



Weekly Geopolitical Report

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

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Horn Review: Weekly Report

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1. Ethiopia

Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs State Minister Hadera Abera took part in the 74th Extraordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers held in Djibouti, where ministers reviewed regional peace and security challenges, the situation in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb, and developments in Sudan, Somalia and South Sudan. The communiqué welcomed Ethiopia's successful national election and National Dialogue, urged full implementation of the Pretoria Agreement, directed stronger regional maritime coordination, and expressed support for Ethiopia's COP32 presidency together with its Green Legacy environmental initiatives.

In a related regional initiative, IGAD called for coordinated large-scale investment to strengthen food-systems resilience across the Horn of Africa through the Regional Agrifood Systems Investment Plan (RASIP) 2026–2035. The plan links agriculture, trade, climate resilience and nutrition, while also advancing a regional seed policy framework. Ethiopian officials highlighted national successes in irrigated wheat production, improved seeds, cluster farming and the Green Legacy Initiative as practical models for the wider region.

Building on this regional engagement, a constructive diplomatic development has strengthened Ethiopia's external partnerships. The United States formally removed the country from the International Traffic in Arms Regulations restricted list, ending the policy of denial on defense exports that originated during the Tigray conflict, with the change taking effect around 18 September. At the same time the Treasury confirmed the expiration of the related national emergency under Executive Order 14046, resulting in the delisting of certain persons and entities and thereby easing long-standing restrictions on arms, technology and related transactions for Ethiopia's security forces. This measured step signals warmer and more cooperative U.S.–Ethiopia ties at a moment when domestic stability remains a shared priority.

Ethiopia also participated in the 70th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, where 181 member states discussed nuclear safety and security, peaceful applications of nuclear science, cancer care, food security and water management. The Ethiopian delegation, led by Ambassador Haileselassie Subba and Second Secretary Betelhem Mekonnen, underscored the country's interest in advancing these technologies for development priorities.

Against this backdrop of external diplomatic shifts, internal political divisions within Tigray continue to surface. The Tigray Democratic Solidarity party, led by Getachew Reda who also serves as a federal advisor, faces accusations from its own council members that the executive leadership violated bylaws through unauthorized dismissals of zone coordinators and by joining an unratified Peace and Change Council coalition. A formal complaint was lodged with the National Election Board while the executive side stated that differences would be resolved in an upcoming council session, illustrating persistent fragmentation between federal-aligned and other Tigrayan currents.

In the same period seven Ethiopian armed opposition groups, led in practice by the Tigray People's Liberation Front in its effort to assemble and direct the alliance, together with the Amhara Fano National Movement, Oromo Liberation Army and smaller regional fronts, formally announced the Ethiopian Peoples' Forces Alliance for Survival. The TPLF's drive to construct this grouping seeks to unite historically antagonistic forces under a shared banner of removing the federal government and installing a transitional administration, yet the political contradictions of former enemies cooperating remain unresolved. How would this actually function, given that they were not even formal representatives? It appears that the blame is placed on the outdated nature of the structure. The Oromo Liberation Army had previously described such cooperation as merely a procedural consensus rather than a binding political pact, underscoring the practical impossibility of sustaining historically rival forces that lack unified mandates or modern institutional coherence.

2. Sudan

The week's developments point to a Sudanese conflict that is becoming increasingly interconnected across military escalation, regional tensions, diplomatic competition, and economic collapse. Fighting around Blue Nile and the Sudan–South Sudan border has continued alongside allegations involving cross-border military activity and attacks on vital infrastructure. Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts involving Egypt, the United States, and Sudan have sought to revive discussions on ending the war, even as Washington's position toward the army-backed authorities introduces a further complication.

The military situation remained particularly tense in Blue Nile, where the RSF and allied forces continued to contest strategic positions near the Ethiopian and South Sudanese borders. The Sudanese army reported repelling an RSF assault near Kurmuk and inflicting losses on the attacking forces, although the battlefield claims have not been independently verified. The escalation was accompanied by drone attacks on Ed Damazin and attempts to strike critical infrastructure near the Ethiopian border, including the Upper Atbara, Setit and Khashm al-Girba dam complexes. The attacks demonstrate how the conflict is increasingly extending beyond conventional front lines toward energy, transport and civilian infrastructure.

The regional implications of the Blue Nile escalation were reinforced by renewed accusations concerning Ethiopia. Sudanese military officials and local authorities have alleged that RSF operations have been supported through Ethiopian territory, including claims that drones were launched from the vicinity of Asosa. These allegations remain contested, and Ethiopia's position should not be equated with the claims of Sudanese military actors. Nevertheless, Khartoum's rhetoric has become more cautious in some quarters. Deputy Sovereignty Council Chairman Malik Agar stated that Sudan did not want war with Ethiopia, suggesting an attempt to prevent military tensions and mutual accusations from developing into a direct interstate confrontation. The combination of battlefield activity, contested allegations and diplomatic caution makes the Ethiopia–Sudan border one of the most sensitive dimensions of the conflict.

The humanitarian consequences of the conflict were starkly illustrated by two separate gold-mine disasters. In West Kordofan, the collapse of the Al-Zara mine near Nuhud reportedly killed at least 82 people, with additional miners remaining missing and rescue operations severely constrained by a lack of heavy machinery. A further collapse in northeastern Sudan killed at least 11 miners and injured around 30 others. They also reveal the wider relationship between gold extraction and the war economy: gold remains an important source of income and foreign currency, while mining networks in conflict-affected areas have been linked to the financing of armed actors.

The war's regional consequences were also visible in Abyei, where renewed intercommunal violence between Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities left at least 26 people dead and 82 injured. The clashes reportedly followed separate killings near the Amiet Common Market and were connected to longstanding tensions over grazing land, water access and seasonal migration. The UN Interim Security Force for Abyei reinforced its presence around Abyei town and called on community leaders to prevent retaliation. Although the violence was primarily communal, the unresolved status of Abyei and its location between Sudan and South Sudan give the conflict broader political and security significance. It also demonstrates how the wider Sudanese war continues to aggravate pre-existing disputes along the border.

Diplomatic activity intensified during the week, particularly through Egypt and the United States. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and CIA Director John Ratcliffe discussed the Sudanese crisis in Cairo, with Sisi reiterating Egypt's support for Sudan's unity, sovereignty and national institutions. At the same time, Washington clarified that it does not formally recognize the army-aligned government as Sudan's legitimate government, although it continues to engage with it as a *de facto* authority. This position indicates that the United States is attempting to maintain diplomatic access while avoiding formal endorsement of either military faction's claim to represent the Sudanese state.

The diplomatic landscape remains complicated by disagreements over the nature of a possible political settlement. The United States has increasingly emphasized a humanitarian truce, an inclusive political process and opposition to both military rule and parallel governing structures. Washington has also stated that neither Abdel Fattah al-Burhan nor Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo should retain a governing role after the war. This position places pressure on both principal belligerents, but it also raises practical questions about how a political transition could be organized when the military and RSF continue to exercise territorial control and retain access to external support networks. The UN secretary-general's call for accountability for foreign states supplying weapons further underlined the international dimension of the conflict.

Economic pressures continued to deepen. Fuel shortages reportedly pushed transport systems in several parts of Sudan toward paralysis, with rising prices affecting mobility, trade and the delivery of essential goods. The crisis is particularly damaging in a country where infrastructure has been destroyed, supply routes remain insecure and humanitarian agencies face severe funding constraints. The World Food Programme has warned that its funding has declined sharply, forcing it to reduce the scale of its assistance even as millions of Sudanese continue to face acute food insecurity.

The week therefore demonstrated how Sudan's conflict is simultaneously becoming more militarily dispersed and more deeply regionalized. The fighting in Blue Nile is linking battlefield developments to tensions with Ethiopia, while violence in Abyei shows how the war is intersecting with longstanding disputes between Sudanese and South Sudanese communities. The gold-mine collapses and fuel shortages, meanwhile, reveal the devastating consequences of an economy operating under conditions of conflict, informality and institutional breakdown. Diplomatic engagement by Egypt, the United States and other international actors offers a potential avenue toward de-escalation, but the absence of a unified political framework and the continued flow of external support remain major obstacles. Sudan's crisis is therefore no longer only a struggle for military control; it is also a contest over sovereignty, regional influence, economic survival and the political identity of the post-war state.

3. Egypt

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman emphasized freedom and security of navigation through Bab el-Mandeb and the Red Sea. Cairo also backed Saudi security measures and a political settlement in Yemen. The discussions reaffirmed close Egyptian-Saudi coordination over maritime routes linking Gulf security, Suez revenues, and regional trade.

Egypt's potential role in securing the Red Sea remains shaped by competing economic and military considerations. Cairo has participated in regional maritime-security arrangements and seeks to protect shipping, yet analysts report a preference for limiting

direct intervention inside Yemen. The approach reflects concern that military involvement could widen commitments while Egypt faces substantial economic pressures.

An Egyptian military delegation traveled to Mogadishu to expand defense cooperation with Somalia. Discussions included establishing a military training school, providing equipment to the Somali National Army, and strengthening capacity-building arrangements. The engagement reinforces Egypt's security presence in the Horn of Africa.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia reiterated support for Sudan's security, stability, and territorial integrity, linking Sudanese fragmentation to broader regional security concerns. The coordination places Cairo alongside Riyadh in backing state institutions during Sudan's conflict. It also reinforces Egypt's wider diplomatic network across the Red Sea corridor, where Sudan's political trajectory affects Egyptian border and security interests.

Growing insecurity around the Red Sea has increased attention to Egypt's exposure alongside other African littoral states. Piracy off Somalia and Houthi activity near Bab el-Mandeb have encouraged broader maritime-security cooperation. Egypt's participation in emerging regional mechanisms gives Cairo a role in collective responses while preserving its primary concern with protecting the Suez Canal approach.

Egypt has condemned Houthi attacks while maintaining a cautious approach to direct military participation. Reporting indicates Cairo has sought to protect navigation and economic interests without becoming directly responsible for operations inside Yemen. Saudi requests for greater assistance therefore confront Egypt's preference for maritime protection, intelligence, and coordination over an open-ended military commitment.

Red Sea disruptions continue imposing substantial economic costs on Egypt through reduced Suez Canal traffic and related foreign-currency losses. The persistence of maritime insecurity therefore has direct fiscal and strategic implications for Cairo. Egypt's efforts to coordinate with Saudi Arabia and other partners are closely connected to restoring safer shipping conditions and protecting canal revenues.

Egyptian and Saudi discussions also connected Sudan to wider regional security coordination. Both governments emphasized Sudan's unity while continuing broader cooperation on Red Sea navigation and regional stability. The combination places Sudan, Yemen, maritime security, and Gulf relations within a single diplomatic framework, reflecting Egypt's effort to manage several interconnected security theaters simultaneously.

4. Eritrea

The U.S. sanctions imposed on six Eritrean entities and individuals in 2021 ceased to apply after the national emergency established under Executive Order 14046 expired on September 17. OFAC subsequently removed the Eritrean Defense Forces, the PFDJ, Hidri

Trust, Red Sea Trading Corporation, and officials Abraha Kassa Nemariam and Hagos Ghebrehiwet W/Kidan from the SDN List. The original measures had been tied specifically to the conflict and humanitarian crisis in northern Ethiopia rather than constituting a general U.S. embargo on Eritrea. Reuters reported that Eritrean officials welcomed the change, while its own reporting linked the development to Washington's growing interest in the Red Sea's deteriorating security environment.

