

# Nala Weekly

A weekly product of the Nala Center

This week, drones and disputed mandates shaped the region. A strike on a market in the contested Abyei Area killed at least 153 people as Sudan's drone war spread beyond its front lines. Ethiopian forces stepped back from the Eritrean border as fighting moved into central Tigray. Egypt weighed sending forces to defend Saudi Arabia, Somalia set election dates without the opposition, and in DR Congo the new FRN claimed the AFC/M23's seat at the Doha talks.



Flashpoints covered in this issue. Map: Nala Center, using Natural Earth boundary data. Boundaries and names shown do not imply endorsement or acceptance by the Nala Center.

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## Sudan / Abyei

### Key dates

#### 15 October 2026

Burhan says he has written to President Trump

#### 17 October 2026

UN calls for an immediate end to drone attacks

#### 18 October 2026

Drone strike on a transport hub in al-Dabab, West Kordofan

#### 19 October 2026

Drone strike on Amiet market, Abyei

#### 20 October 2026

Abyei residents petition UN peacekeepers

# The Drone War Reaches Abyei

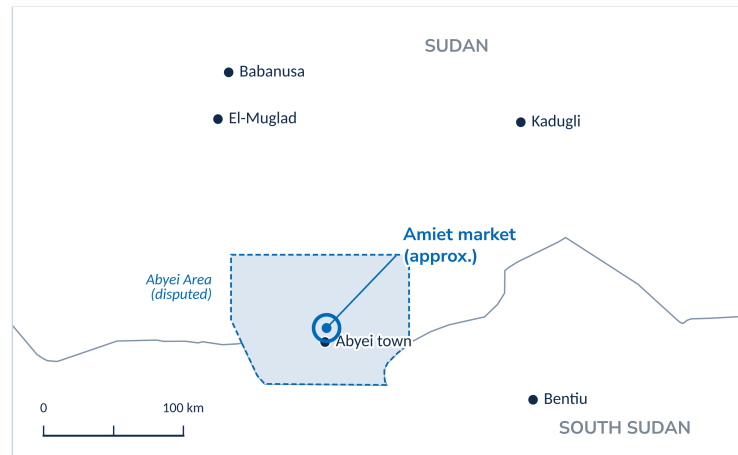
The deadliest attack of the week struck a market at the heart of a disputed border zone. At around 11am on 19 October, drones hit Amiet market, a cross-border trading hub about 10 km north of Abyei town, setting a fuel depot ablaze. The Abyei Area's local administration said at least 153 people were killed, a toll it expected to rise, and some local reports put it higher still. The market serves both the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities and has become a key supply point for fuel, food and medicine moving from South Sudan into Kordofan and Darfur. South Sudan's foreign ministry blamed the Sudanese Armed Forces, condemned the attack 'in the strongest terms possible' and summoned Sudan's ambassador. A senior Sudanese military officer, speaking anonymously, said the army had targeted fuel tankers bound for the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and that those killed were RSF members and fuel smugglers; this account has not been verified, and Khartoum had not commented officially at the time of writing. The UN Secretary-General condemned the attacks near Amiet and Todach, and on 20 October residents of Abyei protested and petitioned the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) to bring the matter before the Security Council.

The strike was part of a wider surge in drone warfare across Sudan. On 18 October, a strike on a transport hub in al-Dabab, in RSF-held West Kordofan, reportedly killed about 80 people, a toll the RSF's Tasis administration and a Sudanese rights group attributed to the army; a market in al-Muglad had been hit the day before. On 19 October, a drone killed three children aged two, four and six in Khartoum's Imtidad Nasser neighbourhood near the airport, an attack local monitors blamed on the RSF, while a strike in Nyala killed 17 people and air defences intercepted drones over the Atbara and Setit dams in Gedaref. Earlier in the week, a Sudanese Red Crescent volunteer was killed when a drone hit a health centre in Blue Nile. On 17 October, the UN's political affairs chief called on the Security Council for an immediate end to drone attacks.

Diplomacy remains stalled. Army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan said on 15 October that he had written to President Donald Trump restating his commitment to ending the war, but the army has still not accepted the US-proposed 90-day humanitarian truce. The fact-finding committee Burhan ordered after the 10 October air strike on gold mines near the Egyptian border has yet to report; Cairo says it dropped warning leaflets before its operation against illegal mining. The incident underlined how central gold has become to the war economy: artisanal mining, largely outside state oversight and reliant on mercury and cyanide, produces more than 80 per cent of Sudan's gold and over half of its exports. The war has killed at least 59,000 people, displaced about 13 million and left 33.7 million in need of aid.

