, a fault line likely to shape the coming campaign independent of how the Iran confrontation resolves.

Tehran's internal position diverges from Jerusalem's in one critical respect, namely the degree to which economic and social strain is visibly destabilizing rather than merely politically inconvenient. The rial's collapse to a historic low near 1.91 million to the dollar,²³⁶ layered atop blockade and sustained strikes, is translating military pressure directly into subsistence level hardship, and the persistence of hunger strikes among roughly fifteen hundred death row inmates alongside the execution of activist Mehdi Khanaki²³⁷ indicates a leadership relying on visible repression to manage internal dissent rather than on any capacity to absorb the war's costs quietly.

This contrasts sharply with Israel's economic position, where a record \$169 billion in exports²³⁸ suggests the war has not yet imposed macroeconomic costs severe enough to generate independent domestic pressure for de-escalation, a divergence that may partly explain why Jerusalem's public posture has hardened even as Washington's own domestic consensus shows signs of fraying.

That fraying is evident in the gap between the House of Representatives' symbolic resolution calling for an end to military engagement and the Pentagon's continued nightly strikes and disclosed \$37.5 billion in expenditures, a divergence between congressional sentiment and executive conduct that indicates the American campaign is proceeding without a settled domestic mandate, a structural vulnerability that typically becomes more consequential the longer a conflict extends, particularly as it intersects with an approaching midterm cycle in which anti-war sentiment is already reshaping primary contests within the president's opposition. Taken together, the month's political developments suggest that the three governments most central to the conflict are each managing distinct and asymmetric domestic constraints, Israel's electoral calendar, Iran's economic and repressive capacity, and America's eroding legislative consensus, none of which point toward a shared timeline or shared incentive for de-escalation.

²³⁶ "Iran International Report." Iran International, July 17, 2026.

²³⁷ "Iran Human Rights Report." Iran Human Rights, 2026.

²³⁸ "Israel's War Economy: The Cost to Ordinary Israelis." Time, July 13, 2026.

Thus, July's evidence points toward entrenchment rather than resolution. Every negotiated framework proceeded alongside continued strikes rather than replacing them, and each government's domestic incentives, Israel's approaching election, Iran's repressive management of economic collapse, America's fraying legislative consensus, pushed toward sustained engagement over compromise. Iran's horizontal dispersal of risk denied Western pressure any single point of leverage, while Israel's expanding territorial control and Washington's blockade enforcement closed off face saving exits for Tehran. Absent a shift in these underlying calculations, the pattern established this month, parallel negotiation and continued force, appears set to persist into August with little structural check remaining on further escalation.

2.4 Türkiye: NATO Summit Gains and African Expansion

Turkey's diplomatic centerpiece for July was hosting the NATO summit in Ankara,²³⁹ an occasion Ankara treated less as a routine gathering than as a stage for reasserting its strategic indispensability to the alliance. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan cultivated visible personal rapport with President Donald Trump, who used a joint press appearance in Ankara to praise Erdogan's leadership and float the possibility of sanctions relief.²⁴⁰ That chemistry produced tangible defense-industrial gains, including a formal license path for Patriot missile systems and American engine components for Turkey's indigenous KAAN fighter program,²⁴¹ outcomes that years of routine bureaucratic engagement had failed to secure.

Secretary General Mark Rutte reinforced the summit's substantive weight by demanding binding member state commitments to a five percent GDP defense spending target and announcing more than fifty billion euros in joint procurement contracts, including the Drone Edge autonomous systems initiative and fuel pipeline modernization for the alliance's eastern flank.²⁴² Yet the summit's managed image collided with two disruptive realities. Trump authorized retaliatory strikes against Iran while still in Ankara, injecting live crisis management into what Turkish officials had framed as a diplomatic showcase, and rights organizations documented the arrest of more than two hundred activists, lawyers, and opposition figures in the capital in the days preceding the event. The juxtaposition captured a recurring feature of Ankara's July conduct, an outward narrative of alliance indispensability sitting uneasily against an inward pattern of political consolidation.

That tension between rhetorical momentum and structural constraint recurred most clearly in the long-running dispute over Turkey's S-400 air defense systems and its exclusion from the F-35 program. Early in the month, reporting indicated Ankara was finalizing a resale of the Russian systems to a Gulf intermediary, with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates named as

²³⁹ "WATCH: Trump Says in Erdogan Meeting That U.S. Will Lift Turkey Sanctions, Consider Selling F-35s." PBS NewsHour.

²⁴⁰ "Türkiye Condemns Israeli Minister's Al-Aqsa Raid." Daily Sabah, July 23, 2026.

²⁴¹ Elmas, Dean Shmuel. "Greece Approves \$4b Israel Air Defense Procurement." Globes, July 23, 2026.

²⁴² "Turkey Doesn't Meet Legal Conditions to Rejoin F-35 Program, State Department Tells Congress." eKathimerini, July 22, 2026.

likely recipients,²⁴³ a maneuver designed to satisfy Washington's legal prerequisites without severing ties to Moscow. The Kremlin confirmed it remained in direct contact with Turkish counterparts over the transfer, describing it as a sensitive matter, while Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan framed the divestment as a systematic step toward resolving the impasse and preserving Turkey's independent defense posture.²⁴⁴ By month's end, however, the State Department formally notified Congress that Turkey remained excluded from the program, reaffirming that complete divestment from the S-400 architecture was a strict precondition for any future acquisition.²⁴⁵ The sequence illustrates the limits of personalized diplomacy in overriding statutory constraints, and it suggests the warmth generated at the summit has yet to translate into the legal reclassification Ankara needs.