The legal mechanism is significant because the change is better characterized as the expiration of a sanctions framework than an affirmative U.S. decision to normalize relations with Asmara. The Biden-era designations were tied to a particular Ethiopia-related emergency, and their removal does not eliminate all U.S. restrictions on Eritrean actors: General Filipos Woldeyohannes remains designated under the separate Global Magnitsky framework over alleged serious human-rights abuses in Tigray. Nevertheless, the lapse gives Washington greater room to reassess engagement with Eritrea as Red Sea insecurity increases, without demonstrating that the two sides have reached broader strategic convergence. Eritrea's location gives it continuing relevance to U.S. regional calculations, but its record of strategic autonomy and past relationships with actors opposed to Washington means that renewed contact is likely to remain pragmatic and limited rather than amounting to a durable security alignment.

The Eritrean delegation led by PFDJ economic affairs chief Hagos Gebrehiwet and Trade and Industry Minister Nesredin Mohammed Saleh held a series of meetings in Riyadh from September 14–16 with Saudi officials, including the commerce minister, deputy foreign minister, and senior Ministry of Energy and Saudi Aramco officials. Eritrea's Ministry of Information said the discussions concerned bilateral cooperation, trade and investment, but no specific investment commitments or projects were announced. Hagos' prominent role is significant because the delegation placed the PFDJ's economic apparatus at the centre of the engagement rather than limiting the talks to conventional government-to-government channels.

The commercial engagement may prove difficult to translate into substantial Saudi investment because Eritrea's economy remains heavily dominated by party-controlled and state-linked enterprises, with limited transparency over ownership, finances and procurement. The Hidri Trust has historically been described as the holding structure for PFDJ business interests, while the Red Sea Trading Corporation, one of its affiliated enterprises, has exercised extensive control over commercial activity; U.S. sanctions previously identified both entities under the Tigray-related sanctions framework. Saudi Arabia has previously shown interest in expanding its economic relationship with Asmara, but the current series of meetings may serve a diplomatic purpose alongside any commercial objective: Hagos' repeated appearances in high-level foreign engagements, including earlier contacts with Egypt, allow Eritrea to demonstrate expanding external relationships while maintaining its negotiating autonomy. For Riyadh, the practical

question is whether engagement can produce commercially viable arrangements within an opaque economic system; for Asmara, the meetings themselves provide evidence of diplomatic and economic attention at a time when its strategic relevance to the Red Sea is increasing.

September 18 marked 25 years since Eritrean authorities arrested 11 members of the G-15, senior PFDJ figures who had publicly called for political reform and greater adherence to the rule of law. The crackdown coincided with the closure of Eritrea's privately owned newspapers, followed by the arrest of journalists who had reported on or protested against the arrests; Human Rights Watch has documented how the repression subsequently expanded into a wider system of arbitrary and incommunicado detention. The anniversary was marked this year by international media and rights organizations, including the BBC and PEN International, which renewed attention to the fate of those detained in 2001, including journalist and playwright Dawit Isaak, whose whereabouts and condition remain unknown. PEN International said on September 18 that 12 Eritrean writers and journalists arrested that year have been held incommunicado for 25 years, while the Committee to Protect Journalists marked the anniversary by honoring the "Eritrea 16," among the world's longest-detained journalists.

The significance of the anniversary lies less in the arrests themselves than in what followed: the consolidation of a political system in which executive authority has operated without meaningful judicial or electoral constraints, while critics can be detained without charge or access to legal representation. Human Rights Watch said in May that Eritrea's human-rights situation remains fundamentally unchanged, with thousands estimated to remain in arbitrary detention and the G-15 still held incommunicado. At the same time, the growing diplomatic engagement with Asmara, including recent U.S. ones, suggests that Eritrea's strategic relevance is increasingly being treated separately from its domestic record. This does not establish that foreign governments have abandoned their human-rights concerns, but the widening external engagement alongside the continued absence of accountability illustrates the considerable space the Afwerki regime has retained to pursue diplomatic normalization without addressing the unresolved legacy of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance.

Getachew Reda, Ethiopian Prime Ministerial Advisor for East African Affairs, said on September 17 that the Eritrean regime is seeking to internationalize conflict in Ethiopia by working with the TPLF and other armed groups. In remarks to Pulse of Africa, Getachew said Eritrea was encouraging the deployment of young people beyond Ethiopia's borders and coordinating with groups opposed to the federal government, including directing the TPLF to provoke clashes with federal forces and link up with armed groups in Amhara. He also said Eritrea has the support of Egypt in these efforts and warned that continued armed confrontations could widen into a broader regional conflict.

Getachew described the emerging Eritrea–TPLF alignment as a pragmatic arrangement between former adversaries with divergent interests, which he said could deepen instability in the Horn. He said the federal government had so far pursued a policy of containment despite repeated provocations, while warning that this approach could change if armed groups initiated further attacks.

On September 15, Germany’s Federal Public Prosecutor ordered the arrest of two senior figures in the German branch of Brigade N’Hamedu, an Eritrean opposition movement, in Saarbrücken and Stuttgart. The two men, Merhawi A. and Shimangus T., are accused of membership in a domestic terrorist organization under Section 129a of the German Criminal Code, with prosecutors linking the organization to violent clashes at Eritrean diaspora events in Germany. Brigade N’Hamedu emerged in the diaspora in 2022 among younger Eritreans opposed to the Afwerki regime, and its supporters have sought to disrupt government-linked festivals and events that they regard as extensions of the regime’s political apparatus abroad. The arrests concern the methods used by the group in Germany, particularly organized violence against police and participants, rather than its opposition to the Eritrean regime itself.

The confrontation reflects the extent to which Eritrea’s authoritarian political system continues to shape relations among its diaspora. PFDJ-linked festivals and organizations function as instruments for maintaining the regime’s influence abroad, including through the coercive collection of the two-percent diaspora tax, pressure on relatives inside Eritrea, and social exclusion or intimidation of those who oppose the regime. Brigade N’Hamedu’s emergence can therefore be understood in the context of a wider migrant community carrying the political conflict of Eritrea beyond its borders, rather than as an isolated European protest movement. The violence associated with some of its mobilizations has nevertheless provided the Eritrean regime and its supporters with grounds to portray the broader opposition movement as extremist, while German authorities have separately focused on the criminal conduct taking place on German soil.

5. Djibouti

On 16 September, Ethiopian officials visiting Djibouti toured the Doraleh multimodal and container terminal and received a briefing on its operations, capacity and role in facilitating Ethiopian trade. The delegation also inspected the construction of an Ethiopian Community School and visited the Ethiopian Embassy. The port visit is particularly relevant given Ethiopia’s continued reliance on Djibouti for the overwhelming majority of its maritime trade and the importance of the corridor to Ethiopia’s external commerce.

The visit also reflects the continued institutional depth of the Ethiopia–Djibouti relationship, which extends beyond high-level political engagement into the infrastructure and logistical systems underpinning Ethiopia’s access to global markets. The emphasis on Doraleh’s strategic role in Ethiopian trade suggests that, despite Addis Ababa’s efforts to

diversify its maritime options, Djibouti remains central to Ethiopia's immediate commercial connectivity. The community-school project, meanwhile, points to the broader social infrastructure supporting the large Ethiopian population residing in Djibouti.

The escalation of fighting in Yemen has triggered a rapid displacement surge, with the UN reporting more than 112,000 internally displaced people and around 3,000 Yemenis arriving in Djibouti by boat. UNHCR reported that more than 2,400 people crossed to Djibouti in the preceding week, predominantly women, children and older people, adding to the roughly 36,000 refugees already hosted by the country. The influx is significant relative to Djibouti's population of around one million and is placing additional pressure on an already constrained humanitarian system. The movement also demonstrates how renewed fighting on Yemen's western coast can quickly translate into direct humanitarian pressures across the Bab al-Mandeb.

For Djibouti, the arrivals underscore the country's exposure to instability across the strait despite the conflict occurring on the opposite shore. Its geographic position makes it a natural destination for people escaping western Yemen, while simultaneously increasing the humanitarian and logistical demands associated with its role as a regional hub for refugees and displaced populations. The concentration of arrivals by sea also highlights the practical consequences of insecurity around the Bab al-Mandeb, where humanitarian movements and commercial maritime activity are increasingly intertwined with the broader security environment. If displacement from Yemen continues at the current pace, Djibouti could face growing pressure to balance humanitarian obligations with the capacity constraints of a small state already hosting substantial refugee populations.

According to a 17 September analysis by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), satellite imagery indicates that China has added two communications facilities to its military support base in Djibouti since mid-2024. The new infrastructure includes high-, very- and ultra-high-frequency antennas, satellite communications equipment and other communications assets, which CSIS assesses are likely to form part of a broader command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) architecture. The researchers further assess that the facilities could support signals intelligence collection, although they note that open-source imagery cannot establish whether passive SIGINT operations are actually being conducted.

The upgrade increases the military significance of Djibouti for China beyond its existing role as a logistical support point for PLAN operations in the Gulf of Aden. Located alongside several Western and Japanese military installations and near the Bab al-Mandeb, the base provides China with a forward position from which to maintain communications with forces operating across the western Indian Ocean and Middle East while potentially monitoring the activities of other militaries in the region. CSIS argues

that the growing intelligence value of the facility is particularly relevant amid the heightened military activity around the Red Sea and Middle East since 2023. For Djibouti, the development further illustrates how the concentration of foreign military infrastructure on its territory is increasing the country's importance as a node in great-power competition, while giving the Djiboutian state continued leverage from hosting strategically important external powers.

6. South Sudan

South Sudan's political transition came under renewed pressure this week as disputes over the country's planned elections intersected with internal fragmentation within the opposition, regional water politics and continuing insecurity along the Sudan border. While Juba advanced its case for the Fula hydropower project and sought to affirm its sovereign authority over Nile development, the political space surrounding the December elections remained unsettled. The reported fragmentation of Riek Machar's SPLM-IO, warnings over aid obstruction, and persistent communal violence illustrate the difficulties of pursuing electoral normalization while the 2018 peace agreement remains incompletely implemented.

The security situation remained fragile along the Sudan–South Sudan border. In Abyei, violence at the Amiet Common Market reportedly killed 26 people and injured 82, following the separate killings of a Ngok Dinka man and a Misseriya man. The UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) reinforced its presence around the market and urged community leaders to prevent retaliatory attacks. Although the immediate violence was communal, the dispute's location in the contested Abyei region means that local insecurity remains connected to the unresolved political relationship between Juba and Khartoum.

The political environment surrounding the December elections also became more uncertain. Reports of internal fragmentation within Machar's SPLM-IO suggest that divisions within the opposition are deepening at a sensitive moment in the transition. Machar remains under house arrest, while competing positions within his political movement could affect opposition coordination, participation in the electoral process and the broader implementation of the peace agreement. The reported splintering should be understood in the context of the government's earlier replacement of Machar-aligned officials with members of a rival SPLM-IO faction.

