

IV. Armed conflict and peace processes in East Africa

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East Africa comprises 22 states or territories and 9 were involved in active armed conflicts in 2020 (see figure 7.2). This section focuses on five of those armed conflicts: in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. There were more than 8.3 million internally displaced people and more than 4.6 million refugees across East Africa, primarily due to conflict and violence in those five countries.¹

Most East African conflicts are in the Horn of Africa.² States in this subregion are particularly fragile for a complex mix of reasons including restricted access to natural resources, intergroup tensions, poverty and inequality, and weak state institutions.³ Counterterrorism and anti-piracy efforts have been priorities in the Horn of Africa for a growing number of external actors over the last decade. This has created a crowded playing field that includes China, India, the United States and other Western powers (France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain and the United Kingdom) and several Middle Eastern countries (Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates)—with growing geopolitical tensions, rivalries and risks of destabilizing proxy conflicts.⁴

Disputes over resource allocation and access have also been significant in the region. For example, the dispute over sharing of the eastern Nile waters, involving Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan, remained deadlocked in 2020.⁵ Many of the region's social, political and economic challenges are compounded by the impacts of climate change, including droughts and floods.⁶ From June to October 2020, at least 3.6 million people were affected by floods or landslides

¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021* (UN OCHA: Dec. 2020), p. 114.

² Geographically, the Horn of Africa is normally understood to comprise Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. There are also broader definitions (as used here) that comprise these four core countries plus all or parts of Kenya, the Seychelles, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

³ Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), *IGAD Regional Strategy: Volume 1, The Framework* (IGAD: Djibouti, Jan. 2016), pp. 8–10, 15; and Adeto, Y. A., 'State fragility and conflict nexus: Contemporary security issues in the Horn of Africa', African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, 22 July 2019.

⁴ See Melvin, N., 'The new external security politics of the Horn of Africa region', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2019/2, Apr. 2019; and Melvin, N., 'The foreign military presence in the Horn of Africa region', SIPRI Background Paper, Apr. 2019. On geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and North Africa see chapter 6, section I, in this volume.

⁵ 'Nile negotiations break down as Egypt, Sudan accuse Ethiopia of rejecting legally binding agreement', New Arab, 18 June 2020; 'Ethiopia says GERD rising waters "natural" part of construction', Al Jazeera, 15 July 2020; and 'US suspends aid to Ethiopia over Blue Nile dam dispute', Al Jazeera, 3 Sep. 2020.

⁶ For a regional analysis of environment, peace and security linkages in the region with specific focus on water security and governance see Krampe, F. et al., *Water Security and Governance in the Horn of Africa*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 54 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Mar. 2020).

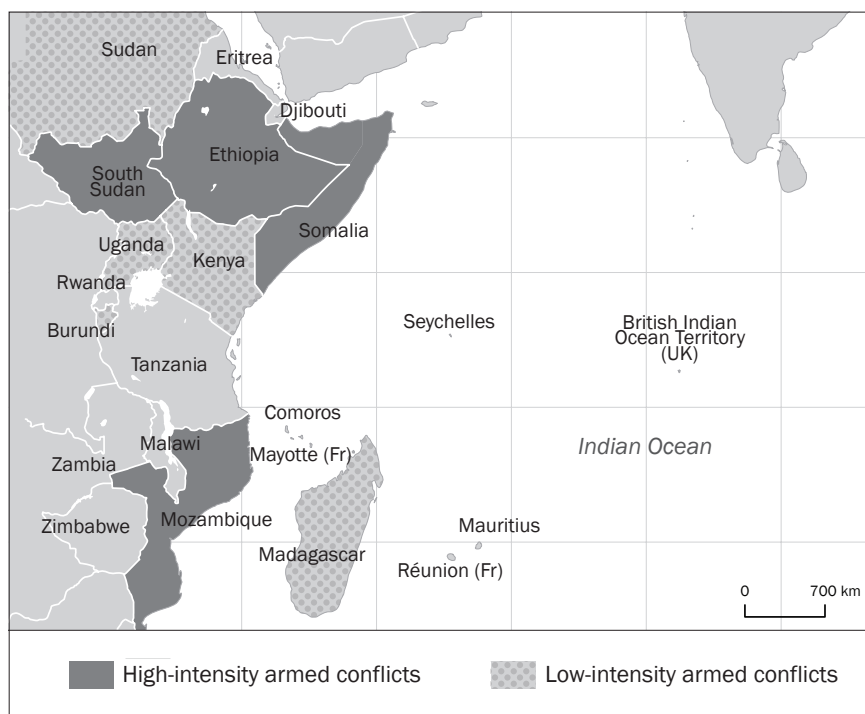


Figure 7.2. East Africa, including the Horn of Africa

across East Africa, many of whom were already suffering due to insecurity and conflict. Problems of food insecurity in the region were heightened by a surge in desert locusts in 2020—the worst in 25 years in Ethiopia and Somalia, and 70 years in Kenya.⁷

Ethiopia

A new armed conflict broke out in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia in November 2020 between federal government forces and the former administration of the northern Tigray region, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which killed thousands and forced more than 46 000 refugees to flee into eastern Sudan. Insecurity also rose in many other areas of the country in 2020 due to simultaneous armed conflicts and high levels of interethnic violence, including in Konso (in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region), Metekel (in Benishangul-Gumuz Region), Guji, Kelam Welega and West Welega (in Oromia Region), and the Oromia–Somalia border area. Most of these proliferating conflicts involved ethnic-based

⁷ UN OCHA (note 1), pp. 114–15.

armed groups and militias driven by ethno-regional nationalism and the pursuit of self-determination, territory and resources.⁸ In particular, Metekel Zone witnessed a series of violent attacks on civilians and a deepening rift between the Amhara and Oromo regional administrations.⁹ Tensions were also high between Amhara and Tigray regions.¹⁰