Turkey's deepest structural investment in July occurred well beyond its immediate neighborhood, in Somalia, where Ankara's role shifted decisively from advisory support toward direct combat. Turkish F-16 fighters and T129 helicopters conducted airstrikes against al-Shabaab targets,²⁴⁶ while Erdogan submitted a motion to parliament extending the military deployment mandate through July 2028 and authorizing operations across Somali maritime zones against piracy and smuggling.²⁴⁷ Unconfirmed accounts that Ankara intends to test domestically developed hypersonic missiles from a proposed spaceport near Somalia's Indian Ocean coast drew scrutiny from regional powers, given a stated range sufficient to reach Israeli-backed Somaliland.²⁴⁸

Turkey's deputy intelligence chief chaired reconciliation talks in Mogadishu between the federal government and opposition groups, an initiative boycotted by the federal states of Puntland and Jubaland,²⁴⁹ who accused Ankara of using its military assets to entrench federal centralization rather than mediate impartially. Somali Senator Abdi Ismail Samatar's public criticism of opposition figures for accepting a foreign intelligence official as mediator²⁵⁰ reinforced the same concern from within Somalia's legislature. Taken together, the Somalia file shows Ankara accumulating hard security and commercial leverage faster than it can convert that leverage into credible political brokerage.

Turkey used the same month to expand a wider network of regional partnerships that increasingly counterbalance Greek, Cypriot, and Israeli coordination in the Eastern Mediterranean. Defense Minister Yasar Guler hosted his Egyptian counterpart in Ankara, the

²⁴³ Hussein Aboubakr Mansour and Blaise Misztal. "The S-400 Transfer and the Erosion of American Leverage in the Gulf." Middle East Forum / JINSA. July 24, 2026.

²⁴⁴ "Turkey Says Work on S-400 System Continues Amid Reports of Possible Sale." Turkish Minute. July 16, 2026.

²⁴⁵ "Turkey Doesn't Meet Legal Conditions to Rejoin F-35 Program, State Department Tells Congress." eKathimerini.com. July 22, 2026.

²⁴⁶ "Turkey's F-16 Jets Kill Al-Shabaab Militants in Somalia Air Strikes, Defense Ministry Says." Somali Guardian. June 30, 2026.

²⁴⁷ "Türkiye Seeks Two-Year Extension of Military Mission in Somalia." TRT Afrika. July 17, 2026.

²⁴⁸ Staff Reporter. "Turkey to Use Somalia Spaceport for Hypersonic Missile Tests." Garowe Online. July 4, 2026.

²⁴⁹ "Turkey Holds Somalia Government-Opposition Pre-Talks as Puntland, Jubaland Boycott Ahead of Key Negotiations." Somali Guardian. July 7, 2026.

²⁵⁰ "Somalia Opposition Made 'Serious Mistake' by Accepting Turkey's Deputy Intelligence Chief as Mediator, Senator Samatar Says." Somali Guardian. July 8, 2026.

first such visit since 2013, producing letters of intent on joint training and defense-industrial cooperation valued near three hundred fifty million dollars, with officials floating Egyptian participation in the KAAN program.²⁵¹ In Sudan, the energy firm Ergaz signed an agreement to build a gas terminal at the Red Sea port of Suakin, extending Ankara's existing security and infrastructure presence there into the energy sector.²⁵² These gains sat against a backdrop of sharpening friction closer to home. Ankara condemned Greece's closure of eight Turkish minority schools in Western Thrace as a violation of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, rejected new European Union envoys to Cyprus as compromised on neutrality during ceremonies marking the fifty second anniversary of the 1974 Cyprus operation, and designated an offshore seismic survey zone north of Cyprus to map a prospective gas pipeline route.²⁵³ Greece responded within the same window by finalizing a roughly four billion dollar air defense procurement from Israel,²⁵⁴ a direct rejoinder that alters the deterrence balance across the Aegean. The pattern suggests Ankara's assertiveness on energy and minority issues is generating coordinated pushback from a Greek-Cypriot-Israeli axis it has struggled to fracture.

Turkey also positioned itself as an aspiring interlocutor on the Iran file even as its rhetoric toward Israel hardened. Fidan called from Doha for a return to the Islamabad memorandum of understanding between Washington and Tehran, warning that continued conflict was damaging the regional economy, while separately cautioning that Israel could attempt to sabotage any revived diplomatic track.²⁵⁵ That warning followed the Foreign Ministry's condemnation of an Israeli cabinet minister's visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, part of a broader pattern in which Ankara has cast Israeli conduct across the region as a destabilizing constant.²⁵⁶

Turkey's July diplomacy centered on leveraging the NATO summit to secure defense gains through Erdogan-Trump rapport, while advancing combat roles in Somalia and partnerships with Egypt and Sudan. These moves underscore Ankara's bid for strategic indispensability and independent posture, yet S-400 constraints and Eastern Mediterranean frictions with Greece and Israel reveal limits to personalized outreach. Near-term trajectories point to sustained African security investments, ongoing F-35 exclusion, and heightened Aegean deterrence competition, as domestic consolidation coexists uneasily with alliance narratives.

²⁵¹ Ezgi Akin. "Turkey, Egypt Expand Military Ties with Cooperation Frameworks: What to Know." *Al-Monitor*. July 13, 2026

²⁵² "Criticism Mounts over Sudan-Türkiye Suakin Gas Terminal Memo." *Dabanga Radio TV Online*. July 22, 2026.

²⁵³ "Türkiye Condemns Greece over Minority School Closures." *Hürriyet Daily News*. July 20, 2026.

²⁵⁴ Dean Shmuel Elmas. "Greece Approves \$4b Israel Air Defense Procurement." *Globes*. July 23, 2026.

²⁵⁵ "Fidan Urges Return to US-Iran Agreement, Says Türkiye Coordinating with Qatar." *Yeni Şafak*. July 19, 2026.

²⁵⁶ "Türkiye Condemns Israeli Minister's Al-Aqsa Raid." *Daily Sabah*. July 23, 2026.

2.5 Gulf States: Diplomacy and Security Engagement in the Horn and Beyond

Qatar

Qatar's political, diplomatic, and security landscape in July was dominated by the regional confrontation surrounding Iran, compelling Doha to balance its long-standing role as a mediator with heightened domestic security measures and expanded regional defense coordination. The month began with a reassessment of Qatar's defense architecture following previous attacks on energy infrastructure, prompting greater interest in collective security arrangements with European partners²⁵⁷. Maritime navigation resumed²⁵⁸ after an earlier emergency suspension, signaling an effort to restore normal economic activity, while Qatar Airways expanded connectivity to Port Sudan²⁵⁹, reinforcing the country's commercial engagement with the Horn of Africa despite regional instability. Simultaneously, Doha intensified coordination with fellow Gulf states through high-level exchanges with the UAE²⁶⁰ and Saudi Arabia²⁶¹ to strengthen collective responses to emerging security challenges.