## The Abyei Area

Amiet market lies about 10 km north of Abyei town, in a border area claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan and patrolled by UN peacekeepers since 2011. Its exact position is approximate.



Map: Nala Center, using Natural Earth boundary data. Boundaries shown do not imply endorsement or acceptance by the Nala Center.

**With drones now striking far beyond the front lines, the coming weeks are likely to follow one of these paths:**

- A** Tit-for-tat drone strikes on markets, fuel routes and infrastructure intensify as each side tries to cut the other's supply lines, with civilians bearing the heaviest cost.
- B** Abyei becomes a new flashpoint between Khartoum and Juba, as attacks on cross-border fuel routes strain relations and test UNISFA's mandate to protect civilians.
- C** Mounting civilian casualties and pressure from the Quad and the UN push the army and the RSF towards limited arrangements, such as protecting markets and humanitarian routes, even without a nationwide truce.

### Recommendation

The UN Security Council should task UNISFA, with AU support, to investigate the Amiet market strike, while Sudan and South Sudan use their Joint Political and Security Mechanism to agree rules protecting civilians and cross-border trade in the Abyei Area. The Quad should press both warring parties to end drone strikes on markets and civilian gatherings.

### What to watch

- Whether Khartoum formally responds to Juba's protest, and whether UNISFA publishes its verified casualty figures.
- Further strikes on fuel convoys and markets along the routes linking South Sudan to Kordofan and Darfur.
- Any response to Burhan's letter, and the outcome of international consultations on Sudan expected in Geneva.

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**Ethiopia–  
Eritrea**

Key dates

**12 October 2026**

Federal forces reach  
Zalambessa and Axum

**13 October 2026**

UN Security Council holds  
closed consultations

**14 October 2026**

Rubio urges Abiy to show  
restraint

**16 October 2026**

Six-month federal  
administration for Tigray

**19 October 2026**

Abiy warns Eritrea of 'severe  
consequences'

## A Step Back from the Border

After reaching the Eritrean frontier, federal forces appear to have stepped back. Having entered Zalambessa and Axum by 12 October as Eritrean troops withdrew across the border, the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) reportedly pulled back from areas near the frontier, including Zalambessa and Rama, from around 17 October, re-grouping around Adigrat, Adwa and other towns. Local residents said Eritrean soldiers remained in some Ethiopian border areas, and trench digging was reported near the frontier. The fighting has shifted inwards: Tigrayan forces have attacked federal supply lines in central Tigray, contesting Hagare Selam and re-entering Abergele and Zana, while the ENDF has stepped up drone strikes on their positions. International rights investigators reported that shelling in southern Tigray had killed and injured civilians and forced health facilities to close.

Politically, Addis Ababa is moving to consolidate control. On 16 October, following decisions by the House of Federation and the Council of Ministers, the government installed a six-month caretaker administration for Tigray, led by four appointed executives, with a mandate to restore order and prepare regional elections. The TPLF's chairman, Debretsion Gebremichael, warned the government against using Ethiopian Airlines to move troops and supplies to Mekelle and said the airline would bear responsibility for any attack, remarks that the Prime Minister's adviser Getachew Reda described as a threat of terrorism. Beyond Tigray, the Oromo Liberation Army reportedly attacked federal troops in East Shewa on 18–19 October, and a Gumuz armed group claimed attacks in Benishangul-Gumuz, the first notable actions by these Alliance for Survival members since the coalition was formed.

On 19 October, in a Tigrinya-language interview on state television, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed warned that Eritrea would face 'very, very, very severe consequences' if it ignored Ethiopia's calls and continued to serve 'as a base for Ethiopia's enemies', and said the TPLF's existence was 'coming to an end'. International pressure for restraint is growing. After the UN Security Council held closed consultations on 13 October, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged Abiy in a call on 14 October to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ethiopia's neighbours, avoid cross-border incursions and pursue dialogue under the 2018 peace agreement, and warned on 17 October that troop build-ups could lead to a wider conflict. Russia has offered to mediate on the sidelines of the Russia–Africa summit in Moscow on 28–29 October.