The killing of a popular ethnic Oromo musician and activist Hachalu Hundessa on 29 June 2020 sparked unrest and ethnic violence in the capital Addis Ababa and the Oromia Region. About 240 people were killed in the unrest. Thousands of local government officials and opposition leaders were later arrested.¹¹

In 2020 the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance increased from 8 to 11.7 million people. Conflict, displacement and climate shocks (droughts, floods and locusts) were key drivers of humanitarian needs.¹²

Stalled reforms and tensions related to federal politics

The descent into violence and chaos during 2020 was in contrast to the optimism generated after the relatively peaceful transition of power, the reform agenda of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the signing of a Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship with Eritrea in 2018.¹³ However, with the opening up of the political space, competition increased among the 10 semi-autonomous ethnically based regional states that make up Ethiopia.¹⁴ When Sidama voted to become Ethiopia's 10th regional state in November 2019, after protests and a successful referendum, there were fears it might fuel similar demands by other ethnic regions, particularly those of Tigray and Wolayta.¹⁵ Thus, during 2020 societal tensions in Ethiopia remained high

⁸ Raleigh, C. and Fuller, B., 'Ethiopia: At risk of multiplying conflicts stretching the capacity of the state', eds E. Bynum et al., *Ten Conflicts to Worry about in 2021* (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project: Feb. 2021), pp. 3–5. On the contribution of the illegal weapons trade to insecurity in Ethiopia see Cochrane, L. and Hadis, S., 'Farmers buying guns: The impact of uncertainty and insecurity in rural Ethiopia', *African Studies Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Jan. 2021), pp. 101–13.

⁹ 'Ethiopia attack death toll reaches 207, state rights watchdog says', *Africa News*, 26 Dec. 2020.

¹⁰ 'Bridging the divide in Ethiopia's north', *Africa Briefing* no. 156, International Crisis Group, 12 June 2020.

¹¹ AFP, 'Ethiopia violence death toll rises to 239', *East African*, 8 July 2020; and Tekle, T.-A., 'Ethiopia arrests 1,700 officials over deadly unrest', *East African*, 13 Aug. 2020.

¹² UN OCHA (note 1), pp. 121–22.

¹³ On developments within Ethiopia in 2018–19 and the Eritrea–Ethiopia peace agreement see Davis, I. and Melvin, N., 'Armed conflict and peace processes in sub-Saharan Africa', *SIPRI Yearbook 2019*, pp. 134–37; Davis, I., 'Armed conflict and peace processes in the Horn of Africa', *SIPRI Yearbook 2020*, pp. 203–205; and Addis, A. K. et al., 'The recent political situation in Ethiopia and rapprochement with Eritrea', *African Security Review*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2020), pp. 105–24.

¹⁴ 'Abiy Ahmed's reforms in Ethiopia lift the lid on ethnic tensions', *BBC News*, 29 June 2019; '67 killed in days of unrest in Ethiopia, police say', *AP News*, 26 Oct. 2019; and International Crisis Group, *Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails*, Africa Report no. 283 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 16 Dec. 2019).

¹⁵ Sileshi, E., 'Sidama becomes Ethiopia's 10th regional state', *Addis Standard*, 23 Nov. 2019; and Temare, G. G., 'The Republic of Tigray? Aydeln, yekenyeyel!', *Ethiopia Insight*, 28 Sep. 2019.

Table 7.11. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Ethiopia, 2013–20

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Battles	418	237	566	999	877	730	193	1 634
Explosions/remote violence	48	2	16	15	2	22	17	85
Protests, riots and strategic developments	33	53	177	749	131	241	170	225
Violence against civilians	85	43	52	752	345	572	287	1 609
Total	584	335	811	2 515	1 355	1 565	667	3 553

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'ACLED definitions of political violence and protest', 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, 'Data export tool', accessed 5 Mar. 2021.

as the country continued its political transition. In particular, its system of ethnic federalism was at risk of increased fragmentation.¹⁶ The proliferation of regional 'special forces' (similar to paramilitary forces) also risked exacerbating tensions.¹⁷

The armed conflict in Tigray

In the second half of 2020 Ethiopia's federal government and the Tigray region—located in the north-west corner of Ethiopia, bordering Eritrea and Sudan, and with a population of about 7 million people (out of a total Ethiopian population of 110 million)—edged towards confrontation. The tensions partly reflected a power struggle between Prime Minister Abiy and Tigrayan elites who once dominated Ethiopia's military and ruling coalition.¹⁸ Regional elections were another source of tensions: the federal government (having decided in June to postpone all elections until 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic) declared the September Tigray regional election illegal. In October the federal government moved to divert funding from the TPLF towards lower levels of the regional administration. Tigray responded by threatening to withhold tax revenues it collected on behalf of the federal government.¹⁹

On 3 November 2020, fearing (it is alleged) an imminent attack by federal forces, Tigray's forces in alliance with some of the Tigrayan officers in the national army, forcibly took control of some of the federal units stationed in the region. The next day, federal forces began an offensive against Tigray with support from Amhara Region forces and militias, and (it is suspected

¹⁶ Mosley, J., 'Ethiopia's transition: Implications for the Horn of Africa and Red Sea region', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2020/5, Mar. 2020.

¹⁷ Abdu, B., 'Regional special forces: Threats or safeties?', The Reporter, 2 Jan. 2021.

¹⁸ Gardner, T., 'How Abiy's effort to redefine Ethiopia led to war in Tigray', World Politics Review, 8 Dec. 2020; and Burke, J., 'Rise and fall of Ethiopia's TPLF—from rebels to rulers and back', *The Guardian*, 25 Nov. 2020.

