

Research  
Paper

XCEPT/Africa  
Programme

September 2023

# Navigating the regionalization of Ethiopia's Tigray conflict

How regional and international  
actors can help consolidate peace

Abel Abate Demissie



**Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, is a world-leading policy institute based in London. Our mission is to help governments and societies build a sustainably secure, prosperous and just world.**

---

# Contents

	Summary	2
<b>01</b>	Introduction	3
<b>02</b>	Mediation efforts and the role of regional organizations	8
<b>03</b>	Key regional players and their interests	14
<b>04</b>	Other influential regional players	19
<b>05</b>	The role of the international community	23
<b>06</b>	Navigating the regional context: what role for the international community?	30
	About the author	36
	Acknowledgments	36

---

# Summary

- 
- The civil war that raged between 2020 and 2022 in Ethiopia's Tigray region and which spread to other regions of the country, including Amhara and Afar, will continue to have a far-reaching impact for many years to come. It will create profound challenges for Ethiopia's economy, social fabric and intercommunal relationships, its state-building process, and the safety and security of its citizens. This is despite the November 2022 Pretoria agreement (the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement – CoHA) which brought the active conflict to an end.
  - Several regional and international state and non-state actors have become embroiled in the war. In order that a sustainable resolution to the conflict can be reached, it is critical that Ethiopia's partners understand and engage with the entangled interests and concerns of external players.
  - Peace needs to be consolidated in northern Ethiopia to enable the country's government to re-engage more actively in regional diplomacy and regain its former pre-eminence in regional affairs.
  - Regional and international diplomatic efforts should be leveraged to encourage the full and complete withdrawal of Eritrean forces from Ethiopia. Common borders should be clearly demarcated and official protocols and agreements reached between the two countries that will govern the bilateral relationships, as opposed to the existing ad hoc relationships. This will demand fresh thinking from Ethiopia's partners on approaches to engaging with the authorities in Asmara, given cooling relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea and limited options for direct Western influence.
  - Ethiopia's international partners must demonstrate their enduring commitment to supporting the robust monitoring and implementation of the CoHA, including through the provision of financial backing and technical resources to both the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

---

# 01

# Introduction

**Sustainable peace can only be achieved in Tigray if the Ethiopian government and Tigray interim administration commit to the implementation of the CoHA. They must leverage relationships with regional and Western partners to address the war's long-lasting and traumatic impacts, and to consolidate peace in neighbouring regions.**

---

Ethiopia's two-year civil war, which began on 3 November 2020, resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and the displacement of millions until it was brought to a negotiated end at talks in Pretoria, South Africa, in November 2022.<sup>1</sup> The conflict spread beyond the Tigray region to the neighbouring regions of Amhara and Afar, affecting the security situation in several other parts of the country and severely weakening Ethiopia's social fabric. Gross violations of human rights, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, were committed during the war, and post-conflict trauma is likely to persist in the foreseeable future.<sup>2</sup>

The war has also had a severely damaging economic impact, with the redirection of resources towards the war effort creating a significant drain on government finances. This has undermined attempts to manage a worsening debt crisis and respond to a number of shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic, a desert locust swarm and severe drought. These events, coupled with a dwindling of development aid, have added to the fiscal difficulties of the federal government.<sup>3</sup> According to official estimates, up to \$20 billion – equivalent to one-fifth of the country's GDP – will be required for the reconstruction of the northern part of Ethiopia

---

<sup>1</sup> International Crisis Group (2022), 'Back to War in Ethiopia', 23 September 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/back-war-ethiopia>; *Guardian* (2022), 'The Guardian view on the world's forgotten conflict: Ethiopia's devastating war', 23 October 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/oct/23/the-guardian-view-on-the-worlds-forgotten-conflict-ethiopias-devastating-war>.

<sup>2</sup> Keaten, J. (2022), 'UN experts detail extensive war crimes amid Tigray conflict', 22 September 2022, AP News, <https://apnews.com/article/health-united-nations-africa-ethiopia-eritrea-dcb992b8389069490c8b44357500cabe>.