Security conditions deteriorated significantly as Qatar's air defense systems intercepted incoming missiles and drones during the broader Gulf escalation²⁶², including attacks on strategic infrastructure and airspace. The incidents resulted in civilian injuries from falling debris and reinforced nationwide military readiness. In response, the government reaffirmed its sovereign right to defend its territory under international law²⁶³ while strengthening monitoring and emergency response mechanisms. International security assessments also warned of continuing risks to regional aviation, highlighting the possibility of sudden airspace closures and operational disruptions across the Gulf.

Domestically, Qatar entered a period of national mourning following the death of Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani²⁶⁴, whose leadership transformed the country into a major diplomatic and economic actor. The declaration of official mourning and the temporary suspension of government operations marked one of the most significant political developments of the month while demonstrating institutional continuity under the current leadership.

Diplomatically, Qatar remained one of the principal channels for regional de-escalation. It

²⁵⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar. "Qatar Inaugurates Its Military Representation at NATO Headquarters in Brussels." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, December 11, 2024.

²⁵⁸ Anadolu Agency. "Qatar Fully Resumes Maritime Navigation Activities after Two-Week Pause." Anadolu Agency, July 2026.

²⁵⁹ Deep Arrivals. "Qatar Airways Expands African Network with Port Sudan Service." Deep Arrivals, 2026.

²⁶⁰ Qatar Tribune. "Qatar, UAE Discuss Regional De-Escalation, Bilateral Cooperation in High-Level Call." Qatar Tribune, July 2026.

²⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar. "Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Receives Phone Call from Saudi Foreign Minister." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, July 27, 2026.

²⁶² Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). "News Article." SANA, 2026.

²⁶³ "Respect Sovereign Borders." The Peninsula, July 19, 2026.

²⁶⁴ Qatar News Agency. "Amiri Diwan Announces Public Mourning Period." Qatar News Agency, July 12, 2026.

actively participated in GCC consultations addressing violations of Gulf airspace²⁶⁵ and intensified engagement with regional and international partners to prevent further escalation between the United States and Iran. High-level discussions with Saudi Arabia²⁶⁶, Jordan²⁶⁷, Oman²⁶⁸, the UAE²⁶⁹, Turkey²⁷⁰, and South Sudan²⁷¹ reflected Doha's dual strategy of preserving Gulf security while sustaining broader diplomatic partnerships. Particular emphasis was placed on supporting the U.S.-Iran Memorandum of Understanding, encouraging renewed ceasefire efforts, and safeguarding freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, reinforcing Qatar's position as a central mediator during one of the Gulf's most volatile periods.

UAE

United Arab Emirates experienced a month shaped by heightened regional security tensions, expanded strategic partnerships, and sustained efforts to reinforce its position as a leading economic, technological, and diplomatic actor in the Gulf. As regional confrontation involving Iran intensified, Abu Dhabi significantly strengthened its defense posture through enhanced air and missile defense readiness, including the deployment of advanced defensive capabilities²⁷² and the successful interception of ballistic missiles²⁷³, cruise missiles²⁷⁴, and drones targeting the country. The government maintained a high level of national emergency preparedness²⁷⁵, reinforced its counterterrorism coordination framework, and responded firmly to attacks on Emirati commercial shipping and critical maritime interests. Simultaneously, growing disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz²⁷⁶ and heightened risks to regional aviation²⁷⁷ underscored the UAE's vulnerability to wider Gulf instability while further emphasizing the strategic importance of safeguarding maritime trade routes and national infrastructure.

Diplomatically, the UAE remained actively engaged in regional and international affairs through intensive consultations with the United States, Russia²⁷⁸, and Gulf partners to contain regional escalation and promote long-term stability. Abu Dhabi strengthened its

²⁶⁵ Condé Nast Traveller Middle East. "Europe Extends Gulf Airspace Warning as US-Iran Tensions Continue." Condé Nast Traveller Middle East, 2026.

²⁶⁶ Xinhua. "China Calls for Regional Stability amid Middle East Developments." Xinhua News Agency, July 26, 2026.

²⁶⁷ Qatar News Agency. "Qatar, Jordan Discuss Regional Tensions and Diplomatic Efforts in Phone Talks." Qatar News Agency, July 28, 2026

²⁶⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman. "Official Statement." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Oman, 2026.

²⁶⁹ Qatar Tribune. "Qatar, UAE Discuss Regional De-Escalation, Bilateral Cooperation in High-Level Call." Qatar Tribune, July 2026.

²⁷⁰ Hürriyet Daily News. "Turkish Top Diplomat Visits Qatar for High-Level Talks." Hürriyet Daily News, 2026.

²⁷¹ Sudans Post. "Tut Gatluak to Lead High-Level Delegation to Qatar for Bilateral Talks." Sudans Post, 2026.

²⁷² The Jerusalem Post. "Regional Security Developments in the Middle East." The Jerusalem Post, 2026.

²⁷³ 8AM Media. "The United Arab Emirates Has Announced That Its Air Defense Systems Are Intercepting..." Facebook, July 2026.

²⁷⁴ Gulf Business. "UAE Air Defences Intercept Iranian Missiles and Drones." Gulf Business, July 2026.

²⁷⁵ Sharjah24. "Abu Dhabi Launches National Readiness Forum." Sharjah24, July 26, 2026.

²⁷⁶ Emirates Policy Center. "The Strait of Hormuz: Dilemma and the Attempt to Re-Engineer Geography." Emirates Policy Center, 2026.

²⁷⁷ "Europe Extends Gulf Airspace Warning." Arabian Business, 2026.