The electoral process also faced a major institutional development with President Salva Kiir's dismissal of the chairperson of the National Elections Commission, Abednego Akok Kacuol, approximately three months before the scheduled vote. The president appointed Gabriel Bol Deng Majok, the commission's former secretary-general, as his replacement. The dismissal prompted questions about its legal basis and the possible effects on election preparations, including voter registration and the commission's

independence. The timing is particularly consequential given the UN Commission on Human Rights' earlier warning that the electoral process is severely underfunded, that the timetable is highly ambitious, and that insecurity and political exclusion could undermine the credibility of the vote.

The dispute over the Fula hydropower project added an important regional and strategic dimension to the week. South Sudan reaffirmed its intention to proceed with the dam, with Energy and Dams Minister Agok Makur invoking national sovereignty and decisions of the Nile Basin Council of Ministers. Egypt subsequently stated that it had approved the project after reviewing technical studies and documents submitted by Juba. The Egyptian position is significant because it contrasts with Cairo's continued opposition to Ethiopia's unilateral approach to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Egypt's approval of Fula suggests that its concerns are not necessarily directed at dam construction itself, but at the procedures, technical assessments, information-sharing arrangements and legal framework governing projects that may affect downstream interests.

South Sudan's position on the dam also reflects an effort to assert greater agency in Nile politics. Juba has argued that it possesses the sovereign right to pursue development projects while referring to regional consultation mechanisms. The project could have implications for domestic electricity generation, infrastructure development and regional water diplomacy, although its eventual effects will depend on the dam's design, operational arrangements and environmental assessment. The emerging understanding between Egypt and South Sudan may create space for technical cooperation, but it should not be interpreted as resolving wider disagreements within the Nile Basin, particularly those involving Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan.

Humanitarian pressure remained another major concern. The United States warned South Sudan's transitional government that it could use sanctions and visa restrictions against individuals involved in obstructing humanitarian assistance. Washington accused officials at national, state and local levels of imposing costs and risks on aid organizations and treating humanitarian assistance as a source of revenue. The warning is significant in a country where conflict, displacement, flooding and food insecurity have placed sustained pressure on humanitarian operations. It also indicates that international donors may increasingly connect continued assistance to the government's treatment of humanitarian actors and its responsibility to facilitate access.

South Sudan also continued to pursue institutional development in sectors beyond security and politics. UNESCO's support for the establishment of the country's first education-sector monitoring system represents an effort to strengthen planning, data collection and oversight within a sector heavily affected by conflict and underinvestment. Such initiatives are important for long-term state-building, but their effectiveness will depend on sustained financing, institutional capacity and the ability to extend public services

beyond areas with relatively stable security conditions.

Taken together, this week's developments reveal a transition facing simultaneous pressures from political fragmentation, electoral uncertainty, regional water diplomacy and humanitarian vulnerability. The Fula dam initiative demonstrates Juba's interest in asserting developmental sovereignty and expanding its regional partnerships, while the Abyei violence and continued insecurity underline the fragility of the country's security environment. At the political level, divisions within the SPLM-IO and changes to the electoral administration raise questions about the inclusiveness and institutional credibility of the December vote. Unless political participation, humanitarian access and security guarantees are strengthened together, South Sudan's formal movement toward elections may continue to outpace the consolidation of the political and institutional foundations required for a durable transition.

7. Somalia and Somaliland

Somalia

The political and military standoff in Somalia's Southwest State continued to pose a threat to national stability during this period. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project issued a warning that the confrontation between federal government forces and their regional allies on one side and Darwish forces loyal to ousted Southwest State President Abdiiaziz Hassan Mohamed Laftagareen on the other risks escalating beyond a power struggle into a protracted inter clan conflict capable of destabilizing the wider Bay region. ACLED cited dozens of prior clashes and a surge in Al-Shabaab attacks amid the security vacuum created by the political impasse. In a related development, Brigadier General Sahal Abdullahi Omar, Chief of Somali National Army Land Forces inspected frontline SNA positions in Baidoa, the interim capital of Southwest State. During the visit he reviewed the security situation, troop conditions, and recent operations and clashes and received briefings from the commander of the 60th Division. The inspection occurred amid ongoing efforts to stabilize the area against opposition forces and militant threats.

Separately Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency announced the dismantling of several Al Shabaab networks allegedly preparing to infiltrate parts of Mogadishu diplomatic and surrounding areas. NISA forces conducted planned operations in the districts of Daarusalaam , Garasbaaley, Kaxda, Dayniile and Afgooye , arresting eleven suspected Al-Shabaab operatives. Weapons and other materials intended for planned attacks were seized. The agency described the operations as part of ongoing efforts to prevent attacks threatening security and civilians.

In the capital the Somalia Non State Actors coalition a civil society umbrella issued a statement strongly opposing forced evictions and displacement of families in Mogadishu. SONSA called for land management to follow the law, court orders and consultation with

affected residents criticizing actions taken without adequate notice, fair compensation or alternative housing. The coalition announced a registration process for those affected and urged civil society, elders and human rights groups to address land disputes transparently.

On the economic and resource front, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud announced the confirmation of uranium, lithium, cobalt and other critical mineral deposits in Somalia. Speaking at the opening of the Somalia Development Financing Forum in Mogadishu, the president called for investment, technical expertise and international cooperation to develop natural resources alongside fisheries, livestock, and agriculture. He emphasized the need to improve the investment climate and reduce import dependence through domestic production. No specific sizes, locations, or commercial viability details were provided.

The United States moved to fill its long vacant ambassadorial post in Mogadishu with President Donald Trump nominating Devin Kennington of California as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Federal Republic of Somalia. The White House announced the nomination on September 15 moving to fill a position that had sat vacant since late last year. Kennington is a career diplomat with prior Africa experience including service related to the Great Lakes and Central Africa regions and earlier consular work in Djibouti. The nomination requires Senate confirmation.

In another engagement, Somali Minister of Defence Ahmed Moallin Fiqi met with China's Minister of National Defence, Admiral Dong Jun on the sidelines of the 13th Beijing Xiangshan Forum. Discussions focused on strengthening historic ties and expanding defence and security cooperation based on mutual respect and sovereignty and territorial integrity. The talks covered Somalia's progress against terrorism and army rebuilding and both sides agreed to accelerate existing understandings into practical measures for regional peace and stability. Minister Fiqi reaffirmed Somalia's adherence to the One China principle. Separately Chinese Ambassador to Somalia Wang Yu met with Somali National Armed Forces Commander Brigadier General Ibrahim Mohamed Mohamud and the two sides exchanged views on issues of common interest. China continued to affirm support for Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the context of Somaliland related developments.

Egypt continued its diplomatic and security engagement with Somalia. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi received CIA Director John Ratcliffe in Cairo where he stated that Egypt fully supports Somalia's security and stability and rejects any infringement on its sovereignty, unity, or territorial integrity. The meeting attended by Egyptian intelligence chief Hassan Mahmoud Rashad also covered developments in the Horn of Africa, Red Sea and international maritime security, counterterrorism, and bilateral coordination. In a related development Defence Minister Ahmed Moallim Fiqi received a visiting Egyptian military delegation accompanied by Egypt's ambassador in Mogadishu. The talks focused

on strengthening defence and security cooperation with Fiqi thanking Egypt for its support on Somalia's sovereignty, unity, counterterrorism, and army rebuilding.

Somalia also condemned an attempted drone attack attributed to Yemen's Houthis toward the holy city of Makkah which Saudi air defenses intercepted. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing full solidarity with Saudi Arabia and affirming the kingdom's right to protect its territory, people, and Islamic holy sites. Mogadishu stood with Riyadh under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques amid heightened regional tensions involving Red Sea and Gulf of Aden security.

In other bilateral engagements, a high level Pakistan Air Force delegation led by Air Defence Commander and Deputy Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal Muhammad Sarfraz arrived in Mogadishu. The delegation was received by Somali Air Force Commander Brigadier General Abdirisak Mohamud Haji for discussions on air defence cooperation following earlier bilateral defence engagements.

The 74th Extraordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers convened in Djibouti bringing together foreign affairs ministers and representatives from IGAD member states including Somalia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Abdisalam Abdi Ali. The session was chaired by Djibouti's Foreign Minister and addressed regional peace and security, maritime cooperation in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden citing threats to shipping, external military activity, and piracy resurgence off Somalia. Institutional matters were also discussed including the entry into force of the 2023 IGAD Treaty, which has been ratified by five of seven members including Somalia. The session expressed support for Somalia's fight against terrorism and called for predictable financing for the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia.

ACLED released an assessment identifying Al Shabaab as the world's most violent Al Qaeda affiliate noting that the group accounted for more than 2,300 political violence events in 2026 to date, nearly half of all such events involving Al Qaeda linked groups globally. The analysis highlighted a concentration of activity in Lower Shabelle and raised concerns about territorial gains and reduced international support risks for 2027.

The African Union Counter Terrorism Centre continued and concluded its engagement with Somali institutions in Mogadishu. Meetings took place between Somali federal institutions including the Immigration and Citizenship Agency, the Ministry of Defence and State Minister for Defence, and the National Security Office, and a delegation from the AUCTC led by Director Idriss Mounir Lallali. Discussions focused on strengthening cooperation on border security, migration management, counterterrorism, intelligence sharing, capacity assessment, and disrupting illicit networks. This formed part of the AUCTC's first national counter-terrorism assessment mission in Somalia. The AU side thanked hosts and praised progress in Somalia's counterterrorism efforts while stressing the need for continued cooperation.

In a counterterrorism operation, U.S. Africa Command publicly confirmed that, in coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia, it conducted a strike on September 17 targeting an Al-Shabaab conventional weapons storage warehouse in the Sanaag region of northern Somalia, approximately 80 kilometers southwest of Bosaso. The statement emphasized ongoing efforts alongside the Federal Government and Somali Armed Forces to degrade Al-Shabaab's ability to threaten U.S. forces and citizens. Puntland authorities had earlier described a related operation in the Markad area of the Al-Madow Golis mountain range as coordinated with U.S. authorities and part of efforts to disrupt the group's logistics in northern Somalia. Later reporting noted differing accounts regarding which Somali authority coordinated the strike with AFRICOM citing coordination with the Federal Government while Puntland authorities described coordination with their own administration.

In Mogadishu tracking reports noted a claimed Al Shabaab improvised explosive device (IED) detonation targeting a Somali military or police vehicle in Daynile District. Reported casualties were noted, though details remained limited and required verification.

On the maritime security front, the Somali Navy reported the successful rescue of all eighteen crew members of the general cargo ship M/V Jacuar. The crew comprised nationals of India, Syria, and Egypt. The vessel, flagged in Saint Kitts and Nevis and Turkish-owned and managed, was carrying approximately 7,007 tonnes of cargo from Mozambique to Egypt when it experienced water ingress, ran aground, and reportedly capsized in Somali waters. The Ministry of Ports and Maritime Transport had been monitoring the situation. The rescue was cited as an example of Somalia's efforts to strengthen maritime security capabilities.