¹⁹ 'Steering Ethiopia's Tigray crisis away from conflict', Africa Briefing no. 162, International Crisis Group, 30 Oct. 2020.

but denied by both governments) Eritrean forces.²⁰ The United Nations warned of a ‘full-scale humanitarian crisis’ as thousands of Ethiopian refugees fled to nearby Eritrea and Sudan.²¹ On 26 November the focus of the offensive moved to Tigray’s capital Mekelle after the federal government’s 72-hour ultimatum for Tigrayan forces to surrender expired.²² The federal forces captured Mekelle on 28 November 2020 and declared victory over the TPLF, which vowed to carry on a guerrilla-style resistance and continued to fire rockets into Eritrea.²³

Thousands of people died in the fighting, as shown in the upsurge in estimated conflict-related fatalities in 2020 (table 7.11). All sides are accused of atrocities and human rights abuses.²⁴ More than 46 000 people fled into neighbouring eastern Sudan, and up to 2 million people were internally displaced. With the federal government restricting access to the region, the UN warned that the crisis was ‘spiralling out of control’.²⁵ A protracted crisis in Tigray seemed likely at the close of 2020. Border tensions between Ethiopia and Sudan also escalated in late December 2020; relations between the two countries were already strained due to the dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the River Nile.²⁶

Mozambique

The Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado province in the north of Mozambique deepened in 2020. Increased violence against civilians caused the number of internally displaced people to more than quadruple to over 500 000, while an estimated 1.3 million people in the region were in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.²⁷ Overall, estimated conflict-related fatalities in Mozambique increased almost threefold in 2020 compared to 2019 (see table 7.12).

While attacks by local Islamist groups have occurred sporadically since late 2017 they escalated sharply in 2020. The main insurgent group is Ansar al-Sunna, although locals call it ‘al-Shabab’ (there is no connection to the

²⁰ Beaumont, P., ‘Diplomats back claims Eritrean troops have joined Ethiopia conflict’, *The Guardian*, 8 Dec. 2020; ‘Ethiopia sees war ending, EU complains of partisan aid access’, Reuters, 4 Dec. 2020; and Fröhlich, S., ‘Once enemies, Ethiopia and Eritrea ally against Tigray’, *Deutsche Welle*, 29 Nov. 2020.

²¹ Paravicini, G., ‘Ethiopia says its troops marching on Tigrayan capital’, Reuters, 17 Nov. 2020.

²² Burke, J., ‘Ethiopia’s military to begin “final offensive” against Tigray capital’, *The Guardian*, 26 Nov. 2020.

²³ Anna, C., ‘UN: Ethiopia’s victory claim doesn’t mean war is finished’, AP News, 29 Nov. 2020; and ‘Rockets hit Eritrea capital after Ethiopia declares victory’, Al Jazeera, 29 Nov. 2020.

²⁴ AFP, ‘“Terrified” survivors recount attacks on civilians in Tigray’, France 24, 15 Dec. 2020; and ‘Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state’, Amnesty International, 12 Nov. 2020.

²⁵ Anna, C., ‘UN: Ethiopia’s conflict has “appalling” impact on civilians’, AP News, 9 Dec. 2020.

²⁶ De Waal, A., ‘Viewpoint: Why Ethiopia and Sudan have fallen out over al-Fashaga’, BBC News, 3 Jan. 2021.

²⁷ UN OCHA (note 1), p. 125.

Table 7.12. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Mozambique, 2013–20

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Battles	116	43	41	45	40	39	268	885
Explosions/remote violence	3	0	0	0	0	0	8	73
Protests, riots and strategic developments	3	3	3	2	71	5	20	19
Violence against civilians	22	11	4	58	18	179	367	805
Total	144	57	48	105	129	223	663	1 782

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ‘ACLED definitions of political violence and protest’, 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, ‘Data export tool’, accessed 5 Mar. 2021.

group of the same name in Somalia). During 2019 the group reportedly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and analysts now refer to it as being part of the Islamic State Central Africa Province.²⁸ However, the extent of the group’s fragmentation and links to Islamic State is difficult to discern.²⁹

During 2020 Islamist militant groups took temporary control of key transport routes, waterways and strategic towns in the region, including the north-eastern port of Mocímboa da Praia in mid August 2020—close to Africa’s largest-ever energy project in the Rovuma basin.³⁰ They also carried out cross-border attacks in southern Tanzania. With Mozambique state forces stretched by the conflict, local communities formed self-defence militias. The government also increasingly relied on military assistance from private security contractors from Russia and South Africa.³¹ The armed violence in a region rich in natural resources was underpinned by poverty and inequality, as well as corruption and poor governance.³² There were allegations of serious human rights abuses by Islamist groups and Mozambique security forces.³³

At the end of the year additional external assistance or intervention was under consideration by neighbouring states, as well as by other states already involved in counterterrorism operations in sub-Saharan Africa.³⁴

²⁸ On the origins of Islamist groups in northern Mozambique see Habibe, S., Forquilha, S. and Pereira, J., ‘Islamic radicalization in northern Mozambique’, *Cadernos IESE* no. 17/2019, Sep. 2019.

²⁹ ‘Mozambique’s mysterious conflict is intensifying’, *The Economist*, 2 Apr. 2020; and Hamming, T. R., ‘The Islamic State in Mozambique’, *Lawfare*, 24 Jan. 2021.

³⁰ ‘Mocimboa da Praia: Key Mozambique port “seized by IS”’, BBC News, 12 Aug. 2020.

³¹ ‘Frelimo’s belated cry for help’, *Africa Confidential*, vol. 16, no. 13 (25 June 2020); ‘Paramount and Lionel Dyck massively boost Nyusi’s firepower’, *Africa Intelligence*, 10 Dec. 2020; and Cenola, T. and Kleinfeld, P., ‘Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado: Militants advance as aid access shrinks’, *New Humanitarian*, 21 Dec. 2020.