<sup>3</sup> Do Rosario, J. and Savage, R. (2022), 'Exclusive: Ethiopia debt relief delay partly due to civil war, state finance minister says', Reuters, 15 October 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-ethiopia-debt-relief-delay-partly-due-civil-war-state-finmin-2022-10-15>.

that was affected by the war.<sup>4</sup> This figure is expected to rise further following the violence on and resultant widespread damage to infrastructure that occurred in early August 2023 in the Amhara region.<sup>5</sup> As well as driving Ethiopia itself into an ever-deepening political, security and economic quagmire,<sup>6</sup> the conflict will continue to have far-reaching consequences – related to resources, trade and commerce, and regional stability – throughout the Horn of Africa region and beyond.

The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (hereafter GFDRE) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) signed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) on 2 November 2022 in Pretoria.<sup>7</sup> Since then, there has been significant progress on its implementation. Following the Pretoria talks, and subsequent discussions in Nairobi which culminated in agreement on the modalities for implementation, a high-level GFDRE delegation led by federal parliament speaker Tadesse Chafo visited Tigray in December 2022 prior to the restoration of the first basic services. Moreover, the stockpiling and decommissioning of heavy weapons by the TPLF paved the way for the return of the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) and Ethiopian Federal Police to major cities in Tigray, and federal forces resumed control over key federal infrastructure such as airports and military camps. In late March 2023, Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed approved the appointment of Getachew Reda as head of the Tigray Interim Regional Administration, following the latter's selection by members of the TPLF Central Committee, in accordance with the process set out in the CoHA.

The CoHA offers an outline process for peace, despite ambitious and unrealistic timelines.<sup>8</sup> However, this process risks being derailed by the interests of neighbouring countries. The most notable is Eritrea, which remains isolated and hard to influence.<sup>9</sup> Having encroached into significant areas of northern Tigray, Eritrea is likely to resent the continuity of TPLF control of the Tigray region as recognized by the CoHA. The Eritrean government has also attempted to establish relations at subnational level

---

<sup>4</sup> Endale, A. (2023), 'Finance minister reveals USD 20 billion required for war recovery', *The Reporter*, 18 March 2023, <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/32229>.

<sup>5</sup> Dawit, E. (2023), 'Ethiopia declares six-month state of emergency in Amhara after clashes', Reuters, 4 August 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-declares-state-emergency-following-militia-clashes-2023-08-04>.

<sup>6</sup> Yusuf, M. and Besheer, M. (2022), 'UN Chief: Ethiopia's Tigray "Spiraling out of Control"', Voice of America, 17 October 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/international-concern-grows-over-ethiopia-s-escalating-conflict/6793146.html>.

<sup>7</sup> The agreement followed intense negotiations facilitated by officials from the African Union (AU), the US, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the United Nations. See African Union (2022), *Agreement for Lasting Peace Through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)*, IGAD, <https://igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Download-the-signed-agreement-here.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Most obviously, this refers to the commitment for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of Tigrayan forces within one month, despite the concession made by the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (GFDRE), on 12 November 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya, in agreeing that DDR should take place concurrently with the withdrawal of 'foreign and non-ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] forces' from Tigray. The GFDRE had previously demanded that the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) should demobilize its forces first. In addition, the monitoring mechanism, which mandates the AU High-Level Panel to appoint up to ten experts, will need to be reviewed, renegotiated, expanded and provided with adequate resources. See *Declaration of the Senior Commanders on the Modalities for the Implementation of the Agreement for Lasting Peace Through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities between the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front*, 12 November 2022, available at <https://aethiopiens-botschaft.de/the-declaration-of-the-senior-commanders-of-the-government-of-the-federal-democratic-republic-of-ethiopia-and-the-tplf-on-the-modalities-for-the-implementation-of-the-agreement-for-lasting-peace-thr>.

<sup>9</sup> Neither the AU nor the US government, which serves as a *de facto* guarantor to the process, has made any notable contact with President Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea.

with elements of the political and military leaderships of Ethiopia's regional states, which suggests that it is making preparations to protect its own interests in the eventuality of a cooling of its relations with the GFDRE.