In a separate security related development, former Custodial Corps chief General Mahad Abdirahman claimed that an F-16 fighter jet bombed his residence in the border town of Doolow in the Gedo region. This followed his earlier public account of a reported airstrike or drone attack earlier in the month that damaged the house and caused injuries. Conflicting narratives about responsibility continued.

Reuters reported exclusively that the United States agreed to give the United Nations another year, a twelve month drawdown starting in January followed by liquidation to wind down support for the UN Support Office in Somalia which provides logistics to the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia. This eased the immediate risk of an abrupt cutoff at the end of 2026 but confirmed Washington's intent to end funding for the roughly \$500 million office leaving longer term financing for AUSSOM unresolved.

Somaliland

Somaliland authorities issued comprehensive security directives prohibiting organized armed groups and the carrying of weapons by unauthorized civilians in the Awdal and Salal regions. The measures took effect from 2 p.m. on Sunday, 20 September following recent tensions and clashes between community sections despite earlier peace and reconciliation efforts.

State Minister for Interior and National Security Abdirashid Mohamed Ahmed Magalo announced the ban on war related mobilisation and illegal weapons possession, instructing national security forces to take immediate legal action against violators. Confiscated weapons are to become state property, with individuals referred to the judiciary. The government further warned that any persons engaging in armed confrontation with security forces that are injured or killed would not be entitled to compensation. Traditional elders and residents were urged to cooperate fully to prevent renewed unrest, marking a shift toward firmer enforcement alongside prior conciliatory approaches.

In parallel, the government announced an immediate ban on public performances by artists that praise or promote specific clans with the explicit aim of curbing tribalism and social division. Minister of Information and government spokesperson Barkhad Jama Batun stated that the arts must not be used to foster division or clan based politics. Relevant security agencies and institutions have been instructed to enforce the prohibition in accordance with existing laws. The minister described artists as guides for society who should instead celebrate statehood and national unity.

President Irro met specifically with Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, an advocate of closer U.S.–Somaliland relations and recognition. The discussion addressed strengthening the bilateral partnership, recognition efforts, security cooperation including counterterrorism and maritime protection in the Horn of Africa, economic ties, regional stability, and Somaliland’s strategic importance in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea. Senator Cruz reaffirmed his commitment to U.S. recognition of Somaliland’s sovereignty, urged the State Department to cease treating Somaliland identically to Somalia and called for a region specific U.S. travel advisory that reflects conditions on the ground. President Irro expressed appreciation for the senator’s advocacy. The President also conducted high level discussions with experts and senior officials from the Atlantic Council and the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. These talks centred on regional security and stability, maritime security in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, international trade, the strategic value of the Port of Berbera and opportunities to deepen U.S.–Somaliland cooperation.

The Chinese Embassy in Somalia issued a strong condemnation of the President’s comments supporting Taiwan asserting that the remarks violated the on -China principle, infringed upon China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and warning that crossing the

line on the Taiwan question would lead to serious consequences. Beijing reiterated that Somaliland constitutes an inalienable part of Somalia's territory and reaffirmed its support for the Federal Government of Somalia's territorial integrity and the one China principle. China had earlier issued warnings regarding remarks on Taiwan made during the Washington visit. In response the Taiwan Representative Office in the Republic of Somaliland rejected the Chinese statements and claims reaffirming the existing partnership and mutual support between Taiwan and Somaliland.

8. Yemen

Over the weekend of approximately 13–14 September, US officials met Houthi representatives at the US Embassy in Muscat, Oman. Oman, a longstanding regional mediator, helped arrange the meeting. The Houthi side included senior figures Mohammad Abdulsalam and Abdelmalik al-Ajri. According to multiple sources familiar with the talks, the Houthis stated they had no intention of attacking American vessels and remained committed to the 2025 ceasefire reached with the United States. They also indicated they would not target Israeli ships or other commercial vessels, while excluding Saudi vessels from that assurance. The discussions focused on maintaining freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. US Vice President JD Vance later publicly acknowledged direct contact with the Houthis. President Trump stated that the Houthis had contacted the US administration asking it to stay out of the Yemen fighting. Washington had rejected Saudi requests for direct military involvement against the Houthis.

On 14 September, government forces reported advances in western Taiz after repelling Houthi attacks and carried out airstrikes on Houthi positions near Mokha, Dhubab, and other coastal areas. Houthis claimed further control of Red Sea islands including Greater and Lesser Hanish and launched missile and drone attacks on Saudi airbases, including King Khalid Airbase in Khamis Mushait. Saudi forces conducted airstrikes in response. Displacement continued as people fled fighting zones. On 15 September, Houthis launched missile and drone attacks targeting Khamis Mushait, Abha, and Taif in Saudi Arabia, injuring civilians. Saudi Arabia reported the attacks and vowed a firm response. Houthis reported Saudi airstrikes in Taiz and other areas that caused civilian casualties. Government forces continued operations and claimed gains in Taiz. Fighting also occurred in al-Jawf.

Between 16 and 17 September, Saudi airstrikes hit Houthi positions in multiple provinces including Taiz, Marib, Hodeidah, and Hajjah. Houthis claimed to have targeted Saudi sites including Yanbu and Khamis Mushait and said they shot down a Saudi fighter jet. Government forces conducted airstrikes and ground operations in Taiz and Lahj, reporting strikes on Houthi reinforcements and positions near the Kahbub range overlooking Bab el-Mandeb. Clashes continued in those areas. More people fled by sea toward Djibouti.

On 18 September, fighting intensified in western Yemen around Bab el-Mandeb. Government forces reported strikes and drone interceptions near Kahboub and Al-Waziya. Houthis accused Saudi Arabia of dozens of airstrikes. Civilian casualties were reported from shelling in Taiz. Displacement figures rose further. On 19 September, government forces reported killing a Houthi commander and several aides in clashes near Bab el-Mandeb on the Kahboub front. They also claimed to have repelled Houthi attacks in Taiz and Marib. Houthis launched a ballistic missile toward Riyadh that was intercepted, along with attempted strikes on other Saudi locations including Yanbu. Saudi defenses reported intercepting the attacks. Clashes continued in Taiz and Lahj.

On 20 September, government-aligned forces claimed attacks on Houthi infrastructure and vehicles in Al-Bayda. Fighting persisted on fronts near Bab el-Mandeb, Taiz, and other areas, with ongoing Saudi airstrikes reported by Houthis and continued government operations along the Red Sea coast and inland.

Throughout the week, the main focus remained the Red Sea coast, Mokha, and approaches to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, with secondary fighting in Taiz, Lahj, Marib, al-Jawf, and Al-Bayda. Houthis held coastal gains while government forces and Saudis conducted airstrikes and ground operations. Displacement continued to rise as people left the fighting zones.

9. Kenya

Kenya's political and geopolitical environment between September 14 and 20 was shaped by growing political competition ahead of the 2027 election, regional security concerns and Nairobi's continued effort to strengthen its economic position abroad. President William Ruto spent much of the week touring Nyanza, while opposition leaders increased their political and international engagements. At the same time, Kenya was dealing with insecurity in the Red Sea, tensions with Uganda over fuel imports, infrastructure financing discussions with China and continuing threats from al Shabaab and armed bandit groups.

Ruto's tour of Nyanza was one of the main domestic political developments of the week. The President launched several projects, including the KSh8.4 billion Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation Project in Kisumu, before continuing through Siaya, Migori and Homa Bay. Roads, markets, housing, water and other infrastructure projects featured heavily throughout the visit. The political importance of the tour was difficult to ignore. Nyanza has traditionally been an ODM stronghold, but the region is going through a period of political adjustment following the death of Raila Odinga. Ruto also used the tour to criticise the opposition and present his administration's development record as an alternative to opposition politics.

Political competition was also becoming clearer in Mt Kenya. On September 19, elders from several Gikuyu, Embu, Meru and Mbeere organisations endorsed Deputy President Kithure Kindiki as a regional spokesperson during a meeting in Kiambu. The position has no constitutional authority and remains disputed by other political groups, particularly those associated with former Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua. At the same time, the opposition continued to deal with disagreements over leadership and coalition arrangements involving figures such as Edwin Sifuna and Babu Owino. Sifuna also met foreign diplomats during the week, while David Maraga and Gachagua were both involved in separate engagements in the United States. The activity suggests that preparations for 2027 are already taking place both inside Kenya and among diaspora communities abroad.

Outside the country, developments in the Red Sea and Gulf received more attention from Nairobi. On September 18, Kenya condemned missile and drone attacks directed at Saudi Arabia and raised concern over threats to civilian infrastructure and commercial shipping. Kenya also stressed the need to keep the Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz open to navigation. This matters directly to Kenya because the country depends on imported petroleum and maritime trade through routes connected to the Gulf and Red Sea. Any prolonged disruption around Bab el Mandeb or Hormuz could increase fuel, freight and insurance costs. Nairobi nevertheless continued to support a negotiated political settlement in Yemen rather than a wider military confrontation.

Relations with Uganda also came under some pressure during the week. President Yoweri Museveni criticised the previous arrangement through which Uganda obtained petroleum products through Kenya, arguing that intermediaries had increased costs and pushed Kampala to look for a more direct supply system. Kenya's Energy Cabinet Secretary Opiyo Wandayi defended the arrangement, saying it had helped the country manage foreign exchange shortages and allowed fuel to be supplied on longer credit terms. The issue is important because Uganda has long depended on Kenya's ports, pipelines and transport corridors. A gradual shift away from Kenyan fuel infrastructure could reduce revenues for the Kenya Pipeline Company and weaken Mombasa's position as the main regional gateway for Ugandan imports.

Kenya continued to look for investment and financing elsewhere. Treasury Principal Secretary Chris Kiptoo met Chinese Vice Minister of Finance Liao Min in Beijing on September 18, with discussions covering infrastructure, investment and financing. Kenyan officials responsible for roads, transport and water were also involved. The talks come as the government tries to continue major infrastructure projects without adding too much pressure to public debt. Ethiopia, meanwhile, announced plans to increase electricity exports to Kenya from 200 megawatts to as much as 400 megawatts. Kenya also held Kenya Week in Kinshasa, aimed at expanding trade and investment ties with the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Two court decisions during the week could affect how the government handles major economic agreements in the future. On September 15, the High Court nullified the sale of a 15 percent government stake in Safaricom to Vodacom, citing problems with public participation and transparency. The government said it would appeal the ruling. Two days later, another High Court decision found that public private partnership projects creating government debt, guarantees or other major financial obligations require stronger parliamentary oversight. These cases are important at a time when Kenya is relying more heavily on private investors and foreign financing for infrastructure. They may make it harder for the executive to conclude large deals without closer parliamentary and public scrutiny.

Security also remained a concern. Kenya launched a new counterterrorism hotline and online reporting platform on September 18 with support from the United States and the United Kingdom. A day later, suspected al Shabaab militants attacked Kenyan military positions in Garissa and Lamu using rocket propelled grenades and rifle fire. No casualties were reported, but the incidents showed that the threat along the Somalia border and coastal region remains active. Separately, five people, including two police officers, were killed in a bandit ambush in Isiolo on September 16. The country therefore continues to deal with both cross border militant activity and armed violence linked to livestock raids and local conflicts in northern Kenya.