³² ‘Mozambique’s jihadists and the “curse” of gas and rubies’, BBC News, 18 Sep. 2020.

³³ ‘Mozambique police: Islamists behead 50 people in troubled province’, *Deutsche Welle*, 9 Nov. 2020.

³⁴ ‘Cabo Delgado: President says Mozambique is open to receiving “any type of support”’, *Club of Mozambique*, 19 Nov. 2020.

Somalia

Since 2012 the main armed conflict in Somalia has been between the Somali Government, backed by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and US forces, and al-Shabab insurgents. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded a 33 per cent increase in the activity of al-Shabab in 2020 compared to in 2019, although a UN panel of experts report indicates that these were mainly smaller-scale attacks using improvised explosive devices, suicide bombings and indirect fire attacks.³⁵ Government forces struggled to mount a cohesive response, partly due to ongoing political factionalism in Somalia. In addition, Somalia's rural populations continued to suffer from clan-based violence, with weak state security forces unable to prevent clashes over water and pasture resources.³⁶

This armed violence has contributed to a prolonged humanitarian crisis in Somalia, which is also characterized by climate shocks including floods (that displaced 840 000 people in the first 10 months of 2020), drought, disease outbreaks (including the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020) and weak social protection. A desert locust infestation caused severe crop damage and added to food insecurity. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance increased from 4.2 million in 2019 to 5.2 million in 2020, while the number of displaced people rose from 770 000 in 2019 to 1.2 million in 2020.³⁷

The fight against al-Shabab

In 2018 AMISOM adopted a security transition plan for the gradual transfer of security responsibilities to Somali forces, with final withdrawal of the mission by the end of 2021.³⁸ AMISOM has been the largest ongoing multi-lateral peace operation in the world since 2015, and remained so in 2020, despite the further withdrawal of 1000 troops in February 2020.³⁹ Despite continued AMISOM operations and increased US air strikes, al-Shabab

³⁵ Kishi, R. et al., 'ACLED 2020: The Year in Review', Mar. 2021, p. 16; and United Nations, Security Council, Letter dated 28 September 2020 from the Panel of Experts on Somalia addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to Resolution 751 (1992) concerning Somalia, S/2020/949, 28 Sep. 2020, p. 15.

³⁶ Felbab-Brown, V., 'The problem with militias in Somalia: Almost everyone wants them despite their dangers', Brookings, 14 Apr. 2020.

³⁷ UN OCHA (note 1), pp. 128–29. On the impact of climate-related change in livelihood options and migration, as well as peacebuilding in Somalia see also Eklöv, K. and Krampe, F., *Climate-related Security Risks and Peacebuilding in Somalia*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 53 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Oct. 2019). On the impact of Covid-19 on Somalia see 'Covid-19 in Somalia: A public health emergency in an electoral minefield', Africa Briefing no. 155, International Crisis Group, 8 May 2020.

³⁸ Oluoch, F., 'AMISOM ready to withdraw', East African, 10 Nov. 2018. On developments within AMISOM in 2018 see Smit, T., 'Regional trends and developments in peace operations', *SIPRI Yearbook 2019*, pp. 169–71.

³⁹ On the force strength of AMISOM see chapter 2, section II, in this volume. On friction with AMISOM and the pursuit of national interests by some of the troop contributing countries see Albrecht, P. and Cold-Ravnkilde, S., 'National interests as friction: Peacekeeping in Somalia and Mali', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2020), pp. 204–20.

Table 7.13. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Somalia, 2013–20

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Battles	1 985	2 893	2 786	3 729	2 686	3 034	2 154	1 890
Explosions/remote violence	529	953	750	1 215	2 188	1 446	1 214	761
Protests, riots and strategic developments	15	19	8	27	74	48	23	24
Violence against civilians	628	602	561	676	887	573	640	465
Total	3 157	4 467	4 105	5 647	5 835	5 101	4 031	3 140

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ‘ACLED definitions of political violence and protest’, 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, ‘Data export tool’, accessed 5 Mar. 2021.

remained a major threat. The threat extended beyond conventional military action and asymmetric warfare ‘to include sophisticated extortion and “taxation” systems, child recruitment practices and an effective propaganda machine’, especially in areas under its control in southern and central Somalia.⁴⁰ Although al-Shabab was generally unable to carry out large-scale complex attacks in 2020, a notable exception was the attack on the Elite Hotel in Mogadishu on 16 August 2020.⁴¹ Overall, estimated conflict-related fatalities in 2020 were the lowest in the last eight years, but still remained above 3100 (see table 7.13).

The USA continued its engagement in Somalia—conducting 54 air strikes in 2020 (compared to 61 in 2019), while an independent assessment recorded 72 incidents in 2020 (and 93 in 2019).⁴² The USA has been carrying out air strikes against the al-Shabab group in Somalia since 2007 and from a US air-base in Niger since 2019. The USA has also sponsored the creation of an elite Somali counterterrorism force: the Danab Brigade.⁴³ In December 2020 President Donald J. Trump announced the withdrawal of all US troops from Somalia (thought to number about 700), but it was expected that many of these would be repositioned to neighbouring countries in East Africa.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ United Nations, S/2020/949 (note 35), pp. 3, 7–13. Also see ‘A losing game: Countering Al-Shabab’s financial system’, Hiraal Institute, Oct. 2020. On the group’s recruitment strategy see Ingiriis, M. H., ‘The anthropology of al-Shabaab: The salient factors for the insurgency movement’s recruitment project’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2020), pp. 359–80.

⁴¹ Nor, O., ‘Somali forces kill attackers to end siege at popular Mogadishu hotel’, CNN, 16 Aug. 2020.