²⁷⁸ Anadolu Agency. "Russia, UAE Call for Immediate End to US-Iran Hostilities." Anadolu Agency, July 18, 2026.

strategic relationship with Washington through high-level political consultations²⁷⁹ while maintaining dialogue with other major powers to support diplomatic solutions to the Gulf crisis. The UAE also continued to play an active role in addressing broader regional conflicts by partnering with Saudi Arabia²⁸⁰.

Beyond security and diplomacy, the UAE continued advancing its long-term strategy of economic diversification and international connectivity despite mounting regional uncertainty. The country reinforced its global commercial outlook through continued engagement with international partners while preserving its reputation as a stable hub for trade, logistics, investment, and technological development. Even as regional conflict disrupted maritime commerce and heightened geopolitical risks, Abu Dhabi demonstrated a balanced foreign policy that combined robust military preparedness, proactive diplomacy, humanitarian engagement, and sustained economic resilience, further consolidating its influence as one of the Middle East's principal strategic and commercial powers.

Saudi Arabia

Throughout July 2026, Saudi Arabia's political, diplomatic, and security posture was shaped by a rapidly evolving regional security environment, prompting the Kingdom to pursue a dual-track strategy that combined military preparedness with intensive diplomacy. Rising tensions between the United States and Iran²⁸¹, recurrent Houthi threats²⁸², and growing insecurity across the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz²⁸³ reinforced Riyadh's determination to strengthen its strategic autonomy while preserving regional stability. Saudi Arabia continued recalibrating its defense doctrine by broadening security cooperation with regional partners, particularly Turkey, Pakistan, and Egypt²⁸⁴, while maintaining close but increasingly pragmatic coordination with the United States. At the same time, the Kingdom sought to prevent a wider regional confrontation through discreet diplomatic channels with Iran and sustained mediation efforts aimed at preserving the fragile truce in Yemen²⁸⁵. Security concerns intensified following Houthi missile and drone attacks targeting Saudi territory and renewed threats against airports, energy infrastructure, and maritime shipping routes²⁸⁶, prompting the Saudi-led Coalition to reaffirm its readiness to respond decisively while expanding efforts to safeguard critical infrastructure and strategic oil export corridors²⁸⁷.

²⁷⁹ United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "UAE-GCC-US Joint Ministerial Meeting." Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Arab Emirates, June 26, 2026.

²⁸⁰ "Saudi Arabia and UAE: Unity amid Underlying Tensions." Saxafi Media, 2026.

²⁸¹ The Jerusalem Post. "Saudi Arabia Responds to Escalating Regional Security Threats." The Jerusalem Post, 2026.

²⁸² Al Jazeera. "Saudi Arabia Seeks International Coalition against Houthis in Red Sea." Al Jazeera, July 29, 2026.

²⁸³ NPR. "U.S., Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq Face Rising Regional Tensions." NPR, July 29, 2026.

²⁸⁴ Iran International. "Saudi Arabia Responds to Escalating Regional Security Developments." Iran International, July 29, 2026.

²⁸⁵ "Why the Latest Houthi Attack Could Reshape Saudi Security Calculations." Responsible Statecraft, 2026.

²⁸⁶ Al Jazeera. "Yemen's Houthis Threaten Saudi Arabia after Alleged Airspace Intrusion." Al Jazeera, July 3, 2026.

²⁸⁷ "Managed Escalation between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis: Confrontation Dynamics and the Prospects for Escalation into Full-Scale War." World Center for Youth Studies (WCYS), 2026.

Diplomatically, Saudi Arabia significantly expanded its regional and international engagement, reinforcing its role as a leading diplomatic actor across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Riyadh maintained active consultations with China on regional security²⁸⁸ and economic cooperation, strengthened political and economic relations with Kenya through new agreements on investment, customs cooperation, and labor mobility²⁸⁹, and deepened strategic coordination with Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Oman, and other Gulf partners as regional tensions escalated²⁹⁰. The Kingdom also continued positioning itself at the center of efforts to resolve regional crises the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Waleed Elkhareiji hosted Egypt's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohamed Abu Bakr in Riyadh. They held high-level political coordination talks to align strategies regarding regional security developments and defense partnerships²⁹¹. Simultaneously, Saudi diplomacy remained heavily focused on protecting freedom of navigation and the stability of global energy markets through coordinated regional consultations addressing the security of the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz.²⁹² Beyond regional diplomacy, Riyadh expanded international engagement through participation in global maritime governance initiatives, reinforcing its ambition to strengthen maritime safety, enhance international cooperation, and consolidate its position as a leading global logistics and shipping hub.

The month also reflected Saudi Arabia's continued pursuit of long-term strategic transformation alongside immediate security management. Developments surrounding a proposed civilian nuclear cooperation framework with the United States highlighted Riyadh's ambitions to expand its technological and energy capabilities while diversifying its future energy portfolio²⁹³. Simultaneously, disruptions to commercial shipping and recurring threats to Red Sea navigation underscored the growing strategic importance of alternative export infrastructure, particularly the East–West Pipeline and the Yanbu export terminal²⁹⁴, in safeguarding Saudi energy exports amid heightened regional volatility. The Kingdom also maintained humanitarian and diplomatic engagement through cooperation with neighboring countries on migration and consular affairs, including legal initiatives benefiting foreign nationals residing in Saudi Arabia. Collectively, July illustrated Saudi Arabia's increasingly multidimensional foreign policy, characterized by a careful balance between deterrence and diplomacy, diversification of strategic partnerships, protection of critical economic infrastructure, and an expanding leadership role in addressing both regional security challenges and broader international governance issues.

²⁸⁸ Anadolu Agency. "China Urges Respect for Saudi Arabia's Sovereignty and Security." Anadolu Agency, 2026.

²⁸⁹ "Africa News Agency. "Kenya and Saudi Arabia: Four Agreements Turn a Diplomatic Friendship into an Economic Lever." Africa News Agency, 2026.

²⁹⁰ "Saudi Arabia Coordinates with Egypt, Qatar and Jordan as U.S.-Iran Fighting Spreads across Gulf." Daily News Egypt, July 20, 2026.