By the end of the week, attention was beginning to shift toward the 81st United Nations General Assembly. Kenya identified debt sustainability, climate finance, digital trade and regional security among its main priorities. These issues closely reflect the challenges Kenya was dealing with during the week. At home, political competition is becoming more intense and the courts are taking a more active role in major economic and electoral questions. Regionally, Kenya is trying to manage tensions with Uganda while expanding economic links with Ethiopia and the DRC and responding to insecurity in Somalia, Sudan and the Red Sea. Nairobi is also continuing to balance its Western security partnerships with economic ties to China and other international partners.

10. The Gulf Countries

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia faced a sharp military and diplomatic escalation during the week, driven by renewed Houthi missile and drone attacks and intensified consultations with regional partners. The most significant development came on September 19, when Saudi air defenses intercepted and destroyed a Houthi ballistic missile targeting Riyadh. Separate drone and missile attacks were also reported toward Yanbu, Taif, Bisha, and Farasan, while Houthi activity along Yemen's Red Sea coast continued to raise concerns over maritime security. The escalation also prompted the United States to raise its Saudi

Arabia travel advisory to Level 3 on September 15, citing heightened regional and border security risks.

The attacks increased diplomatic pressure for a renewed de-escalation process. The UN Security Council condemned the Houthi attacks on Saudi territory and reaffirmed Saudi Arabia's inherent right to self-defense under international law. At the same time, Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan continued to emphasize de-escalation, sovereignty, and maritime security in Saudi Arabia's international diplomacy. Omani mediators reportedly delivered a Saudi proposal for a two-week truce to the Houthis on September 18, but the initiative stalled after the Houthis demanded a broader settlement addressing the blockade rather than a temporary cessation of hostilities. Riyadh also maintained consultations with Turkey, Pakistan, and Egypt, with Turkish and Pakistani officials reiterating their readiness to provide technical and defense assistance through regional security frameworks.

UAE

The UAE concentrated its efforts on maintaining diplomatic channels with Iran, strengthening regional security coordination, and preparing for high-level multilateral engagement at the United Nations. At the Arab Media Summit in Dubai on September 16–17, Dr. Anwar Gargash said that rebuilding trust with Iran would take years following recent regional security disruptions, while stressing the importance of keeping diplomatic channels open between neighboring states. Noura Al Kaabi similarly emphasized the role of public diplomacy in sustaining dialogue and building international bridges during periods of geopolitical change.

The UAE also expressed solidarity with Saudi Arabia as regional security tensions increased. On September 18, President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed spoke with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the deteriorating security situation in the Red Sea and condemned attacks against Saudi territory and economic assets. This placed the UAE's regional diplomacy within a broader effort to address threats to Gulf security and maritime stability. On September 20, the UAE also highlighted its conflict-prevention and mediation efforts ahead of the International Day of Peace, including its humanitarian and diplomatic engagement concerning Ukraine and its hosting of a UN Peace Operations Leadership Workshop. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed would lead the UAE delegation to the 81st UN General Assembly in New York from September 22 to 28. On September 21, President Sheikh Mohamed also sent a congratulatory message to Belize's Governor-General on the country's Independence Day.

Qatar

Qatar focused on diplomatic mediation between Washington and Tehran while preparing for the 81st UN General Assembly and responding to wider regional security pressures. Qatari officials continued shuttle diplomacy between regional capitals in an effort to help restart negotiations between the United States and Iran. Doha also reiterated its support for diplomatic solutions to the Strait of Hormuz crisis and for maintaining safe maritime navigation. At the same time, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Dr. Majed Al-Ansari rejected what he described as selective interpretations of security documents concerning previous regional attacks, emphasizing the importance of official UN records in documenting threats to Qatari infrastructure.

Qatar's preparations for UNGA 81 also formed an important part of its diplomatic agenda. The country prepared its high-level delegation around themes of multilateralism, international law, and peaceful dispute resolution. At the special UNGA edition of the Qatar Economic Forum in New York, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani emphasized civilian protection and continued humanitarian mediation concerning Gaza and Lebanon. Within Qatar, the Cabinet also convened in Doha to address regional stability and formally condemned attacks against civilian and economic infrastructure in neighboring Gulf and Arab states. The position reflected Doha's continued emphasis on the interconnected nature of regional security and the need for diplomatic responses to escalating threats.

11. Africa and The Sahel Region

Mali

Mali experienced a week in which the security situation remained severe while the transitional government continued to strengthen regional partnerships and pursue domestic state-building measures. The security situation deteriorated further following the jihadist assault on the Dioura military camp in the Mopti region, where security sources reported that more than 50 Malian soldiers and five Russian Africa Corps personnel were killed. Several dozen Malian soldiers were also reportedly captured during the attack. The Malian Armed Forces responded with airstrikes and localized operations against suspected extremist positions in central and northern areas, highlighting the continued difficulty of containing militant activity despite the government's reliance on military operations and foreign security assistance.

Diplomatically, Mali maintained engagement with Algeria while continuing its broader realignment through the Alliance of Sahel States. Prime Minister Abdoulaye Maiga held talks with Algerian Prime Minister Sifi Ghrieb in Bamako on September 14, with bilateral and regional security cooperation forming part of the discussions. At the same time, the AES framework continued to deepen Mali's security and political coordination with Niger

and Burkina Faso, alongside its growing reliance on alternative partners such as Russia and reduced dependence on traditional Western security frameworks.

The government also pursued domestic development initiatives during the week. President Assimi Goïta inaugurated new healthcare infrastructure on September 17 under the Mali Kura initiative, with the stated objective of expanding access to medical services. Meanwhile, tensions surrounding the country's mining sector presented an economic challenge. Labor unions threatened strike action at Barrick's Loulo-Gounkoto gold complex over wages and benefits, creating potential complications for the government's efforts to maintain mining revenues and strengthen state control over the sector.

Niger

Niger's week was marked by deeper institutionalization of the Alliance of Sahel States and a significant new economic engagement with the United States. On September 16, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso opened the first session of the AES Confederal Parliament in Niamey, bringing together 45 lawmakers to coordinate policies relating to security, political affairs, and development. The establishment of the parliamentary institution represented a further step in translating the AES from a security-oriented arrangement into a broader political and institutional framework.

Niger also secured a major economic agreement with the United States on September 17, when Washington approved a \$414 million uranium investment in the country. The agreement came two years after the withdrawal of US military forces from Niger and demonstrated that the deterioration of military cooperation had not prevented economic engagement in the strategic uranium sector.

Domestically, the military government continued to maintain tight political and security control following its recent leadership changes. General Mamane Sani Kiaou remained chief of staff of the armed forces, while the authorities continued relying on the presidential guard and foreign security partners to address internal dissent and militant Islamist threats. The combination of stronger AES integration, renewed economic engagement with the United States, and continued dependence on military and foreign security structures characterized Niger's position during the week.

DRC

The DRC's week combined growing domestic political confrontation with continued diplomatic efforts involving Rwanda and persistent fighting in the east. On September 15, hundreds of people demonstrated in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, and Uvira against proposed constitutional changes. The demonstrations were organized by opposition groups associated with the C64 coalition and figures linked to political platforms led by Martin Fayulu and Moïse Katumbi. The opposition argued that the proposed reforms could

enable President Félix Tshisekedi to seek a third term. Security forces intervened in Kinshasa, where riot police used tear gas and warning shots to disperse protesters. Opposition groups reported at least one death and multiple arrests following the clashes.

Alongside the domestic political confrontation, the DRC and Rwanda continued their diplomatic security discussions in Geneva on September 16 and 17. The meetings constituted the seventh session of the Joint Security Coordination Mechanism established to assess implementation of the 2025 Washington Accords. Representatives from the United States, Qatar, Togo, and the African Union participated in the mediation process. President Tshisekedi also designated Prime Minister Judith Suminwa Tuluka to lead the Congolese delegation to the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly, placing the country's political and security concerns within a broader multilateral diplomatic setting.

Despite these diplomatic efforts, the security situation in North Kivu and South Kivu remained unstable. Fighting continued between the Congolese armed forces and M23 forces, demonstrating that the diplomatic mechanisms involving Kinshasa, Kigali, and international mediators had not yet removed the underlying military confrontation in eastern Congo.

Chad

Chad's week was shaped by continued pressure from the Sudanese conflict, efforts to strengthen its external security partnerships, and a stronger emphasis on control over national resources. Security conditions along the eastern frontier remained volatile following the late-August air and drone strikes associated with the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces, keeping Chadian forces on heightened alert. The humanitarian consequences of the Sudanese conflict also remained substantial. An updated UNHCR assessment published on September 14 highlighted the continued influx of people from Sudan, with Chad hosting well over 1.5 million refugees and internally displaced persons. The concentration of displaced populations in eastern provinces such as Ennedi-Est and Wadi Fira has placed additional pressure on food supplies, water resources, and logistical capacity. At the same time, the Lake Chad Basin remained exposed to Boko Haram-related threats, requiring continued security vigilance and localized restrictions.

Against this security backdrop, Chad continued to adjust its international partnerships. Relations with France have moved toward renewed military cooperation after a period of serious friction, with approximately 600 French soldiers preparing to return to Chad to provide logistical and intelligence support. Discussions involving the United Nations and the wider Sahel have also increasingly focused on preventive diplomacy and addressing structural sources of violence rather than relying primarily on large-scale peacekeeping deployments. Chad's previously announced intention to withdraw from the International

Criminal Court continued to shape its position toward international justice institutions, reflecting its stated emphasis on national sovereignty and its broader engagement with states outside the ICC framework.

Economic sovereignty also became more prominent during the week. On September 15, Chad joined a group of African countries in freezing domestic mining operations as the government sought greater local ownership, domestic mineral processing, and stronger state control over resource revenues. Politically, President Mahamat Idriss Déby continued to consolidate authority following the August pardon of his principal rival, Succès Masra. The administration has sought to project political stability through its reformed 37-member cabinet while pursuing international credit and economic transition support.

12. North Africa

Libya

Members of Libya's 4+4 committee met in Tunis to review implementation of the agreement reached under UN auspices. Discussions covered the electoral commission, electoral legislation, and positions expressed by Libyan institutions. The meeting preserved momentum around the process while seeking wider domestic support before further implementation steps are considered.

Khalifa Haftar reaffirmed support for the 4+4 process and its stated objective of unifying Libya's institutions. His position keeps eastern Libya formally engaged with the electoral track despite persistent political and security divisions. Support from Haftar's camp provides an important element of cross-faction participation, although implementation still depends on agreement across competing institutions.

Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah and U.S. adviser Jeremy Berndt continued backing the 4+4 agreement and discussed election preparations. Their engagement covered the electoral commission, development spending, and oil-sector stability. U.S. involvement therefore remains focused on linking political progress with institutional and economic arrangements needed to sustain a unified administrative framework.

Libya's Defense Ministry denied reports that authorities were negotiating over a sabotage cell accused of attacking oil and electricity facilities with drones. Investigations remain underway to identify suspects and possible links. The case has heightened attention to the vulnerability of critical infrastructure and to the security implications of armed networks capable of targeting energy facilities.