⁴² ‘Declared and alleged US actions in Somalia’, Airwars, [n.d.]; and Ahmed, K., ‘Zero accountability’: US accused a failure to report civilian deaths’, *The Guardian*, 2 Apr. 2020.

⁴³ Sperber, A., ‘The Danab Brigade: Somalia’s elite, US-sponsored special ops force’, Pulitzer Center, 11 Aug. 2020.

⁴⁴ Cooper, H., ‘Trump orders all American troops out of Somalia’, *New York Times*, 4 Dec. 2020; and ‘Statement from AFRICOM Commander US Army Gen. Stephen Townsend on the activation of Joint Task Force—Quartz’, 19 Dec. 2020.

Political fragmentation and Somalia's federalism

Political relations between the federal government and some of the federal member states (especially Galmudug, Jubaland and Puntland) remained volatile in 2020.⁴⁵ Electoral processes were the primary source of the tensions, especially in the aftermath of disputed regional elections in Jubaland in August 2019 and Galmudug, and in the preparations for national parliamentary and presidential elections. In Jubaland this led to a military stand-off between federal and regional forces.⁴⁶ Power-sharing arrangements along clan lines are common at all levels of Somali governance. A road map for inclusive politics was agreed in 2018, paving the way for a change from indirect voting, whereby clan leaders select electoral college delegates, to a one-person, one-vote system for the first time in 2020. However, in September 2020, after an impasse in the electoral process, agreement was reached to maintain the indirect voting system, albeit slightly modified. Nonetheless, parliamentary elections that were due to take place in mid December 2020 were pushed back until January 2021, while preparations for presidential elections scheduled for February 2021 were also lagging and the process was still being contested by opposition parties. With al-Shabab also threatening to disrupt the vote it remained unclear at the end of 2020 whether these pivotal elections would take place.⁴⁷

South Sudan

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan on 9 July 2011 after a 2005 agreement that ended one of Africa's longest-running civil wars. A UN peacekeeping mission—the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)—was established on 8 July 2011. Although a post-independence civil war (2013–15) was curtailed by a 2015 peace agreement, the legacy of violence continued in the form of an armed conflict waged primarily between two groups: the Government of South Sudan and its allies, led by President Salva Kiir (an ethnic Dinka), and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in-Opposition and the Nuer White Army, led by Vice President Riek Machar (an ethnic Nuer). Although the main division in the subsequent conflict has been between the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups, underlying conflict dynamics are primarily

⁴⁵ United Nations, S/2020/949 (note 35), pp. 20–22.

⁴⁶ 'Jubaland demands for withdrawal of SNA from Gedo ahead of election', Garowe Online, 7 Oct. 2020; and 'Ending the dangerous standoff in southern Somalia', Africa Briefing no. 158, International Crisis Group, 14 July 2020.

⁴⁷ 'Who wants an election?', *Africa Confidential*, vol. 61, no. 10 (14 May 2020); 'Staving off violence around Somalia's elections', Africa Briefing no. 163, International Crisis Group, 10 Nov. 2020; and 'Blunting al-Shabaab's impact on Somalia's elections', Africa Briefing no. 165, International Crisis Group, 31 Dec. 2020.

Table 7.14. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in South Sudan, 2013–20

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Battles	1 300	4 473	2 309	2 541	3 409	1 133	822	1 698
Explosions/remote violence	18	61	61	46	18	30	10	10
Protests, riots and strategic developments	0	11	24	1	4	5	4	7
Violence against civilians	3 077	1 849	1 208	960	1 416	532	970	656
Total	4 395	6 394	3 602	3 548	4 847	1 700	1 806	2 371

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'ACLED definitions of political violence and protest', 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, 'Data export tool', accessed 5 Mar. 2021.

political and vary considerably across the country. Opposition groups have become more fractured and localized.

Kiir and Machar signed a new peace deal in September 2018—the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan—but since then implementation has been contested, partial and subject to delays.⁴⁸ In particular, further negotiations to form a unity government, transitional security arrangements and a unified national army stalled during 2019. There was also inconsistent support for the agreement among the Intergovernmental Authority on Development states and neighbouring states.⁴⁹

Implementation of the 2018 peace agreement and ongoing conflict

In February 2020 the deadlock was broken after Kiir and Machar agreed to form the long-awaited unity government, as well changes to the number and boundaries of regional states (reducing the number of such states from 32 to 10).⁵⁰ However, the implementation of other aspects of the 2018 peace agreement was further slowed during 2020 in part by Covid-19-response measures that, among other things, delayed the registration and training of former combatants who were due to be integrated into new unified national forces.⁵¹ In particular, the failure to agree on local power-sharing jeopardized the unity government and left large parts of the country 'in a governance and

⁴⁸ IGAD, *Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan* (IGAD: Addis Ababa, 12 Sep. 2018).

⁴⁹ On developments in South Sudan in 2017–19 see Davis, I. et al., 'Armed conflict in sub-Saharan Africa', *SIPRI Yearbook 2018*, pp. 99–100; *SIPRI Yearbook 2019* (note 13), pp. 140–43; and *SIPRI Yearbook 2020* (note 13), pp. 208–11.

⁵⁰ 'A major step toward ending South Sudan's civil war', Statement, International Crisis Group, 25 Feb. 2020.