²⁹¹ Saudi Press Agency. "Official Statement." Saudi Press Agency, July 2026.

²⁹² Gulf Cooperation Council. "GCC Secretary-General's Statement." Gulf Cooperation Council Secretariat General, July 22, 2026.

²⁹³ BBC News. "Iran and Israel Regional Tensions Escalate amid Gulf Security Concerns." BBC News, 2026.

²⁹⁴ Middle East Forum. "The Promise and Perils of Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Port of Yanbu." Middle East Forum, 2026.

Section Three: Regional and International Organizations

July 2026 was a critical month for the Horn of Africa defined by a single seismic decision that sent shockwaves through the region's security plan. The United States' announcement that it would block any UN Security Council mandate renewal for UNSOS beyond December threw the future of the 12,000-strong AU mission in Somalia into profound uncertainty. This triggered a cascade of emergency African Union consultations from technical meetings in Addis Ababa to an extraordinary summit of troop contributing countries in Kampala, all grappling with how to sustain the fight against Al-Shabaab without a logistical lifeline. This crisis overshadowed but did not halt significant progress in other areas. IGAD drove forward a multifaceted agenda from convening a unified peace forum for war-torn Sudan to advancing digital trade, climate smart agriculture and cross border conflict prevention. The United Nations balanced high-level diplomacy over funding gaps with critical on the ground training in aviation safety and counter-IED skills, while also issuing stark warnings of deepening hunger in Djibouti. The European Union solidified its strategic presence by signing a key military basing agreement with Djibouti and deepening ties with Ethiopia. During diplomatic tensions over Red Sea security and a historic National Dialogue opening in Ethiopia the month encapsulated a region at a crossroads navigating existential threats with a determined if uncertain push for self-reliance and stability.

United Nations (UN)

The United Nations system spent July in the throes of a diplomatic tailspin with the US decision to block UNSOS funding triggering intense discussions among member states about the future mandate of AUSSOM. The implications of withdrawing a roughly \$500 million logistics operation for a 12,000 strong force are profound adding immense pressure to an already strained system facing liquidity challenges and prior budget reductions. ²⁹⁵Throughout the month, the UN and its partners remained intently focused on charting a viable path forward engaging in high-level consultations to address potential funding gaps and alternative financing mechanisms to ensure that hard won security gains are not undone by an abrupt withdrawal of essential support. These deliberations built upon longstanding logistical dependencies that have underpinned the mission's operations for nearly two decades.

On the ground in Somalia the operational tempo remained high with a focus on building critical capacities despite the looming uncertainty. UNSOS wrapped up a nine day technical capacity building workshop on Field Remote Infrastructure Monitoring (FRIM) in Mogadishu, a practical, hands on initiative that brought together participants to explore how advanced monitoring technologies can enhance resource efficiency, optimize logistics and improve operational sustainability. ²⁹⁶For those who took part the knowledge and tools

²⁹⁵ Paravicini, Giulia. "Somalia Peacekeeping Mission at Risk as US Blocks UN Support, Sources Say." *Reuters*, July 2, 2026.

²⁹⁶ United Nations Support Office in Somalia. "UNSOS Trains and Mentors AUSSOM Military Personnel on Aviation Rescue and Fire Safety." Accessed July 29, 2026.

gained will prove valuable in the months ahead even as uncertainty looms over what comes next for the mission. In a live drill that underscored the mission's commitment to saving lives and property, UNSOS conducted a full-scale aviation emergency response exercise at Mogadishu's Aden Abdulle International Airport, simulating a UN helicopter emergency to test coordinated search, rescue, firefighting and casualty evacuation procedures with AUSSOM, UNTMIS and Somali aviation authorities. The month-long preparations included a communications exercise prior to the drill to clarify roles and procedures.

Further strengthening frontline capabilities, UNMAS and UNSOS delivered Conventional Munitions Disposal (CMD) training to Djiboutian peacekeepers serving under AUSSOM in Beletweyne, Somalia.²⁹⁷ This training is aimed at enhancing their ability to handle conventional ammunition and improvised explosive devices that remain a persistent threat with one trainee noting the course would significantly improve understanding of the various ammunition types encountered in Somalia. This is critical given Al-Shabaab's continued reliance on roadside bombs and vehicle-borne IEDs as primary asymmetric weapons and Beletweyne's position along a strategic corridor that has seen repeated militant attacks.

Away from Somalia, the UN's focus extended to humanitarian crises and institution building. A UN backed food security alert issued this month warned that over 256,000 people in Djibouti roughly a quarter of the population are projected to face crisis or emergency level hunger in the coming months a significant deterioration from earlier in the year when 166,000 people were affected.²⁹⁸ The report noted that refugees in the Ali Addeh and Holl-Holl camps are the hardest hit with nearly 70 percent of their population now classified under crisis levels or worse. The worsening situation is driven by looming El Niño climate hazards, high food import prices and inflation that has eroded household purchasing power prompting calls for urgent action to reduce consumption deficits and strengthen resilience.

The UN, through UNDP provided technical and financial backing to Ethiopia's historic National Dialogue Conference which officially opened in Addis Ababa, bringing together over 4,000 delegates from across the country to deliberate on eight core agenda pillars aimed at building national consensus and addressing deep rooted political divisions. The month long forum organized by the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission has drawn support from regional and international partners with the dialogue itself seen as a foundation for lasting peace and reconciliation across the country. In a complementary effort to strengthen national institutions, stakeholders convened for an event co-organized by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Ethiopian government to enhance biosafety practices and build local capacity in managing biological risks.

UN officials and monitors also observed escalating strategic realignments in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea corridor. Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed concerns over a perceived encirclement strategy linked to recent maritime and port cooperation agreements

²⁹⁷ United Nations Peacekeeping Resource Hub. "Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD)." Accessed July, 2026.