Sudanese forces reportedly struck a convoy moving from eastern Libya toward Sudan in support of the Rapid Support Forces. The episode highlights the cross-border military dimension of Sudan's war and the role of eastern Libyan networks in regional supply

routes. It also underscores how Libya's internal division can facilitate external involvement in neighboring conflicts.

of National Unity protested Niger's handover of Libyan nationals to authorities aligned with Haftar. Tripoli described the transfer as a violation involving individuals considered opponents of the eastern camp. The dispute illustrates how neighboring states' security decisions can intersect with Libya's east-west political divide and deepen tensions between rival authorities.

Turkey's intelligence chief held talks with Libya's acting defense minister on bilateral cooperation and efforts to unify military and political institutions. The contact complements Turkey's engagement with both western and eastern Libyan actors. It also places Ankara inside discussions over future security arrangements, where institutional integration could affect foreign military relationships and existing bilateral agreements.

Algeria

Algerian Prime Minister Sifi Ghrieb visited Mali as both governments sought to rebuild relations through investment, energy, transport, agriculture, mining, and security cooperation. The engagement follows earlier tensions between the neighbors. The visit signals Algeria's effort to preserve influence in the Sahel through economic connectivity and bilateral security ties alongside its broader diplomatic outreach.

Algeria continued using its role within the African Union Peace and Security Council to address political, security, and humanitarian conditions in the Sahel. Discussions covered terrorism, organized crime, governance, and regional coordination. The engagement provides Algiers with a multilateral platform for advancing its longstanding preference for African-led security responses and stronger state institutions.

Algeria expanded security engagement with Sahel partners through military assistance, technical cooperation, and energy relationships. Earlier transfers of helicopters and continued oil-sector cooperation with neighboring states form part of this broader outreach. The approach combines security support with economic ties, allowing Algiers to maintain regional influence while limiting reliance on external security actors.

Morocco

Morocco and Israel agreed to upgrade their diplomatic missions to full embassies and exchange ambassadors. The two sides also discussed restoring direct flights and completing investment-protection and double-taxation agreements. The move formalizes a deeper bilateral relationship under the Abraham Accords framework while expanding political, economic, and security cooperation between Rabat and Tel Aviv.

The embassy agreement strengthens Morocco's broader alignment with Israel and the United States while occurring alongside Algeria's rupture with the UAE. Defense cooperation, including interest in additional Israeli systems, gives the relationship a security dimension. The developments connect diplomatic normalization with Rabat's wider effort to deepen Western partnerships and strengthen its regional position.

The trilateral Morocco-Israel-United States statement reaffirmed Washington and Israel's support for Morocco's sovereignty claim over Western Sahara and its autonomy proposal. The language links diplomatic normalization with Rabat's territorial priorities. Morocco therefore continues using its expanding partnership with Israel and the United States to reinforce diplomatic support around the Western Sahara dispute.

13. Middle East

Iran-Israel Conflict

Tehran is increasingly looking to Beijing as a possible intermediary between Iran and Washington. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi's engagement with Chinese officials coincided with planned high-level U.S.-China contacts. Beijing has urged renewed Iran-U.S. consultations and offered a constructive diplomatic role, while stopping short of formally presenting itself as a mediator.

Iran is approaching winter with roughly one-third of its prewar gas-production capacity reportedly unavailable after wartime damage. Authorities are seeking repairs while balancing household heating, electricity generation, and industrial demand. Analysts cited by Iran International estimate substantial reconstruction costs and warn that equipment, labor, and financing constraints could prolong pressure on the energy system.

Discussion inside Iran has intensified over whether Tehran should withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Critics of remaining in the treaty argue that recent military pressure demonstrates the limits of existing safeguards, while opponents warn that withdrawal could deepen isolation, reduce diplomatic options, and increase incentives for further confrontation over Iran's nuclear program.

Russia and China vetoed a United States resolution seeking to extend the United Nations expert mechanism monitoring sanctions on Iran. The sanctions themselves remain in force, including measures affecting Iranian assets, arms transactions, and missile development. The failed renewal highlights continuing disagreement among major powers over sanctions enforcement and the international framework surrounding Tehran.

Iran has conveyed seven conditions for resuming negotiations with Washington, according to Iranian officials. The reported terms include ending the broader conflict, lifting the naval blockade, and addressing frozen Iranian assets. The conditions indicate that Tehran is linking diplomatic engagement to immediate security and economic issues

rather than treating nuclear questions as a separate negotiating track.

Iranian parliamentary leadership said the Strait of Hormuz would remain closed until Tehran's conditions were satisfied. The position keeps control of the waterway tied to broader negotiations over the conflict and maritime arrangements. It also reflects continuing disagreement over navigation management, particularly after competing claims about shipping access and Iranian control.

UAE cyber authorities said Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was responsible for many attacks against Emirati networks. The UAE reported hundreds of thousands of attempted attacks during a single period and described Iran as a major participant in the cyber campaign. The allegation adds a persistent digital dimension to the wider regional confrontation between Tehran and Gulf states.

Reporting on Iran's wartime decision-making indicates that hardline political and security actors remain central to major strategic choices. The assessment points to continued influence by conservative institutions over military policy, regional operations, and negotiations. Political competition inside Tehran continues alongside the conflict, while the principal security direction remains concentrated within established hardline decision-making structures.

Analysts assessed that Iran was facing challenges consolidating control over the Strait of Hormuz despite maintaining significant disruptive capabilities. Iranian proposals for managing the waterway encountered resistance from Gulf states, while damage to surveillance and mine-related systems affected operational capacity. These constraints have complicated Tehran's effort to convert geographic leverage into sustained control over commercial shipping.

Iran executed a man accused by its judiciary of providing Mossad with information on missile sites in Isfahan province. The execution occurred amid an intensified domestic security crackdown on alleged collaborators with Israel. Iranian authorities have increasingly treated suspected intelligence cooperation as a wartime security threat, linking internal counterintelligence measures directly to the wider military confrontation.

Israel continued participating in joint military activity with the United States against Iranian military and leadership targets. The reported operations remained part of the broader campaign against Tehran's strategic capabilities. The cooperation demonstrates continued operational integration between Washington and Jerusalem, while the focus on senior leadership and military infrastructure indicates the conflict extends beyond efforts aimed exclusively at Iran's nuclear facilities.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu publicly directed the Israeli military to prepare for the possible removal of Iran's ruling system. The statement marked an expansion of declared Israeli objectives beyond degrading military capabilities. It places regime change

within Israel's stated strategic horizon, while the practical feasibility, political consequences, and extent of American support remain separate questions.

Israeli officials and security analysts continued examining whether renewed Iranian nuclear activity could trigger another U.S.-Israeli military campaign. The discussion focuses on Tehran's nuclear infrastructure, access for international inspectors, and uncertainty over remaining capabilities after earlier strikes. The issue remains closely connected to deterrence, verification, and the potential threshold for renewed escalation.

Direct military exchanges between Israel and Iran have reportedly decreased after months of sustained confrontation. The reduction has occurred alongside continuing threats, regional proxy activity, and unresolved disputes over nuclear capabilities and maritime security. The pause therefore represents a change in the pattern of direct strikes rather than evidence of a settled political agreement between the two governments.

Israel continued facing security pressure from several directions, including southern Lebanon, the West Bank, and the Red Sea environment. Hezbollah activity, Houthi attacks, and Palestinian militant threats remain part of the wider security picture. The overlapping fronts require Israeli forces to distribute attention across geographically separate theaters while maintaining readiness for renewed escalation.

Israel's government was reported to be advancing preparations for an expanded military posture against Hezbollah while U.S.-mediated discussions on Lebanese security remained uncertain. The Israeli demand for Hezbollah's full disarmament remains central to negotiations. Continued military pressure in southern Lebanon has kept the possibility of renewed fighting connected to the future deployment and authority of Lebanese state forces.

The United States embassy in Israel issued a security alert because of renewed fighting involving Saudi Arabia and Houthi forces in Yemen. The warning cited potential flight cancellations, airspace closures, and wider travel disruption. Although directed at American citizens, the alert reflects concern that attacks around Saudi Arabia and the Red Sea could rapidly create broader regional security effects.

The Israeli military increased force levels across several commands ahead of Yom Kippur. Additional troops were placed in northern, southern, and central areas, while air and naval forces were also readied. The buildup followed continuing regional tensions and reflected the military's effort to protect population centers, borders, and strategic infrastructure during heightened operational sensitivity.

Israeli security forces prepared extensive operations in the West Bank following a deadly shooting attack. Planned measures included village closures, arrest raids, a brigade-level operation, and heightened deployment around settlements and major routes. The preparations demonstrate how individual attacks can trigger broader security activity, with

counterterrorism operations extending across surrounding communities and transportation corridors.

European and Arab military leaders met in Paris to examine support requirements for the Lebanese Armed Forces as the future of UN peacekeeping arrangements in southern Lebanon becomes uncertain. Discussions considered alternatives involving international assistance, training, equipment, intelligence, and mentoring. The effort reflects concern that reduced external security coverage could create conditions for renewed confrontation.

Israeli forces continued operations in southern Lebanon while also conducting arrests in the West Bank, according to regional reporting. The activity spans separate theaters but reflects the wider security burden created by Hezbollah, Palestinian militant threats, and border instability. The simultaneous operations reinforce the continuing prioritization of tactical control across Israel's immediate security environment.

Israeli police and security forces reported shots fired in East Jerusalem following an alleged stone-throwing incident. The episode occurred amid heightened security sensitivity in the city and across Israel. Such incidents can prompt rapid reinforcement and surveillance measures, particularly when religious observance, political tensions, and regional conflict increase the possibility of localized confrontations.

The Israeli government continued demanding Hezbollah's complete disarmament as negotiations with Lebanon faced delays. The issue remains central to discussions over Israeli force positions, Lebanese military deployment, and longer-term border arrangements. Military activity in southern Lebanon and the dismantling of Hezbollah infrastructure continue to shape the security environment surrounding any prospective Lebanese-Israeli understanding.

Israel's diplomatic isolation remained a political issue ahead of its election campaign, with commentary highlighting worsening criticism from parts of Europe and the United States. The discussion focused on whether foreign relationships remain central to national security and why international standing has received limited electoral attention despite growing diplomatic costs.

Turkey

Turkey deported a first group of Somali nationals to Mogadishu amid protests in several Somali regions over Ankara's expanding security and economic role. Reports said additional Somalis were being held pending possible removal. The episode introduces a domestic Somali political dimension into Turkey's bilateral relationship with Mogadishu, where Ankara has built extensive security institutions and investments.

Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan's visit to Syria reinforced Turkey's expanding role in the country after Assad's removal. Discussions with Syrian leaders focused on bilateral

coordination and regional security, while Israel expressed concern over possible Turkish deployments. The episode reflects growing Turkish involvement in shaping Syria's security institutions and Ankara's increasingly direct competition with Israeli regional influence.

Turkey condemned Houthi attacks affecting Saudi Arabia and navigation near Bab el-Mandeb, framing the disruption as a threat to international maritime trade. Ankara also continued criticizing Israeli settlement activity. The positions place Turkey between regional security concerns and its wider diplomatic confrontation with Israel, while keeping maritime stability connected to its relations with Saudi Arabia.