⁵¹ Joshi, M. et al., 'The effect of Covid-19 on peace agreement implementation: The cases of Colombia, South Sudan, and the Philippines', PRIO Paper, 2020; and United Nations, Security Council, 'Interim report of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan submitted pursuant to Resolution 2521 (2020)', S/2020/1141, 25 Nov. 2020, pp. 7–8.

security vacuum', which led to further intercommunal violence.⁵² There was also no progress in establishing any of the transitional justice mechanisms.⁵³

While violence directly attributable to the conflict parties to the civil war continued to ebb as a result of the 2017 ceasefire, intercommunal violence fuelled by the proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons rose sharply in 2020—as reflected in the higher estimated conflict-related fatalities in 2020 (see table 7.14). UNMISS documented more than 1197 incidents of subnational armed violence in 2020—an increase of 146 per cent in comparison to 2019—that resulted in the deaths of 2421 civilians (compared to 1131 civilian deaths from armed violence in 2019).⁵⁴ The most devastating localized conflicts involved allied Dinka and Nuer militias and Murle pastoralist militias in central and southern Jonglei State and the lowland, oil-rich Greater Pibor Administrative Area.⁵⁵ On 12 August 2020 Kiir declared a three-month state of emergency for those two areas.⁵⁶ Efforts to disarm local communities in August led to at least 81 people being killed.⁵⁷

In addition, signatories and non-signatories continued to violate the 2017 ceasefire. Clashes involving the National Salvation Front (a non-signatory to the revitalized agreement), the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in-Opposition, the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and local militias persisted in 2020, especially in Central and Western Equatoria.⁵⁸

All the parties to these conflicts were accused of engaging in gross human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including sexual and gender-based violence.⁵⁹ In March 2020 the UN Security Council extended the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2021, maintaining an authorized strength of 17 000 military personnel and 2101 police.⁶⁰ However, as was the case in 2019, UNMISS did not achieve this strength in 2020: as of 31 December 2020 UNMISS deployed 14 869 military personnel and 1653 police officers.⁶¹ An independent strategic review of UNMISS concluded that its mandate remained valid, but among a number of

⁵² United Nations, Human Rights Council, Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, A/HRC/46/53, 4 Feb. 2021, p. 3.

⁵³ United Nations, A/HRC/46/53 (note 52), pp. 14–15.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Division, UN Mission in South Sudan, 'Annual brief on violence affecting civilians, January–December 2020', Mar. 2021.

⁵⁵ United Nations, A/HRC/46/53 (note 52), pp. 6–8.

⁵⁶ Emmanuel, O., 'Kiir imposes state of emergency to contain greater Jonglei conflict', Eye Radio, 13 Aug. 2020.

⁵⁷ Dahir, A. L., 'Efforts to disarm communities in South Sudan fuels deadly clashes', *New York Times*, 11 Aug. 2020; and United Nations, A/HRC/46/53 (note 52), pp. 8–9.

⁵⁸ United Nations, A/HRC/46/53 (note 52), pp. 4–6. For a record of the violations see South Sudan Peace Monitoring, 'CTSAMVM violation reports', 2020.

⁵⁹ United Nations, A/HRC/46/53 (note 52), pp. 13–14.

⁶⁰ UN Security Council Resolution 2514, 12 Mar. 2020.

⁶¹ SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, accessed 1 Apr. 2021, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/pko/>>. On developments within peace operations more generally see chapter 2, section II, in this volume.

proposed reforms, the review recommended a reduction in the authorized military strength to 15 000 military personnel.⁶² On 29 May 2020 the UN Security Council agreed to extend an arms embargo on South Sudan along with individual travel bans and financial sanctions. China, Russia and South Africa abstained from the vote.⁶³

The humanitarian situation

As a result of years of persistent armed conflict, enduring vulnerabilities and weak basic services, humanitarian needs in South Sudan remained exceptionally high in 2020. About two thirds of the population (7.5 million people) were in need of humanitarian assistance, while at least 6.5 million people were acutely food insecure—with the risk of famine in Jonglei State. Flooding affected 856 000 people and temporarily displaced nearly 400 000 persons during July–December 2020, while violence and insecurity continued to displace large numbers of people. Overall, some 1.6 million people in South Sudan were internally displaced during 2020.⁶⁴

At the end of 2020 continued delays in the full implementation of the peace agreement and concern over the potential recurrence of even higher levels of violence meant that South Sudan remained at a critical juncture.

Sudan

A major transition of power occurred in Sudan in 2019 following the removal of President Omar al-Bashir by the Sudanese army. Under a subsequent power-sharing agreement reached between the Sudanese Transitional Military Council and a coalition of opposition and protest groups, Sudan is scheduled to hold elections following a 39-month period of shared rule between the military and civilian groups.⁶⁵ The new transitional administration inherited a deepening economic and humanitarian crisis, as well as a legacy of armed conflict. At the beginning of 2020 long-standing insurgencies remained extant mainly in Darfur and in the southern border states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, involving a fragmented mosaic of non-state armed groups (see table 7.15). Some of these armed groups from Darfur were also present in Libya and South Sudan. The progress made in the Sudanese

⁶² United Nations, Security Council, 'Report on the independent strategic review of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2514 (2020)', S/2020/1224, 15 Dec. 2020, annex.

⁶³ UN Security Council Resolution 2521, 29 May 2020. On disagreements within the UN Security Council about the arms embargo on South Sudan see chapter 14, section II, in this volume.

⁶⁴ UN OCHA (note 1), pp. 131–32.

⁶⁵ Burke, J. and Salih, Z. M., 'Sudanese military and protesters sign power-sharing accord', *The Guardian*, 17 July 2019.

peace process in 2019 accelerated during 2020, with further significant peace agreements reached with the main armed groups.⁶⁶

The Sudanese peace process

The August 2019 deal called for the newly established Sudanese transitional government to reach a peace agreement with the armed groups in Darfur and other states within six months. The peace negotiations were classified into parallel tracks in five geographical regions (see table 7.15).⁶⁷ Most of the negotiations took place in the South Sudanese capital Juba. Initial agreements with some of the armed groups were reached during negotiations between October 2019 and February 2020.