Sudan has also had significant interests in the conflict, not least in connection with its historical border dispute with Ethiopia,<sup>10</sup> and due to the perceived backing given by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) to the TPLF during the war. It has also participated alongside Ethiopia and Egypt in tripartite negotiations over the management of Nile waters. However, the Sudanese government's capacity to directly influence developments in Ethiopia and the wider region will be limited in the foreseeable future due to the eruption in April 2023 of a potentially protracted war across Sudan, primarily involving the country's two most powerful armed factions, the SAF and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

## **The Sudanese government's capacity to directly influence developments in Ethiopia and the wider region will be limited in the foreseeable future due to the eruption in April 2023 of a potentially protracted war across Sudan.**

International actors also have a role to play in supporting sustainable peace. Türkiye and China are among the few states which have some influence on both Ethiopia and Eritrea. As guarantors of the 2018 peace accord signed in Addis Ababa between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the United Arab Emirates (UAE)<sup>11</sup> and Saudi Arabia could also leverage their relations with Eritrea to convince it – if necessary – not to act as a spoiler in the achievement of peace in Ethiopia.

When war broke out in Tigray in late 2020, regional conflict resolution mechanisms – particularly the mediation efforts of the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) – initially performed very weakly in the face of horrific atrocities, in part due to institutional factors. Ethiopia hosts the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa and it has simultaneously been the most influential country in the regional bloc IGAD, which has made it difficult for either institution to adopt an assertive or constructive role in ending the conflict quickly. The concentration of power at leadership level across both organizations and the relative institutional weaknesses of both the AU and IGAD also contributed to their inaction. Ultimately, when the conditions on the battlefield were ripe, the AU and IGAD were part of a strengthened mediation process that played an important role in persuading the TPLF and GFDRE to sign the CoHA in Pretoria, and in establishing

---

<sup>10</sup> The Ethiopia–Sudan boundary line was delimited in 1902 as per the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty, agreed between Ethiopia's Emperor Menelik II and the UK on behalf of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium of Sudan. In the following year (1903), a British surveyor, Major Charles Gwynn, demarcated the boundary between the two countries based on the 1902 treaty. Ethiopia rejects this boundary, claiming that it was unilaterally imposed and deliberately left resource-rich areas on the Sudanese side. Following Sudanese independence in 1972, the two countries adopted an exchange of notes in which both agreed to re-demarcate the contested border, using Major Gwynn's demarcation as a basis; however, this has never materialized. See Mulatu, W. (2021), 'The Ethio-Sudan boundary: what's next?', Near East Policy Forum, 15 July 2021, <https://nepf.org.au/index.php/the-ethio-sudan-boundary-what-happened-and-whats-next>.

<sup>11</sup> The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has at various times supplied drones to the Ethiopian National Defence Force.

## Navigating the regionalization of Ethiopia's Tigray conflict

How regional and international actors can help consolidate peace

the subsequent confidence-building measures between the two parties to the Tigray conflict. But it would have been difficult to imagine the fulfilment of this role had it not been for the constant pressure and encouragement from the United States and, to a lesser extent, from the EU.

**Figure 1.** The Horn of Africa and regional interests in the Tigray war



Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) Ethiopia Peace Observatory.

The CoHA offers the GFDRE a point of entry for averting a further haemorrhaging of resources to the war, as well as an opportunity to rebuild its relations with partners in the West.<sup>12</sup> There has been a marked policy shift towards strengthened engagement by both Ethiopia and its partners in the West following the Pretoria

<sup>12</sup> Research interview with senior official in the GFDRE, Addis Ababa, 2 December 2022.

agreement.<sup>13</sup> Donors have an opportunity to play an important role in ensuring the CoHA delivers durable peace, despite the perception that Tigray has become less of a priority in terms of human rights violations, advocacy and humanitarian assistance since the onset of war in Ukraine in early 2022 and following the outbreak of war in Sudan in 2023.<sup>14</sup>

## Methodology

This research paper is based on findings from key informant interviews and desk-based research. The desk-based research examined a variety of secondary sources, including academic and policy research on Ethiopia and its wider regional dynamics, the CoHA document itself, policy reports on regional perspectives on the CoHA, and reports from a range of Ethiopian, Sudanese and international news outlets.