Turkey's planned Sea Wolf-I naval exercise spans the Black Sea, Sea of Marmara, Aegean, and Eastern Mediterranean, combining forces across several maritime theaters. The exercise emphasizes multi-threat decision-making and interoperability. Its geographic scope demonstrates Ankara's continued effort to maintain naval readiness across waters linked to European security, the Caucasus, the Levant, and North Africa.

Turkey has broadened engagement with Khalifa Haftar while retaining its relationships with authorities in western Libya. Ankara's outreach includes political, security, commercial, and maritime interests, including protection of the 2019 maritime agreement. Engagement across rival camps gives Turkey channels in Libya's east as Washington encourages institutional and security unification.

Turkey's security and economic footprint in Somalia continues expanding through Camp TURKSOM, military training, airpower, and offshore energy activity. Recent unrest and deportations highlighted local sensitivities surrounding Ankara's role. Turkey is simultaneously seeking to protect investments and deepen state capacity, making Somalia a central component of its Horn of Africa strategy.

Turkey's new defense coordination with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan is being tested by Houthi attacks on Saudi territory. Ankara has offered technical assistance, training, intelligence, and planning while ruling out direct military intervention in Yemen. The approach preserves the alliance's deterrent value while limiting Turkey's exposure to an open-ended conflict beyond its immediate strategic interests.

Turkey's intelligence chief Ibrahim Kalin met Libya's acting defense minister in Istanbul to discuss bilateral cooperation and efforts to unify Libya's military and political institutions. The engagement complements Ankara's broader contacts across Libyan factions. It also gives Turkey a direct channel into negotiations over security-sector integration, where future arrangements could affect its military presence and agreements.

Turkey's tensions with Greece continued around the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, including disputes over island militarization and maritime security. Turkish officials continued objecting to Greek defense cooperation with Israel. Naval activity and rhetoric

maintained pressure across the maritime theater, where territorial claims, energy interests, alliance networks, and military positioning remain closely interconnected.

Turkey and Egypt have expanded practical defense cooperation after years of strategic rivalry. Joint exercises and defense-industrial discussions have broadened contact across Libya, Sudan, Somalia, and Red Sea security. Turkish support associated with Sudan's armed forces and Egyptian regional deployments indicate increasing overlap, even while the two governments retain distinct interests in the Horn.

Turkish and Somali forces continued maritime-security and anti-piracy activity around Somali waters. Operations involving naval, aviation, drone, and ground capabilities reflect a transition from training toward more direct security engagement. The activity is linked to protecting shipping and Turkish economic interests, while Somalia's renewed piracy problem increases the operational value of Ankara's local military infrastructure.

Turkey maintained diplomatic engagement with Sudanese authorities while continuing discussions surrounding Sudan and Red Sea security. Ankara's contacts provide political access to Port Sudan's leadership and potential defense cooperation. The approach keeps Turkey involved in a conflict where Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other external actors are pursuing competing security and political relationships.

Turkey's dispute with Israel increasingly intersects with Horn of Africa politics through competing positions on Somalia and Somaliland. Israel's recognition of Somaliland conflicts with Ankara's support for Somali territorial integrity. Turkey's military and maritime presence in Somalia gives the issue strategic weight because Somaliland's coastline overlooks shipping routes near Bab el-Mandeb.

Turkish armed forces participated in multinational exercises alongside partners in Europe and the Caucasus while conducting national naval drills. The activities strengthen interoperability and demonstrate sustained expeditionary readiness. Participation across separate geographic theaters also supports Ankara's broader effort to maintain defense relationships spanning NATO members, Azerbaijan, and regional partners amid increased strategic competition.

Turkey continued criticizing Greek island militarization and defense cooperation with Israel while maintaining a firm maritime posture in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. Official statements and military activity kept sovereignty disputes active. The issue remains intertwined with Ankara's wider regional policy, where maritime claims, alliance politics, energy interests, and defense partnerships reinforce one another.

14. Global Powers

The United States entered the week still dealing with the consequences of the prolonged war with Iran, while the Trump administration simultaneously moved toward diplomacy. On September 17, Trump said he was approaching a major decision point over whether to resume large-scale military operations against Iran. Washington was preparing consultations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman at the UN General Assembly, with the administration considering both the future of the conflict and a possible post-war strategy for containing Iran. By September 20, the situation had deteriorated again after Houthi forces attacked Saudi Arabia, while Iran warned that further U.S. attacks could trigger sustained retaliation. Trump issued a new ultimatum to Tehran, threatening severe economic consequences or even action against Iran's leadership if it refused negotiations. The conflict continued to affect the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb, with major implications for global energy and maritime trade.

Washington also made an unusual diplomatic concession toward Tehran ahead of the UN General Assembly. The administration approved visas for Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and the core Iranian delegation to attend the UN meetings in New York despite the ongoing U.S.-Iran war. The decision was framed by the State Department as compliance with U.S. obligations as the UN host country, while Iranian officials will face restrictions on their movements outside the UN complex, Iran's mission, their ambassador's residence and JFK Airport. This creates an unusual diplomatic channel at a moment when Washington is simultaneously threatening renewed military escalation.

The Ukraine track also produced an important development. On September 18, Trump signed the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026, imposing additional pressure on Russia's energy and defense sectors and its sanctions-evading tanker fleet while authorizing tariffs against countries trading with Russia. The legislation passed the Senate 86–11 and the House 262–159 before Trump's signature. At the same time, Trump continued pressing Kyiv to reduce attacks on Russian energy infrastructure because of the effect on global diesel supplies. Ukraine has indicated that it could consider a reciprocal halt to attacks on critical infrastructure if Russia provides credible guarantees. On September 20, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced that he and Trump had agreed to meet in New York during the UN General Assembly, describing the meeting as potentially significant for the diplomatic track.

Washington also concluded a new arrangement with Denmark concerning Greenland. The agreement would expand the permanent U.S. military presence on Greenland while leaving the territory under Danish sovereignty and excluding China and Russia from establishing a military presence there. The agreement still requires Danish and Greenlandic approval. It represents a shift from Trump's earlier threats to acquire

Greenland toward securing U.S. strategic access while formally leaving Danish sovereignty intact.

The U.S.-China relationship was another major focus as Washington prepared for Xi Jinping's September 24 visit. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng held economic discussions in New York on September 20 covering trade, AI security and broader economic issues. Bessent proposed an AI-safety notification mechanism between Washington and Beijing covering issues such as AI weaponization, critical infrastructure and cyberattacks. The discussions were also intended to prepare the ground for the Trump-Xi summit.

The administration's relationship with the American media deteriorated further. On September 18, Trump announced that CNN, MS NOW and Politico would be barred from White House access, accusing them of publishing what he called false reporting. The move generated renewed First Amendment and press-access concerns because presidential access is traditionally managed through a press pool rather than selectively withdrawn based on unfavorable coverage.

In technology policy, Trump announced plans for an “AI Force” and continued pushing a relatively permissive approach to AI development while his administration seeks to strengthen U.S. technological and defense capabilities. The issue is increasingly connected to the emerging U.S.-China competition over artificial intelligence, critical infrastructure and military applications.

For the Horn of Africa, this was an unusually consequential week in U.S. policy. Washington ended the Ethiopia-related national emergency established in 2021 and removed Ethiopia-related designations imposed under that framework. More significantly, the United States lifted sanctions on Eritrea's ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice, Eritrean Defense Forces and other Eritrean entities, including the Red Sea Trading Corporation and senior official Hagos Ghebrehiwet. The sanctions had originally been imposed in connection with Eritrea's role in the Tigray war. The timing is notable because the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb have become increasingly important to U.S. strategy amid the Iran war and Houthi advances.

Washington simultaneously maintained direct counterterrorism operations in Somalia. AFRICOM conducted an airstrike against an al-Shabaab facility on September 14 and another against an al-Shabaab conventional-weapons storage warehouse in northern Somalia on September 17, both in coordination with the Somali federal government. The United States also agreed to give the UN another year to phase out its support for the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia, with the transition now beginning in 2027, although Washington will no longer fund the UN Support Office in Somalia.

China's central strategic development this week was the preparation for Xi Jinping's September 24 state visit to Washington, where he will meet Donald Trump. The summit is expected to cover trade, tariffs, critical minerals, Taiwan, artificial intelligence, fentanyl and the Iran war. The meeting comes as both sides try to preserve the broader trade truce while several structural disputes remain unresolved. U.S. and Chinese officials held preparatory economic discussions in New York on September 20, including talks on AI safety, trade and critical minerals.

The economic relationship remains the foundation of the summit. China's exports continue to perform strongly, with its global trade surplus projected to exceed \$1 trillion for a second consecutive year. This gives Beijing substantial economic leverage going into Washington, particularly as the Trump administration faces higher energy costs from the Iran conflict. The immediate objective appears to be preventing another major escalation in the trade relationship while leaving the deeper competition over technology, industrial capacity and strategic supply chains unresolved.

Taiwan remains one of the most sensitive issues. Washington has delayed approval of a proposed \$14 billion arms package for Taiwan, with Trump describing the package as a negotiating instrument in his relationship with Xi. The delay has already affected U.S. defense companies operating with Taiwan. Beijing continues to oppose American arms sales to Taipei, while Taiwan's government is increasing its emphasis on drones and asymmetric capabilities. The issue is likely to be central to Xi's discussions with Trump because any movement on arms sales could affect the broader U.S.-China understanding.

Artificial intelligence is emerging as another major area of U.S.-China strategic competition. During the September 20 talks, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent proposed an AI-safety notification mechanism between Washington and Beijing covering issues such as AI-related national-security incidents, attacks on critical infrastructure and AI weaponization. The proposal is significant because the two governments are simultaneously competing over advanced computing, AI development and technological supply chains.

China also continued its diplomatic engagement with Iran. Foreign Minister Wang Yi met Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Beijing on September 16 and called for Washington and Tehran to return to the Islamabad memorandum and rebuild negotiations. Beijing described the continuation of the U.S.-Iran conflict as contrary to international interests and reiterated its willingness to play a constructive role. China's position allows it to maintain its strategic relationship with Tehran while presenting itself as a diplomatic actor in the Middle East.

China also responded directly to the new U.S. sanctions legislation against Russia and Iran. On September 20, Beijing rejected U.S. secondary sanctions against third countries and warned that it would take necessary measures to protect China's sovereignty,

development interests and Chinese companies. The statement came after Trump signed legislation authorizing stronger sanctions on Russia and Iran and tariffs of up to 100% against certain countries purchasing Russian energy.

On September 14, an Italian NATO fighter shot down a drone carrying explosives after it entered Lithuanian airspace from Belarus. Italian officials said it most probably originated from Russia, although Lithuania was still investigating the precise origin. If confirmed, this would represent a significant escalation in the spillover of the Ukraine war into NATO territory.

Russia summoned Britain's deputy head of mission in Moscow and warned that British facilities in Ukraine could become "legitimate targets" if they are used to support Ukrainian long-range strikes against Russia. This followed London's continued military assistance to Kyiv and discussions about European support for Ukrainian long-range capabilities.

Russia's State Duma elections were a major domestic political event. Voting took place September 18–20. Putin had framed the elections as a demonstration of national support during wartime, while ISW assessed that the Kremlin had established conditions designed to produce its desired political outcome. The election was particularly important because it occurred amid the continuing war and growing economic pressure.