²⁹⁸ UN News. "Title of Article." July 2026.

involving Egypt, Somalia and Eritrea, highlighting the ongoing geopolitical competition for influence over Red Sea access and security arrangements that carry significant implications for regional stability.²⁹⁹

African Union (AU)

The month of July was dominated by a frantic diplomatic effort to salvage the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) following Washington's delivery of a diplomatic note signaling its intent to terminate all financial and logistical support for UNSOS by the end of the year.³⁰⁰ The AU warned that this decision described by a senior African diplomat as irreversible could effectively spell the end of a peacekeeping force that has been propping up Somalia's federal government since 2009. Without the UN provided backbone of food, fuel, medical services and troop transportation the mission faces severe operational constraints or even a risk of collapse casting a long shadow over operations against a raging Al-Shabaab insurgency. The US justified the move by pointing to Somalia's failure to sustain progress and assume full ownership of its security despite nearly two decades of substantial international support and nearly \$2 billion in contributions since 2007 a position driven by President Donald Trump's increasingly hostile stance towards Somalia.

This existential threat spurred the AU into a strategic consultative process that unfolded throughout the month. The Peace Support Operations Division led by General Cheick Dembelé, convened a Meeting of Experts in Addis Ababa bringing together the Federal Government of Somalia, AUSSOM, troop and police contributing countries, the Military Staff Committee, the A3 and the United Nations. The talks examined the operational, financial and legal aspects of the mission's future, force structure and Somalia's security transition.³⁰¹ These technical consultations fed into high-level meetings in Kampala which culminated in an extraordinary summit of leaders from troop contributing countries at the end of the month. The overarching theme was a growing consensus that external missions must eventually end, and Somalia must accelerate security sector reforms to move toward self-reliance. The challenge remained managing this transition without creating a vacuum that Al-Shabaab could exploit with analysts suggesting countries like Turkey could play a larger bilateral role in the coming months.

This crisis formed the backdrop to the AU Peace and Security Council's broader work on sustainable financing. Chairperson of the AU Commission, H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf addressed an informal consultation chaired by Uganda, underscoring that the mission's future should be guided by clear strategic objectives. He called for the accelerated operationalization of the AU Peace Fund the implementation of a 0.2 percent levy and increased Member State contributions to reinforce African ownership of peace and security

²⁹⁹ Al Jazeera. "Who Is Driving Diplomacy in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea and Why." July 21, 2026.

³⁰⁰ African Union Peace and Security Council. "Communiqué on the Informal Consultation on the Future of AUSSOM." July 8, 2026. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

³⁰¹ AUSSOM. "AUSSOM Background." Accessed July 29, 2026.

stating that honoring the sacrifices of Troop Contributing Countries requires safeguarding the gains achieved through a mission that is sustainable, adaptable and fit for purpose.

Beyond the Somalia crisis the Commission engaged in a flurry of diplomacy. Chairperson Youssouf received H.E. Sergey Lavrov the Russian Foreign Minister for annual high-level consultations reaffirming their growing partnership anchored in mutual respect and shared interests.³⁰² Discussions focused on expanding cooperation in trade, investment, energy and food security in support of Agenda 2063, with Minister Lavrov reaffirming Russia's support for a more equitable UN Security Council including permanent African representation. The Chairperson also received the Letters of Credence from Saudi Arabia's new Permanent Representative, Ambassador Abdullah Al Zahrani with both pledging to deepen strategic cooperation on health, development and African led solutions to conflicts.³⁰³ Saudi Arabia commended the AU's work on pandemic preparedness and its peace efforts in Somalia while the Chairperson expressed appreciation for the Kingdom's constructive role in easing Middle East tensions noting that instability in the Strait of Hormuz directly harms African economies.

Responding to broader regional tensions, Chairperson Youssouf strongly condemned Houthi attacks against commercial oil tankers in the Red Sea describing them as a dangerous escalation that threatens regional peace and the economic interests of numerous African states that depend on the waterway.³⁰⁴ He reaffirmed the AU's full solidarity with Saudi Arabia and insisted that freedom of navigation must be respected warning that any disruption undermines regional connectivity, energy security and trade. The Red Sea crisis has forced major shipping companies to reroute vessels driving up costs and disrupting global supply chains with coastal and landlocked African nations bearing the brunt.

On the peace and security front, the AU Commission for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Amb. Bankole Adeoye held productive discussions with the AU Special Envoy on the Prevention of Genocide, H.E. Adama Dieng, reviewing priorities for upcoming engagements in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel and advancing atrocity prevention and transitional justice efforts.³⁰⁵ Commissioner Adeoye also attended the official opening of Ethiopia's historic National Dialogue conference delivering a message of congratulations and reaffirming the AU's steadfast support for the inclusive homegrown process expressing confidence that it will advance lasting peace and sustainable development.³⁰⁶ In a separate institutional matter Deputy Chairperson Ambassador Selma Malika Haddadi received the new Ethiopian Permanent Representative, Ambassador Lemlem Fiseha Minale pledging

³⁰² African Union. "Chairperson received H.E. Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation." *World News*, July 7, 2026.

³⁰³ African Union. "AUC Chairperson this Morning Received the Letters of Credence of H.E. Mr. Abdullah Al Zahrani, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the AU." Press release, July 7, 2026.

³⁰⁴ Hiiraan Online. "African Union Condemns Houthi Attacks on Red Sea Oil Tankers." July 2026.

³⁰⁵ African Union. "AU Commission for Political Affairs, Peace and Security Update." X (formerly Twitter), July 2026.

³⁰⁶ Ethiopian News Agency, "Ethiopia: National Dialogue Conference Kicks Off, Striving for Consensus and National Reconciliation," *AllAfrica*, July 16, 2026,

close collaboration for the successful hosting of the 49th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council and reaffirming their shared commitment to Agenda 2063.³⁰⁷

A ministerial delegation from the AU Ad Hoc High-Level Committee for South Sudan (C5), led by South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Ronald Lamola, visited Juba to assess progress on the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement.³⁰⁸ President Salva Kiir reaffirmed his government's steadfast commitment to the full implementation of the agreement, upholding the rule of law and holding free, fair and credible elections in December 2026. Minister Lamola commended the government's efforts to maintain peace and reiterated the call for an inclusive national dialogue to foster national cohesion and reconciliation. The AU Permanent Observer to the UN also held discussions with the Director of UN-Habitat's Regional Office for Africa on post-conflict reconstruction, urban resilience and municipal finance emphasizing the importance of partnerships to advance Agenda 2063 and the global Agenda 2030.