The key informant interviews followed a semi-structured interview process and were largely conducted in person, with only a few being conducted online. Sampling for the key informant interviews was based on two key considerations. First, it was important to comprehensively represent the governments, parties, and regional and international actors that were engaged in the CoHA. To represent this population, the sample included senior leaders from across the Ethiopian political spectrum who were engaged in the CoHA, as well as advisers and spokespersons representing these actors; staffers of the AU and other regional organizations; diplomats from key Western governments; and representatives of multilateral and international organizations.

The second consideration was ensuring the safety of the research team and participants. While the focus on foreign policy considerations reduced the potential risk of conducting interviews, the political and security situation in Ethiopia meant that not all actors affected by the CoHA could be consulted, nor could all societal positions on the agreement be included. Where possible, additional secondary sources were consulted to fill these gaps: however, it is important to acknowledge the difficulties encountered in conducting this research.

---

<sup>13</sup> This was evidenced by the visit to Ethiopia in December 2022 of UK foreign secretary James Cleverly, who took part in talks with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, and the latter's attendance at the US–Africa Summit in the same month. At the same time, the EU was also in the process of normalizing its relationship with Ethiopia following a joint visit to Addis Ababa in early 2023 by Catherine Colonna and Annalena Baerbock, the respective foreign ministers of France and Germany. (See Council of the European Union (2023), 'Ethiopia – Council Conclusions', 24 April 2023, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8610-2023-INIT/en/pdf>). Prime Minister Abiy followed this up with visits to Europe in February and June 2023. Reports in June indicated that the US government had revoked its previous designation of Ethiopia as a state responsible for gross violations of human rights, paving the way for the resumption of development assistance to the country. Gramer, R. (2023), 'U.S. Lifts Human Rights Violation Designation on Ethiopia', *Foreign Policy*, 29 June 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/29/ethiopia-tigray-war-human-rights-violations-designation-biden-us-government>.

<sup>14</sup> Before the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Tigray conflict had been included on the agenda of meetings of the EU's Foreign Affairs Council at least every other month. After the invasion, it was included less often. (Research interview with TPLF member based in Europe, 11 January 2023.)

---

# 02 Mediation efforts and the role of regional organizations

**External pressure has bolstered mediation efforts by the African Union, which struggled to establish trust earlier in the conflict. The CoHA is holding, but the gains made under the agreement must be protected and the humanitarian situation across northern Ethiopia must urgently be addressed.**

---

Before the outbreak of the Tigray war, the AU had demonstrated an increasing commitment to humanitarian principles under the Responsibility to Protect umbrella.<sup>15</sup> But following the start of the war, pressure from its host Ethiopia saw the continental bloc revert to older principles of non-interference under a pan-Africanist narrative.<sup>16</sup> The AU's peace and security architecture was therefore disengaged from internal Ethiopian dynamics, including in Tigray, and the organization was unable to effectively lead on mediating the conflict. Moreover, relations between the Tigrayan authorities in Mekelle and the AU were strained in the early days

---

<sup>15</sup> Negm, N. (2022), 'The African Union's humanitarian policies: A closer look at Africa's regional institutions and practice', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 104(920-1), pp. 1918-29, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383122000479>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 1920: '[The] AU has robust regional humanitarian laws and institutions. [...] The AU's Constitutive Act marked a complete shift from the OAU's cardinal principles by redefining sovereignty. Sovereignty was no longer considered as absolute'. The main challenges lie in the lack of implementation.

of the war after Moussa Faki Mahamat, the chair of the AU Commission, classified the GFDRE's offensive in Tigray as a 'legitimate' law enforcement operation,<sup>17</sup> in the face of mounting reports of atrocities. Faki's statement met with heavy criticism.<sup>18</sup>