On September 14, the U.S. Treasury imposed additional sanctions on VTB Bank, accusing it of helping Iran evade Western sanctions by establishing banking relationships and financial channels supporting Russian-Iranian trade. This is important because the U.S. is increasingly treating the Russia-Iran financial relationship as a single sanctions-enforcement problem.

15. European Countries

The defining British development this week was the escalation of the UK's constitutional question. On September 14, the leaders of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland met in Cardiff and issued a joint declaration asserting their nations' right to determine their constitutional futures. The meeting was significant because all three devolved governments are now led by parties advocating some form of constitutional change. The declaration called on Westminster to prepare for and facilitate constitutional change, although it does not itself create a legal mechanism for independence or dissolve the United Kingdom.

Scotland and Wales simultaneously signed the Cardiff Agreement, establishing closer cooperation between their governments on economic development, the cost of living, fiscal arrangements, climate policy and international engagement, including relations with the EU. Both governments explicitly linked the agreement to the principle that Scotland

and Wales should be able to determine their own constitutional futures.

Northern Ireland presents a different constitutional situation. Sinn Féin First Minister Michelle O'Neill participated in the Cardiff meeting as party leader and argued for a future referendum on Irish reunification, with Sinn Féin president Mary Lou McDonald calling for clarity on a possible border poll by 2030. The UK government, meanwhile, continues to reject calls for an immediate referendum. Prime Minister Andy Burnham and Irish Taoiseach Micheál Martin met in Manchester on September 18 and reaffirmed their commitment to the Good Friday Agreement, including its constitutional provisions.

The government is also preparing for Burnham's first face-to-face meeting with Trump at the UN General Assembly in New York. The relationship is complicated by Burnham's previous criticism of Trump, but Downing Street has sought to separate personal political disagreements from the broader UK-US relationship. Iran is expected to be one of the major subjects, particularly the effect of the conflict on energy prices and the British economy.

Another significant domestic political development concerns Reform UK and political financing. Reform leader Nigel Farage is seeking to deepen his relationship with the Trump administration and this week said he wanted to bring Trump's immigration chief, Tom Homan, to Britain to advise on border enforcement. At the same time, the government is considering retrospective restrictions on large political donations following Reform's reported £72 million in contributions from cryptocurrency-linked donors.

After Poland warned that Moscow could test NATO's Article 5 through a limited attack or drone and missile strikes, Macron convened France's political leaders and 2027 presidential contenders on September 18 for an emergency discussion regarding Russia. Macron described the Polish assessment as serious and well documented.

On September 20, Tehran closed a French language centre affiliated with the French embassy in Tehran. Paris announced that it would summon the Iranian ambassador and take unspecified measures in response. France described the closure as another attack on its cultural presence following an assault on French embassy personnel in July. The dispute comes against the background of Iran's nuclear programme, French criticism of Tehran's treatment of protesters and previous arrests and expulsions involving French diplomats. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi are nevertheless expected to meet at the UN General Assembly.

Macron met Prime Minister Mark Carney in the French territory of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, where the two governments discussed defense, space, energy, telecommunications and critical minerals. Macron also endorsed Canada's proposal to become an associate member of the European Union. The proposal would give Canada a closer institutional relationship with the EU without becoming a full member. The

discussions are particularly relevant as Ottawa seeks to diversify strategic partnerships amid deteriorating U.S.-Canada relations.

Germany had a considerably more turbulent domestic week. The major development came on September 20, when voters in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Berlin went to the polls. The results produced a major setback for Chancellor Friedrich Merz's CDU. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the CDU received only about 4.9%, falling below the threshold for parliamentary representation, while the AfD became the largest party with roughly 38%. In Berlin, the CDU also suffered a major decline, while Die Linke made substantial gains.

Merz described the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern result as a "disaster" but immediately rejected suggestions that he should resign. He said he intended to remain chancellor and continue with his government's economic reforms. The results nevertheless increase internal pressure within the CDU/CSU because they follow the AfD's earlier breakthrough in Saxony-Anhalt.

Chancellor Merz met Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi on September 15, with bilateral economic relations and the regional political situation among the central subjects. The meeting came as Germany attempts to maintain diplomatic channels in the Middle East while the Iran conflict is reshaping regional security and energy markets.

Italy significantly increased its focus on the Bab el-Mandeb and Red Sea as Houthi forces expanded their operations along Yemen's Red Sea coast and intensified attacks against Saudi Arabia. On September 18, Italian Defence Minister Guido Crosetto called for a stronger European naval presence, arguing that the deterioration around Bab el-Mandeb required additional ships. He said Italy was prepared to act with its navy without waiting for a broader EU decision, while still operating within the framework of the EU's EUNAVFOR Aspides mission. Italy considers the issue particularly important because approximately 40% of its maritime trade passes through the Suez Canal.

The Italian Navy then demonstrated this position operationally. On September 18, the Italian frigate Carlo Bergamini, operating under Aspides, escorted the Italian merchant vessel Jolly Oro through Bab el-Mandeb. The escort was conducted northbound through the strategic strait and was described by the Italian Navy as a concrete demonstration of the importance Rome attaches to protecting commercial shipping.

16. International and Regional Organizations

United Nation

On or around September 15, intercommunal violence erupted at the Amiet Common Market in the disputed Abyei region between Sudan and South Sudan, killing at least 26 people and injuring 82 others as of September 16. The clashes followed separate killings

of a Ngok Dinka man September 14 and a Misseriya man September 15 that heightened tensions between the communities. The United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) strongly condemned the violence in a statement on September 17 extended condolences reinforced its security presence around the market, deployed additional forces and engaged local authorities and community leaders to restore calm and prevent retaliation. Force Commander Lieutenant General Ganesh Kumar Shreshta stressed that dialogue, not retaliation is the way forward and that protecting civilians and preventing further loss of life remains the priority. UNISFA called for a swift investigation and accountability.

UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy for Sudan Pekka Haavisto held talks in Cairo around September 14 with Arab League and Egyptian officials amid ongoing preparations for UN meetings and continued reports of drone strikes and civilian displacement in Sudan. The UN continued coordination within the Quintet framework on an inclusive political path.

AUSSOM Force Commander Lieutenant General Sam Kavuma stated around mid-September that Al-Shabaab had not seized any territory from Somali government and AU forces since March of the previous year and highlighted ongoing operations while stressing that the fight requires more than military means and that Somalis must lead in resolving national challenges. Concerns persisted over potential disruption to AUSSOM operations if UN logistical support (UNSOS) faces cuts, with the US indicating willingness to support a 12-month drawdown of UNSOS support beginning in early 2027. IGAD's call for predictable financing for AUSSOM aligned with these discussions.

Africa Union

The Quintet concluded a Good Offices mission to Khartoum, with its statement last updated on September 14. The mission held constructive discussions with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Transitional Sovereignty Council, the Prime Minister, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and other political and civilian actors, including the Democratic Bloc and a committee working on a conducive environment for Sudanese dialogue. It also met independent women and youth groups. The Quintet emphasized listening to stakeholders on the ground, bridging external engagements with Sudanese initiatives and advancing a credible, inclusive Sudanese-led and Sudanese-owned political track toward a democratic, civilian-led government. It reiterated that there is no military solution to the conflict called for concrete steps to protect civilians and end hostilities, reaffirmed respect for Sudan's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and rejected parallel governing structures.

The African Union Commission expressed concern over the military escalation in the Red Sea region, condemning Houthi attacks against civilian and economic infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and threats to commercial shipping. It stressed the need to protect civilians,

pilgrims and holy sites, uphold freedom of navigation through the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb Strait and prevent further regional escalation. The Commission called for an immediate cessation of attacks and urged dialogue and de-escalation to preserve peace and stability, noting the strategic importance of Red Sea security for Africa, particularly the Horn of Africa and coastal states.

AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security Ambassador Bankole Adeoye attended the opening of the IGAD Council of Ministers' 74th Extraordinary Session in Djibouti on September 15 reflecting continued AU-IGAD coordination on Horn of Africa peace and security matters, including Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia.

The African Union Peace and Security Council chaired by Benin in September, held an open session on September 18 on the nexus between climate change, peace and security in Africa, addressing the security implications of climate-related risks. The Council also commemorated the International Day of Peace on September 21 under the theme Invest in Peace for Everyone, Everywhere, Every Day. These discussions are particularly relevant to the Horn of Africa where climate-related shocks contribute to food insecurity, displacement and regional instability.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

On September 15 in Djibouti the IGAD Council of Ministers held its 74th Extraordinary Session under the chairmanship of Djibouti's Foreign Minister Abdoukader Houssein Omar. Attendees included foreign ministers or representatives from Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda along with IGAD Executive Secretary Workneh Gebeyehu. AU, UN and EU representatives also participated in the opening. The Council addressed the region's overlapping crises, noting that nearly 49 million people face acute food insecurity and more than 19 million are internally displaced, with Sudan at the centre of a severe humanitarian catastrophe almost 19.5 million facing crisis-level hunger, an estimated 825,000 children under five expected to suffer severe acute malnutrition in 2026, and some nine million still displaced.

Key outcomes included endorsement of the formal entry into force of the 2023 IGAD Treaty after five of seven member states – Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan ratified it, meeting the two thirds threshold. The Council directed the Executive Secretary to notify members of the entry into force date, complete registration formalities and urged the remaining states to ratify. It welcomed Sudan's resumption of full membership formalized in February 2026 and the reopening of the IGAD mission in Khartoum.

On Sudan the Council reiterated its call for an immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities, protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure and safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access. It reaffirmed that a Sudanese-led and Sudanese-owned

inclusive dialogue and political process is the shortest path to durable peace, stressed that fragmented mediation cannot substitute for a coherent process and called for coordinated diplomacy aligned with the Quintet and other partners. It affirmed that Sudan's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity are not negotiable.

On South Sudan the Council reaffirmed the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) as the sole viable framework, underlined that elections remain anchored in the Agreement and urged inclusive dialogue among parties and stakeholders to restore confidence and clarify a consensual pathway to the December 2026 elections. It directed the IGAD Ministerial Sub-Committee on South Sudan to intensify engagement and report back and underscored the need for sustainable and predictable funding for the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC) and the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM). It also noted the scheduled C5+ Summit.

On Somalia, the Council renewed solidarity with the Federal Government in the fight against terrorism, commended AUSSOM and troop-contributing countries and called on the UN Security Council and international partners for adequate, predictable and sustainable financing for the mission. It upheld Somalia's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and commended progress on democratization.

The Council directed the Secretariat to strengthen regional maritime governance, cooperation and coordination in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden in response to geopolitical shifts, intensifying strategic competition, external military engagement, threats to shipping and the resurgence of piracy. It also addressed climate preparedness for the expected wetter than normal October–December season and appealed for sustained humanitarian financing.

European Union

As a Quintet member the EU participated in the Good Offices mission to Khartoum and was represented at the IGAD Council session in Djibouti, continuing engagement in support of coordinated regional efforts on Sudan and broader Horn of Africa stability, including maritime security concerns in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.



HORN **REVIEW**

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Ideas



Connections



Synergy