Negotiations continued during the Covid-19 pandemic that reached Sudan in early 2020. In response to the UN secretary-general's March call for a Covid-19-related global ceasefire, on 30 March 2020 the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army–Abdel Wahid (SLM/A–AW) stated it would continue to exercise a de facto ceasefire in Darfur but reiterated its rejection to join the peace process in Juba. A day later the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army–North (al-Hilu) (SPLM/A–N (al-Hilu)) announced an extension of its pre-Covid-19 ceasefire for a further three months (and on 1 May 2020 extended it until 31 January 2021), and the Sudanese Government recommitted to its own pre-Covid-19 nationwide ceasefire.⁶⁸

On 4 June 2020 the UN Security Council approved Resolution 2524 (2020), which mandated a UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan. This mission started on 1 January 2021 and succeeds the joint UN–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) that closed on 31 December 2020, having been deployed since 2007.⁶⁹

On 31 August 2020 a comprehensive series of peace agreements was reached between the Sudan Revolutionary Front coalition and the government. The agreements covered key issues such as land ownership, security and power-sharing.⁷⁰ However, two of the groups in the coalition—the SLM/A–AW and the SPLM–N (al-Hilu)—rejected the agreements. On 4 September the

⁶⁶ On developments in Sudan in 2019 see *SIPRI Yearbook 2020* (note 13), pp. 211–14.

⁶⁷ 'Rebel movement denies suspension of peace negotiations', Radio Dabanga, 18 Dec. 2019.

⁶⁸ 'Coronavirus: Sudan rebels extend ceasefire', Radio Dabanga, 31 Mar. 2020; and Wise, L. et al., *Pandemic Pauses: Understanding Ceasefires in a Time of Covid-19*, Political Settlements Research Programme (University of Edinburgh: Edinburgh, 2021), pp. 11–12; and 'Ceasefires in a time of Covid-19', Open access tool, Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh, accessed 24 Mar. 2021, <<https://pax.peaceagreements.org/static/covid19ceasefires/>>. On the UN secretary-general's global ceasefire call see chapter 2, section I, in this volume.

⁶⁹ UN Security Council Resolution 2524, 3 June 2020. On the closure of UNAMID see chapter 2, section II, in this volume.

⁷⁰ 'Sudan signs peace deal with rebel groups from Darfur', Al Jazeera, 31 Aug. 2020.

Table 7.15. Peace agreements between the Sudanese transitional government and key armed opposition groups, 2019–20

Region	Date of agreement	Type or status	Armed opposition group(s) signees
Darfur	21 Oct. 2019	Political, ceasefire and humanitarian	SRF
	28 Dec. 2019	Framework	JEM, SLM/A-MM, SLM/A-TC, SLFA
	31 Aug. 2020	Preliminary	SRF (incl. SLM/A-MM, JEM, SLM/A-TC)
	3 Oct. 2020	Juba Peace Agreement	SRF (incl. SPLM/A-N (Agar), SLM/A-MM, SLM/A-TC, JEM)
Two Areas (Blue Nile and South Kordofan)	18 Oct. 2019	Political, security and humanitarian	SPLM/A-N (al-Hilu)
	17 Dec. 2019	Ceasefire and humanitarian	SPLM/A-N (Agar)
	24 Jan. 2020	Framework	SPLM/A-N (Agar)
	17 Aug. 2020	Security	SRF
	31 Aug. 2020	Preliminary	SRF (incl. SPLM/A-N (Agar))
	3 Sep. 2020	Declaration of Principles	SPLM/A-N (al-Hilu)
	3 Oct. 2020	Juba Peace Agreement	SRF (incl. SPLM/A-N (Agar), SLM/A-MM, SLM/A-TC, JEM)
	26 Jan. 2020	Final	KLM
Northern	24 Dec. 2019	Final	SRF
Central	21 Feb. 2020	Final	SRF

JEM = Justice and Equality Movement; KLM = Kush Liberation Movement; SLFA = Sudan Liberation Forces Alliance; SLM/A-AW = Sudan Liberation Movement/Army–Abdel Wahid; SLM/A-MM = Sudan Liberation Movement/Army–Minni Minnawi; SLM/A-TC = Sudan Liberation Movement/Army–Transitional Council; SPLM/A-N = Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army–North; and SRF = Sudan Revolutionary Front.

Notes: The SRF is an umbrella organization that was founded in 2011. Five major armed groups operating in Sudan were part of the SRF in 2020: (a) SPLM/A-N; (b) SLM/A-AW; (c) SLM/A-MM; (d) JEM; and (e) SLM/A-TC, which is a splinter group from the SLM/A-AW. In 2017 the SPLM/A-N split into two factions: SPLM/A-N (al-Hilu) and SPLM/A-N (Agar). The SLFA is another splinter group created in 2017. The KLM is a minor armed group founded in 1969.

Sources: United Nations, Security Council, ‘Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan’, S/2020/36, 14 Jan. 2020, pp. 15–28; ‘Human security baseline assessment for Sudan and South Sudan, Darfur’s Armed Groups’, Small Arms Survey, [n.d.]; ‘SRF rebels, Sudan govt sign agreement in Juba’, Radio Dabanga, 21 Oct. 2019; ‘Rebel movement denies suspension of peace negotiations’, Radio Dabanga, 18 Dec. 2019; ‘Juba peace talks: “Breakthrough accord” on central Sudan track’, Radio Dabanga, 25 Dec. 2019; ‘Sudan rebels, govt. sign framework agreement in Juba’, Radio Dabanga, 26 Jan. 2020; ‘Peace agreement on Sudan’s northern track’, Radio Dabanga, 27 Jan. 2020; ‘Sudan peace talks: Agreement on eastern track finalised’, Radio Dabanga, 23 Feb. 2020; ‘SPLM-N Malik Agar rebels, Sudan govt initial “historic and important” protocol’, Radio Dabanga, 18 Aug. 2020; ‘Sudan signs peace deal with rebel groups from Darfur’, Al Jazeera, 31 Aug. 2020; Atit, M., ‘Sudan’s government agrees to separate religion and state’, Voice of America, 4 Sep. 2020; and Dumo, D., ‘Sudan and main rebel groups formalise peace deal’, Reuters, 3 Oct. 2020.