**With the fighting now inside Tigray rather than on the border, the coming weeks are likely to follow one of these paths:**

- A** A protracted insurgency takes hold in central and western Tigray, with federal forces holding the towns and main roads while Tigrayan forces strike supply lines and the ENDF relies on drones.
- B** The border standoff hardens behind entrenched positions on both sides, and a single incident, or Eritrean support for Tigrayan forces, triggers direct clashes despite the pull-back.
- C** US, Russian and African mediation offers converge into talks on border de-escalation, opening space to revisit the Pretoria Agreement.

#### **Recommendation**

The AU Commission should draw the parallel US and Russian mediation offers into a single, AU-anchored track before the Moscow summit, while all parties allow independent monitoring, restore communications in Tigray and guarantee safe humanitarian access.

#### **What to watch**

- Whether federal forces return to the border or consolidate around Adigrat and Adwa.
- Tigrayan attacks on federal supply routes in central Tigray, and any action against civilian flights to Mekelle.
- Mediation contacts on the sidelines of the Russia–Africa summit in Moscow on 28–29 October.

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## Red Sea / Yemen

### Key dates

#### 13 October 2026

Coalition strikes Houthi-held oil sites

#### 15 October 2026

Missiles hit the presidential palace in Aden

#### 18 October 2026

Egypt's defence council pledges support to Riyadh

#### 19 October 2026

Saudi Arabia postpones its investment summit

#### 26 October 2026

Egyptian parliament due to vote on deployment

# Egypt Weighs a Saudi Front

The war between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia escalated further this week, and is now pulling in Egypt. On 13 October, the Saudi-led coalition confirmed strikes on oil sites in Sanaa, Dhamar and Saada, after Houthi attacks on Saudi airports since early October had killed at least 20 people. The Houthis kept up missile and drone fire on Riyadh and the Eastern Province, much of it intercepted, and on 15 October fired five missiles at the presidential palace in Aden, the seat of Yemen's internationally recognised government, killing at least five people and wounding 16; the Prime Minister was unharmed. On 19 October, Saudi Arabia postponed its flagship Future Investment Initiative conference to 2027. A senior US official said the Houthis were adopting new tactics to evade Saudi air defences, firing different munitions simultaneously and targeting areas without air-defence cover. The coalition said a foreign state was assisting the Houthis, without naming it; reports point to Iran's Revolutionary Guards, a role Tehran and the Houthis deny.

Cairo is now weighing a direct role. On 17 October, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi said Egypt would take 'any measure' to protect Saudi Arabia if asked, while stressing that he was speaking only about defence. On 18 October, Egypt's National Defence Council pledged 'all necessary and possible forms of support', and parliament met in emergency session to consider authorising a deployment abroad, which requires a two-thirds majority. The vote has been deferred to 26 October, after some lawmakers asked for more detail on the mission's aims, duration, cost and risks. The speaker of the Houthi-run parliament wrote to his Egyptian counterpart warning that intervention would endanger Egypt's national security.

In Yemen, government forces said they repelled Houthi attacks on the Dhubab and al-Aqroudh fronts around Taiz on 14 October and at al-Rahan, south of the city, on 19 October, as the Houthis reportedly moved hundreds of reinforcements into the governorate, likely in an attempt to break the defences around Taiz City. For the Horn of Africa, the stakes are rising on two fronts: an Egyptian deployment would place Ethiopia's main regional rival at the centre of the Red Sea war, and the combined disruption at Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb continues to push up fuel costs and weaken currencies across East Africa.

**In the coming weeks, the Red Sea conflict is likely to follow one of these paths:**

- A** Coalition air strikes and Houthi missile fire continue in a costly exchange, while the Houthis press on Taiz and the coast remains contested.
- B** Egypt's parliament authorises a defensive deployment and Egyptian forces move to Saudi Arabia, regionalising the war and drawing Houthi threats against Egyptian interests, including shipping bound for the Suez Canal.
- C** The prospect of a wider war spurs back-channel efforts that produce a partial halt to strikes on Saudi territory.

#### **Recommendation**

Any Egyptian deployment should be strictly defensive and time-bound, and regional states should back UN and Omani channels to restore a truce. IGAD and the AU should open talks with Gulf partners on protecting East African shipping and fuel supplies through the Bab el-Mandeb.