European Union (EU)

The European Union took definitive steps to cement its strategic partnership in the Horn of Africa this month, with a primary focus on maritime security and bilateral cooperation. A centerpiece achievement was the signing of a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between Djibouti and the EU, establishing a formal legal framework for the EU's naval operation, EUNAVFOR ASPIDES to operate from Djiboutian territory.³⁰⁹ This agreement provides essential legal protections and operational arrangements ensuring the EU can maintain access to critical logistical support including fuel, water, food and air assets reinforcing its ability to help secure one of the world's most critical maritime corridors against persistent threats to international shipping. During her official visit, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas emphasized that Operation ASPIDES is protecting lives, trade and stability noting that over the past 29 months the mission has successfully protected more than 670 merchant vessels and rescued 128 seafarers. However, ships cannot secure sea lanes without reliable partners on shore. Her discussions with Djibouti's Prime Minister Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed also covered broader security challenges facing the Horn of Africa, including migration, refugee support and regional stability in Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea.

High Representative Kallas also visited Addis Ababa, where she held productive talks with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Foreign Minister Gedion Timothewos.³¹⁰ Describing Ethiopia as a valued partner and one of Africa's most influential countries she reaffirmed the

³⁰⁷ Selma Malika Haddadi (@HaddadiSelma), "Pleased to welcome H.E. Ambassador Lemlem Fiseha Minale to AU Headquarters, X, July 8, 2026.

³⁰⁸ AUC Political Affairs, Peace and Security (@AUC_PAPS), "A ministerial delegation from the AU Ad Hoc High-Level Committee for South Sudan (C5)...visited Juba," X, July 7, 2026.

³⁰⁹ Dawan Africa, "Djibouti, EU Sign Defence Agreement on Red Sea Naval Operation," accessed July 29, 2026.

³¹⁰ European External Action Service, "EU High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas Visited Addis Ababa," accessed July 29, 2026.

EU's commitment to deepening ties across investment, digital governance, renewable energy and critical raw materials while noting the need for a welcoming business environment to attract European companies. Their discussions covered the region's most pressing security challenges including the devastating war in Sudan Al-Shabaab's terrorist threat in Somalia, Iran's attacks on its neighbors and broader global conflicts and their repercussions. Kallas also visited Ethiopia's National Dialogue conference praising its scale and grassroots inclusiveness and expressing hope that it would deliver concrete results for peace and reconciliation. The visit underscored the EU's view of its relationship with Ethiopia as a partnership of equals with stronger ties serving shared interests and a commitment to more cooperation, business opportunities and investments.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

IGAD's month was a study in determined multi-pronged engagement weaving together high stakes peacemaking, institutional strengthening and long term regional integration. The most pressing diplomatic push was on Sudan where the brutal war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces has created the world's largest humanitarian crisis. IGAD and Kenya jointly hosted the Third Special Envoys and Representatives Forum on Sudan in Nairobi, bringing together a broad coalition from the AU, UN, EU, League of Arab States, the Quartet and the Quintet with support from the Government of Japan.³¹¹ Executive Secretary H.E. Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu issued a central message of unity warning that fragmented peace initiatives risk prolonging a conflict marked by unprecedented displacement, hunger, civilian casualties, conflict related sexual violence and drone attacks targeting civilian infrastructure. The forum reaffirmed that any lasting solution must be Sudanese owned and Sudanese led, with external partners playing a coordinated, supporting role rather than pursuing competing agendas. The renewed diplomatic push acknowledged that instability in Sudan carries direct consequences for the entire Horn of Africa and beyond.

In a parallel track, Dr. Workneh met with Kenya's Prime Cabinet Secretary and Foreign Affairs Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi where discussions were laser focused on Sudan and the fragile peace process in South Sudan.³¹² Mudavadi reaffirmed Kenya's commitment to IGAD led peace efforts emphasizing the need for inclusive political processes that bring in civilian coalitions, women and youth reflecting the understanding that a durable peace cannot be negotiated by generals alone. Dr. Workneh deeply appreciated Kenya's steadfast leadership noting the country's enduring role as a diplomatic anchor and safe harbour for peace talks from Sudan mediation to previous Somali dialogues. This engagement underscored Kenya's strategic patience and its recognition that a relapse into full scale war in Juba would have immediate humanitarian and security implications across its northern border.

³¹¹ Afrik Times. "IGAD Hosts Special Envoys Forum in Nairobi to Strengthen Sudan Peace Efforts." July 21, 2026.

³¹² The Star. "Mudavadi, IGAD Chief Commit to Regional Peace." July 22, 2026.

This peace and security focus were mirrored in institutional actions. IGAD's Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) convened a Kenya-Ethiopia High-Level Experts Consultative Meeting in Arba Minch, Ethiopia. The two day meeting focused on reviewing bilateral agreements and cooperation mechanisms for the critical Moyale-Moyale and South Omo-Turkana border corridors both hotspots for resource competition, cattle rustling and climate related pressures.³¹³ Experts examined gaps in current frameworks and produced a set of practical recommendations and follow up actions aimed at strengthening early warning and response systems with support from the European Union and the Food and Agriculture Organization. The meeting reaffirmed the commitment of both nations to fully implement existing bilateral and regional peace and security frameworks underscoring the recognition that stability in border regions is essential to protecting broader economic and infrastructure ties including the LAPSET corridor.

In a landmark step for regional security cooperation, the Executive Secretary signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ethiopian Federal Police to expand advanced forensic training for law enforcement officers across all Member States.³¹⁴ This initiative represents a significant move toward building a more robust criminal justice framework that will benefit the entire Horn of Africa by equipping personnel with modern investigative capabilities. On the global stage, IGAD's Permanent Representative to the UN delivered a statement on the Responsibility to Protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. He emphasized that protecting communities starts with preventing conflict and that the most effective way to safeguard populations is to address root causes through local peacebuilding initiatives, including cross border efforts that serve as practical examples of community driven conflict prevention. The statement also urged greater investment in women and youth as agents of peace and expressed strong support for a landmark resolution recognizing the transatlantic enslavement of Africans as a crime against humanity.