Growing condemnation of the AU's inaction on mediation led to the appointment in August 2021 of former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo as AU High Representative for the Horn of Africa region, with a specific mandate on Ethiopia. The AU sought to reassert leadership with respect to the Tigray conflict, but Obasanjo struggled with staffing, budget and scheduling issues for much of his first year in office. Moreover, he found it difficult to gain the trust and confidence of Tigrayans due to widespread suspicions that he was colluding with the GFDRE.<sup>19</sup> An offensive by federal government and allied forces from late August to October 2022 resulted in a series of heavy battlefield losses for the Tigrayan forces and mounting indiscriminate attacks against civilians in Tigray. These defeats, alongside a bolstered negotiation effort that included ongoing pressure from the US, coupled with the addition of former Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta and South Africa's Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka as co-mediators alongside Obasanjo, led to TPLF acceptance of the AU negotiations, despite strong reservations. Kenyatta's participation and South Africa's leadership were key factors in reaching an agreement.<sup>20</sup>

The Pretoria negotiations, which took place over a matter of days, saw a TPLF vision of a phased peace process lasting 15 to 18 months set against government demands for an immediate peace deal that would lead to the unlocking of much-needed development aid and debt relief.<sup>21</sup> The TPLF's growing military weakness and lack of options for resupply, as well as the worsening humanitarian situation in the region and the expectation that the tilt in the balance of power would lead to further Tigrayan suffering, led the Tigrayan leadership to conclude that its only options were either a negotiated settlement or a long, difficult guerrilla war. The CoHA was considered a victory for the GFDRE, with the TPLF agreeing to disarm and accept the federal government's sovereignty over Tigray.

The CoHA has thus increased pressure on the TPLF leadership, with the Tigrayan opposition and segments of the diaspora calling for accountability and an end to TPLF dominance over the governance of the region.<sup>22</sup> Tigray-based opposition groups have largely boycotted participation in the TPLF-dominated interim administration, and in March 2023 hundreds of wounded Tigrayan soldiers protested in the regional capital of Mekelle, demanding better conditions.<sup>23</sup> In March the UN and US suspended food aid in Tigray amid allegations of the misappropriation and diversion of food assistance that was intended for people placed in dire need

<sup>17</sup> APA News (2020), 'AU backs Ethiopia's Tigray war', 21 December 2020, <https://apanews.net/2020/12/21/au-backs-ethiopia-tigray-war>.

<sup>18</sup> TGHAT (2021), 'Three Tigray opposition parties write an open letter to Moussa Faki Mahamat, asking for the AU to distance itself from HR violations investigations in Tigray', 18 March 2021, <https://www.tghat.com/2021/03/18/three-tigray-opposition-parties-write-an-open-letter-to-moussa-faki-mahamat-asking-for-the-au-to-distance-itself-from-hr-violations-investigations-in-tigray>.

<sup>19</sup> Research interview with staffer at the AU Commission, Nairobi, 17 September 2022; research interview with senior official in the GFDRE, Addis Ababa, 2 December 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Research interview with senior official in the GFDRE, Addis Ababa, 2 December 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Research interview with senior official in the GFDRE, Addis Ababa, 2 December 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Research interview with a TPLF member based in Europe, 11 January 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Kristos, M. G. (2023), 'News: Incoming Tigray interim leader pledges to address grievances of disabled Tigrayan soldiers following protest rally in Mekelle', *Addis Standard*, 22 March 2023, <https://addisstandard.com/news-incoming-tigray-interim-leader-pledges-to-address-grievances-of-disabled-tigrayan-soldiers-following-protest-rally-in-mekelle>.

by the conflict.<sup>24</sup> Getachew, the leader of the Interim Regional Administration, has promised to address these issues, but such demands on the TPLF, as well as on the GFDRE, are likely to increase over the short to medium term, particularly if peace is not quickly translated into improvements in the everyday lives of the Tigrayan population.