#### **What to watch**

- Egypt's parliamentary vote on 26 October and the scope of any mandate it grants.
- A US decision on whether to join strikes on the Houthis.
- Houthi attacks on merchant shipping, or threats against Egyptian interests in the Red Sea.



## Somalia

### Key dates

#### **13 October 2026**

Laftagareen and nine others put on a sanctions list

#### **15 October 2026**

Electoral commission sets 2027 election dates

#### **19 October 2026**

Somali Future Council rejects the timetable

#### **20 October 2026**

Laftagareen calls on the President to step aside

#### **1–22 November 2026**

Voter and party registration window

# Elections Without Agreement

Somalia's electoral dispute deepened this week. On 15 October, the national electoral commission announced that elections for both houses of parliament would be held on 15 April 2027 and the presidential vote on 15 May 2027, under a one-person, one-vote model, with voter and party registration from 1 to 22 November. The government welcomed the timetable, but the opposition, which says President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's mandate expired in May, rejected it. Former President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo called it a 'dangerous threat to Somalia's statehood and future', and former President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed warned that a contested process could lead to parallel elections and civil conflict. On 19 October, the Somali Future Council said the timetable had been set without an inclusive political agreement, called for immediate talks and international mediation, and warned that it would consider 'constitutional and political measures' if the President continued on his current course.

The dispute is most violent in South West State. On 13 October, the National Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Committee placed the state's ousted president, Abdiiaziz Hassan Mohamed Laftagareen, and nine others on a financial sanctions list over alleged links to al-Shabaab, without publishing the evidence; they deny the allegations. Forces loyal to Laftagareen reportedly seized Buurhakaba, on the main Mogadishu–Baidoa road, around 15 October, after taking Qansahdhere. In an open letter on 20 October, Laftagareen called on the President to step aside and on federal forces to withdraw, and alleged that federal operations against his administration had received support from al-Shabaab and Turkish F-16 aircraft. These claims have not been independently verified, and Türkiye has not publicly accepted responsibility for any strikes. Clashes around Baidoa had displaced more than 5,600 people by early October, and Somali journalists report threats, arrests and intimidation in the region.

Offshore, piracy has returned. Since late April, pirate groups have seized commercial vessels, fishing boats and dhows off the Puntland coast, several of them held near Bander Beyla. By 2 October, three hijacked vessels had been freed and 44 seafarers released, with five crew members killed during one rescue operation, and local authorities had barred fishing for two months to stop pirates posing as fishermen. The diversion of international navies to the Houthis threat in the Red Sea since late 2023, and the strain on Puntland's maritime police, who are also fighting ISIS in the Cal Miskaad mountains, have left the coast less protected.

**Over the coming months, Somalia is likely to face one of the following trajectories:**

- A** The government opens registration in November without the opposition, which responds with a rival timetable or parallel process, hardening the split between Mogadishu, the opposition, Puntland and Jubaland.
- B** Fighting in Bay spreads to Baidoa itself, drawing in more federal forces and diverting them from the fight against al-Shabaab, which exploits the division.
- C** International partners broker talks that agree a revised timetable and electoral model before registration opens, easing tensions in Mogadishu and the regions.

**Recommendation**

Somalia's partners, including the UN, the AU, the EU, Türkiye and the Gulf states, should press for talks on an agreed electoral model before registration opens on 1 November, while the federal government publishes the evidence behind its sanctions designations and all sides protect journalists and civilians in South West State.

**What to watch**

- Whether registration opens on 1 November, and which parties and federal member states take part.
- Any rival timetable or parallel electoral process announced by the opposition.
- Control of Buurhakaba and the main road between Mogadishu and Baidoa.

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DR Congo

Key dates

**12 October 2026**

FRN launched in Goma

**13 October 2026**

US urges the DRC and FRN to finalise the Doha protocols

**15 October 2026**

FRN says it inherits AFC/M23 commitments

**15 October 2026**

Kinshasa suspends the activities of 13 parties

## From AFC to FRN

A week after its launch in Goma, the Front for the Refoundation of the Nation (FRN) has moved to claim the AFC/M23's place in the peace process. In a communiqué on 15 October, its secretary-general said the movement succeeds the AFC 'in its entirety' and takes on all its rights, obligations and commitments, particularly under the Doha negotiations with Kinshasa. At the UN Security Council on 13 October, the United States urged the DRC and the FRN to build on recent progress and finalise the remaining Doha protocols; only two of the eight, on prisoner releases and ceasefire monitoring, have been signed. Washington also welcomed the government's transfer of 15 detainees to the movement as a step to build confidence.