The development and integration agenda advanced on multiple fronts. A landmark five year Memorandum of Understanding was signed with UN-Habitat in Nairobi, establishing a strategic partnership to accelerate sustainable urbanization, climate resilience and integrated development across the Horn and Eastern Africa. The agreement combines UN-Habitat's global technical expertise with IGAD's regional leadership to address rapid urbanization, displacement and disaster risks, focusing on strengthening urban and cross border resilience through integrated planning, improving land governance and promoting climate risk informed infrastructure with special attention to climate induced human mobility. The Executive Secretary also signed a grant agreement with the Chinese Ambassador to Djibouti,

³¹³ IGAD CEWARN (@CEWARN_IGAD), "Ethiopia and Kenya strengthen coordination of cross-border frameworks," X, July 23, 2026.

³¹⁴ Fana Media Corporation, "Ethiopia, IGAD Forge Strategic Security Partnership to Enhance Regional Law Enforcement Capacity," accessed July, 2026.

Ambassador Hu Bin, enhancing institutional support to IGAD.³¹⁵ Ambassador Hu expressed China's high appreciation for IGAD's role in promoting cooperation and stability while Dr. Workneh welcomed China as an important and reliable partner. Separately, he hosted partners from Finland, Sweden and Switzerland to review their contributions through the ISAP project to IGAD's institutional strengthening conveying profound appreciation for their unwavering commitment to regional cooperation.

On digital integration, the Third Project Steering Committee for the Horn of Africa Digital Market Integration (HDMI) project met in Juba, South Sudan marking a significant step forward in the region's digital journey. Representatives from member states and key partners took stock of encouraging progress over the past year in harmonizing policies and building shared digital infrastructure. The meeting had a palpable sense of shared purpose, with South Sudan's Deputy Minister warmly welcoming delegates and reinforcing national commitment, while IGAD's Dr. Victoria Anib reminded participants that the project is about creating a more connected, inclusive, and resilient regional economy. A highlight was the visit to South Sudan's Ministry of ICT and the National Communication Authority which gave delegates a valuable on the ground look at the country's digital transformation efforts. Concurrently, a dedicated Technical Working Group was established under the EARDIP framework, housed within the Trade, Industry and Tourism Unit to accelerate digital commerce and reduce barriers to cross-border trade aligning regional efforts with the African Continental Free Trade Area.

In the agricultural and social sectors, the Ministry of Agriculture and IGAD's Agriculture and Environment Division convened their inaugural collaboration meeting. The Somali delegation briefed the Deputy Executive Secretary, H.E. Mawareso, who gave strong assurances of IGAD's unwavering support for advancing sustainable agriculture and food security.³¹⁶ The dialogue centered on aligning Somalia's national priorities with the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) to boost productivity and drive sustainable agricultural transformation. An IGAD delegation, led by the Head of Mission to Somalia, also met with Somalia's Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Salim Alio Ibrow to discuss progress on the ratification and domestication of the IGAD Free Movement Protocol.³¹⁷ The Minister reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to accelerating the process underscoring Somalia's support for greater regional cooperation and the free movement of people. Similarly, the IGAD Head of Mission to Uganda paid a courtesy call on the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs to brief him on IGAD's mandate and strategic interventions supporting Uganda.

The month was also marked by a series of high level diplomatic and symbolic engagements. The Executive Secretary had the honor of delivering a keynote address at the historic

³¹⁵ IGAD (@IGADsecretariat), "IGAD and China Strengthen Cooperation on Regional Matters," X, July 6, 2026.

³¹⁶ IGAD Secretariat (@IGADsecretariat), "The Somali delegation briefed the Deputy Executive Secretary, H.E. Mawareso," X, July 16, 2026.

³¹⁷ Goobjoog News, "IGAD Steps Up Somalia Consultations on Regional Free Movement Protocol," accessed July 29, 2026.

opening of Ethiopia's National Dialogue reaffirming IGAD's unwavering commitment to supporting inclusive homegrown processes that pave the way for lasting peace. He also welcomed the Turkish Ambassador to Ethiopia and the AU, H.E. Berk Baran for a productive meeting on deepening collaboration on mediation, peace and security, noting Turkey's constructive role in supporting the Ethiopia and Somalia resolution through the Ankara Declaration, which has proven a valuable model for dialogue. IGAD's Special Envoy to South Sudan, H.E. Moussa Djama met with the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, Hon. Albino Akol Atak Mayom, for a frank discussion on the country's pressing humanitarian needs, the growing impacts of climate change and how IGAD can better support durable solutions for communities affected by displacement and conflict ahead of elections.

In gestures of regional solidarity, the Executive Secretary expressed heartfelt condolences following the passing of Djibouti's Minister of Defense, H.E. Hassan Omar Mohamed Bourhan, remembered as a distinguished statesman whose commitment to regional stability left a lasting mark on IGAD's peace and security framework. He also visited the Embassy of Qatar in Addis Ababa to sign the book of condolence following the passing of the Father Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, honoring his visionary leadership and extending deep sympathies.³¹⁸ IGAD also extended its warmest wishes to the Governments and Peoples of Somalia and South Sudan on the occasions of their respective Independence Days, recognizing their resilience and enduring aspirations for peace, unity and prosperity.

³¹⁸ IGAD Secretariat (@IGADsecretariat), "He also visited the Embassy of Qatar in Addis Ababa to sign the book of condolence," X, July 15, 2026.

A light blue background featuring a faint outline map of the Horn of Africa. The word "HORN" is written in large, bold, dark blue capital letters. The word "REVIEW" is written in smaller, bold, red capital letters, positioned between the "O" and "R" of "HORN".

HORN

REVIEW

IDEAS CONNECTIONS SYNERGY

Ideas

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Connections

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Synergy