Table 7.16. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Sudan, 2013–20

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Battles	5 595	3 049	2 440	2 939	851	700	321	565
Explosions/remote violence	479	263	263	294	33	28	17	13
Protests, riots and strategic developments	342	15	9	27	34	37	213	34
Violence against civilians	380	831	756	639	373	289	225	345
Total	6 796	4 158	3 468	3 899	1 291	1 054	776	957

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ‘ACLED definitions of political violence and protest’, 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, ‘Data export tool’, accessed 5 Mar. 2021.

government signed a separate ‘declaration of principles’ agreement with SPLM–N (al-Hilu).⁷¹

On 3 October 2020 the Sudanese Government and representatives of several armed groups (mostly members of the SRF coalition) signed the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan.⁷² The two armed opposition groups that did not sign the August agreements also remained outside of this one. It is a highly complex agreement that brought together and expanded the individual agreements signed in August 2020. It consists of 10 different chapters—including 6 chapters of bilateral agreements with the different armed groups—and also sets out in considerable detail the future federal system, establishes a complicated web of transnational justice mechanisms and extensive transitional security arrangements, as well as implementation deadlines for many of these issues.⁷³ While there was positive support for the Juba Peace Agreement in many parts of Sudan, eastern Sudan became the epicentre of demonstrations against it.⁷⁴

Conflict and humanitarian needs

Conflict remained lower than the levels of 2018 and earlier, but conflict-related fatalities increased in 2020 compared to in 2019 (see table 7.16). These were the result of mainly localized security incidents in Darfur and other conflict-affected regions in 2020. Intercommunal clashes and related attacks on civilians by Arab militias increased sharply, in frequency and in

⁷¹ Atit, M., ‘Sudan’s government agrees to separate religion and state’, Voice of America, 4 Sep. 2020.

⁷² ‘Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan between the Transitional Government of Sudan and the Parties to the Peace Process’, Official English version, 3 Oct. 2020.

⁷³ Al-Ali, Z., ‘The Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan: Summary and analysis’, International IDEA, 2021.

⁷⁴ United Nations, Security Council, ‘Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan’, S/2021/40, 13 Jan. 2021, pp. 7, 11–12; and ‘Eastern Sudan rocked by protests and calls for independence’, Middle East Eye, 7 Oct. 2020.

scale, particularly in South Darfur and West Darfur in July and August 2020.⁷⁵ Sudan's security forces were often accused of negligence and complicity in some of the attacks. Sexual and gender-based violence remained endemic in Darfur.⁷⁶

Humanitarian needs in Sudan continued to rise in 2020: 7.5 million people needed humanitarian assistance, up from 5.7 million in 2019, and this was expected to rise to 13.4 million people in 2021. These emergency levels were driven by an economic crisis, Covid-19, the worst floods in decades, localized conflict and disease outbreaks. The military escalation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia in November 2020 resulted in over 40 000 refugees crossing the border into Sudan.⁷⁷

Efforts to address the economic crisis in 2020 included a virtual international partnership conference on 25 June 2020 that secured pledges of \$1.8 billion in financial support, a new International Monetary Fund programme to support economic reforms, and the US Government's announcement on 14 December 2020 of its intention to remove Sudan from its State Sponsors of Terrorism List, an impediment to securing debt relief and international finance.⁷⁸ The latter was the result of a normalization agreement between Israel and Sudan, facilitated by the USA.⁷⁹

Future outlook

After the USA removed Sudan from its State Sponsors of Terrorism List, Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said his country 'officially' rejoined the world community as 'a peaceful nation supporting global stability'.⁸⁰ The peace agreements reached in 2020 were key components of Sudan's larger transition from military to civilian rule. Implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement will be difficult amid Sudan's economic problems, as well as ongoing divisions among various actors involved in the political transition. The rejection of the agreement by the SLM/A-AW, the only armed movement with a substantial area of control in Darfur, may also hinder implementation of the security arrangements.

⁷⁵ United Nations, S/2021/40 (note 74), pp. 32–33; Salih, Z. M., 'In Darfur, civilians pay price in new wave of deadly violence', Al Jazeera, 9 Aug. 2020; and Walsh, D., 'The dictator who waged war on Darfur is gone, but the killing goes on', *New York Times*, 30 July 2020.

⁷⁶ United Nations, S/2021/40 (note 74), pp. 27–30.

⁷⁷ UN OCHA (note 1), pp. 134–35; Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN and World Food Programme, 'FAO-WFP early warning analysis of acute food insecurity hotspots', Oct. 2020, p. 7; and Salih, Z. M., "'We had to eat our seeds for planting": 10 million in Sudan facing food shortages', *The Guardian*, 28 July 2020. On the economic crisis see 'Financing the revival of Sudan's troubled transition', Africa Briefing no. 157, International Crisis Group, 23 June 2020.

⁷⁸ 'Sudan partnership conference', Berlin, 25 June 2020, Final communiqué, 2020.

⁷⁹ Burke, J. and Holmes, O., 'US removes Sudan from terrorism blacklist in return for \$335m', *The Guardian*, 19 Oct. 2020. On the normalization agreement with Israel see chapter 6, section III, in this volume.

⁸⁰ Cited in Magdy, S., 'US embassy says Sudan no longer on list of terror sponsors', AP News, 14 Dec. 2020.