Kinshasa has responded by tightening its grip at home. An Interior Ministry message dated 15 October ordered provincial governors to suspend the activities of 13 political parties, including Joseph Kabila's PPRD and the party of FRN vice-president Corneille Nangaa, without giving a legal basis or duration. The government's spokesperson has said Kabila has 'nothing to offer but chaos', and the former president remains under a death sentence handed down in absentia in 2025. Fighting continues in South Kivu, including in northern Kalehe and the Minembwe highlands.

The FRN appears to be more a political rebranding of the AFC/M23 than a restructuring of the rebellion. It formalises an alliance of convenience: Kabila gains a direct seat in the peace process and a credible threat of force against a government that has excluded him from national dialogue, while the movement gains political cover and access to his networks. Long-standing tensions persist, however, between the movement's political leaders, who favour expansion beyond the Kivus, and its military wing under Sultani Makenga, which is focused on consolidating control, and reported mistrust between Makenga and Kabila suggests the front may struggle to act as one. Rwanda, which UN experts say exercises decisive influence over the movement's military strategy, denies backing it.

**In the coming weeks, the conflict is likely to take one of the following paths:**

- A** Kinshasa refuses to negotiate with the FRN while Kabila leads it, stalling the Doha track as fighting continues in South Kivu.
- B** Mediators accept the FRN as the AFC/M23's successor and talks resume on the remaining protocols, with Kabila kept outside the formal negotiating team.
- C** Divisions between the FRN's political and military wings deepen, weakening its cohesion and producing local splits or defections.

**Recommendation**

Qatar, the United States and the AU facilitation should agree a common position on the FRN's status in the Doha process and keep the focus on the six unsigned protocols, while Kinshasa avoids restrictions on political parties that narrow the space for the inclusive national dialogue the crisis requires.

**What to watch**

- Kinshasa's formal position on negotiating with the FRN.
- The date of the next round in Doha and progress on the six unsigned protocols.
- Any legal challenge to the suspension of the 13 political parties.

**Also on our radar**

**South Sudan**

Beyond Abyei, preparations for the 22 December elections remain behind schedule. The National Elections Commission has yet to announce a start date for voter registration, which will be manual and paper-based, and said in early October that no voter had been registered anywhere in the country. The Amiet strike adds diplomatic strain with Khartoum just as Juba needs calm borders for the vote.

**The wider Middle East**

Iran's parliament approved missile specialist Mehrdad Akhlaghi as defence minister, a sign that Tehran will keep prioritising the missile programme on which allies such as the Houthis rely. In Lebanon, the seizure on 5 October of a Hezbollah truck reportedly carrying about 800 kg of explosives has led to a standoff between the movement and the government, with President Joseph Aoun warning of 'no tolerance' for attempts to destabilise the country.

## About the Nala Center

The Nala Center is a youth-led, nonpartisan policy and research think tank based in Nairobi, Kenya. More about its work is available at [www.nalacenter.org](http://www.nalacenter.org).

## About Nala Weekly

Nala Weekly is a weekly product of the Nala Center. Each issue offers concise analysis of key developments, the trajectories they are likely to take and, where relevant, recommendations for policymakers. The analysis in this issue reflects information available as at 20 October 2026. Scenarios describe plausible trajectories and are not predictions. Casualty figures and territorial claims attributed to parties to a conflict have not been independently verified.

## Sources

This issue draws on reporting and analysis from AFP, AP, Al Jazeera, Africanews, Asharq Al-Awsat, CBS News, Eye Radio, Radio Tamazuj, Radio Yei, Sudan Tribune, The National, The EastAfrican, Eastleigh Voice, Dawan Africa, Hiiraan Online, Horseed Media, Axadle Times, Somali Guardian, FTL Somalia, Congo Quotidien, The New Times, The Rio Times, the Critical Threats Project and the Institute for the Study of War, ACLED, Human Rights Watch, Security Council Report, the Government of South Sudan, the International Maritime Organization, UNHCR, UNISFA and the United Nations.

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