IV. Armed conflict and peace processes in East Africa

IAN DAVIS

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

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.
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).
armed conflict and conflict management, 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.\footnote{UN OCHA (note 1), pp. 114–15.}

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

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.

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. However, with the opening up of the political space, competition increased among the 10 semi-autonomous ethnically based regional states that make up Ethiopia. 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. Thus, during 2020 societal tensions in Ethiopia remained high.


12 UN OCHA (note 1), pp. 121–22.


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

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. 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.

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

but denied by both governments) Eritrean forces.\textsuperscript{20} The United Nations warned of a ‘full-scale humanitarian crisis’ as thousands of Ethiopian refugees fled to nearby Eritrea and Sudan.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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


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

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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.


\textsuperscript{27} UN OCHA (note 1), p. 125.
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. However, the extent of the group’s fragmentation and links to Islamic State is difficult to discern.

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. 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. The armed violence in a region rich in natural resources was underpinned by poverty and inequality, as well as corruption and poor governance. There were allegations of serious human rights abuses by Islamist groups and Mozambique security forces.

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.

---

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Battles</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explosions/remote violence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protests, riots and strategic developments</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against civilians</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>1782</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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


---

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. 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.

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.

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. 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. Despite continued AMISOM operations and increased US air strikes, al-Shabab

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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{44}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Somalia, 2013–20}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\hline
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 \\
\hline
Total & 3,157 & 4,467 & 4,105 & 5,647 & 5,835 & 5,101 & 4,031 & 3,140 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\textit{Note:} For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ‘ACLED definitions of political violence and protest’, 11 Apr. 2019.
\end{table}


\textsuperscript{41} Nor, O., ‘Somali forces kill attackers to end siege at popular Mogadishu hotel’, CNN, 16 Aug. 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. 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 standoff between federal and regional forces. 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.

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


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Battles</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>4,473</td>
<td>2,309</td>
<td>2,541</td>
<td>3,409</td>
<td>1,133</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>1,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explosions/remote violence</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protests, riots and strategic developments</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against civilians</td>
<td>3,077</td>
<td>1,849</td>
<td>1,208</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>1,416</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,395</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,394</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,602</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,548</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,847</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,700</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,806</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,371</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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


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

---


security vacuum’, which led to further intercommunal violence.\textsuperscript{52} There was also no progress in establishing any of the transitional justice mechanisms.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{55} On 12 August 2020 Kiir declared a three-month state of emergency for those two areas.\textsuperscript{56} Efforts to disarm local communities in August led to at least 81 people being killed.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{61} An independent strategic review of UNMISS concluded that its mandate remained valid, but among a number of

\textsuperscript{55} United Nations, A/HRC/46/53 (note 52), pp. 6–8.
\textsuperscript{60} UN Security Council Resolution 2514, 12 Mar. 2020.
proposed reforms, the review recommended a reduction in the authorized military strength to 15,000 military personnel.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 insurgescies 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


\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{64} UN OCHA (note 1), pp. 131–32.

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

---

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

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

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.

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

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\hline
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 \\
\hline
\textbf{Total} & \textbf{6 796} & \textbf{4 158} & \textbf{3 468} & \textbf{3 899} & \textbf{1 291} & \textbf{1 054} & \textbf{776} & \textbf{957} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Sudan, 2013–20}
\end{table}

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


---

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


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.\footnote{‘Sudan partnership conference’, Berlin, 25 June 2020, Final communiqué, 2020.}

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.\footnote{Burke, J. and Holmes, O., ‘US removes Sudan from terrorism blacklist in return for $335m’, \textit{The Guardian}, 19 Oct. 2020. On the normalization agreement with Israel see chapter 6, section III, in this volume.} The latter was the result of a normalization agreement between Israel and Sudan, facilitated by the USA.\footnote{Cited in Magdy, S., ‘US embassy says Sudan no longer on list of terror sponsors’, AP News, 14 Dec. 2020.}

\textit{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’.\footnote{Cited in Magdy, S., ‘US embassy says Sudan no longer on list of terror sponsors’, AP News, 14 Dec. 2020.} 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.