Initially, the GFDRE envisaged an ambitious four-step approach to normalizing relations with Tigray. This included substantial steps towards the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of Tigrayan fighters, followed by the establishment of an interim administration in Tigray (including but not limited to the TPLF), the delisting of the TPLF as a terrorist organization and, finally, a regional election now tentatively scheduled to take place before September 2024. Some of these elements were subsequently brought forward, notably the establishment of the interim administration and the removal of the TPLF's terrorist designation. In May 2023 the AU's Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission confirmed that the disarmament of the TPLF forces was 85–90 per cent complete.<sup>25</sup> Despite these important advances, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia rejected the TPLF's request to be reinstated as a legal political party; the decision prompted complaints on the part of the TPLF and the interim administration of Tigray, both of which warned that it risked threatening the stability of the Pretoria agreement.<sup>26</sup> Unless resolved amicably, this issue could strain the relationship between the TPLF and GFDRE.

Immediately following the signature of the CoHA, the GFDRE considered the holding of a regional election in Tigray under federal auspices as being a crucial step towards the full resumption of its relations with the TPLF. However, with the agreement holding and cordial relations developing with the TPLF leadership, the federal government's prioritization of elections in Tigray has diminished somewhat. Moreover, the TPLF was reported to have nominated a deputy commissioner and additional experts, at the request of the GFDRE, to serve in the newly established National Rehabilitation Commission, led by former minister and ambassador Teshome Toga. This promised to be an important confidence-building measure, given that the commission is entrusted with overseeing the complete withdrawal of Eritrean forces in addition to the demobilization and reintegration of Tigrayan combatants.<sup>27</sup>

The TPLF leadership is hoping that a rapid improvement in the humanitarian situation and a normalization of life in Tigray will quieten criticism of the deal both within the region itself and among its influential diaspora constituencies. However, the situation in Tigray continues to worsen, with the regional administration

---

<sup>24</sup> World Food Programme (2023), 'WFP statement on diversion of food aid in Ethiopia', 3 May 2023, <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-statement-diversion-food-aid-ethiopia-0>.

<sup>25</sup> Tigray Television via Twitter (2023), 'Briefing by AU Monitoring, Verification, and Compliance Mission', 19 May 2023, [https://twitter.com/Tigrai\\_TV/status/1659625141679079442](https://twitter.com/Tigrai_TV/status/1659625141679079442).

<sup>26</sup> *Addis Standard* (2023), 'News: Tigray interim admin, TPLF say election board decision unacceptable legally, politically; caution it endangers existence of interim admin, renders peace process ownerless', 17 May 2023, <https://addisstandard.com/news-tigray-interim-admin-tplf-say-election-board-decision-unacceptably-legally-politically-caution-it-endangers-existence-of-interim-admin-renders-peace-process-ownerless>.

<sup>27</sup> Research interview with senior official in the GFDRE, Addis Ababa, 8 January 2023; research interview with Western diplomat, virtual, 12 January 2023.

announcing in July 2023 that over 100 people had died due to hunger in the three months since the suspension of food aid.<sup>28</sup> Momentum still lies with the CoHA's supporters, particularly in the wake of the resumption of some basic services.<sup>29</sup> In order to secure additional buy-in, the TPLF has indicated that it plans to expand the cabinet of the Interim Regional Administration by including representatives of the diaspora, opposition and civil society organizations.<sup>30</sup> However, in reality the administration is still principally composed of members of the TPLF and the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF),<sup>31</sup> with only a few representatives of one or other of the region's opposition parties.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, reports from Mekelle suggest that internal fissures are rife within the TPLF, where several members of the 'old guard' are trying to undermine Getachew and his cabinet.<sup>33</sup> To prevent backsliding on the Tigrayan side, the gains made under the CoHA must be protected, principally through the resumption of large-scale and unhindered humanitarian engagement involving international aid agencies, the full resumption of basic services in the region and the honouring of the provisions of the agreement.

## How civil war evolved to regional conflict: the implications for mediation

Consolidating the gains brought about by the Pretoria agreement will require the GFDRE and its regional partners to navigate dynamics that have their roots outside Ethiopia's borders. What began as a civil war in Ethiopia has developed into a regional conflict with several layers of interest and influence (see Figure 2). Eritrea is deeply implicated; the Sudanese military-led regime has been involved (with suggestions that Egypt has also engaged through a proxy); there was growing concern among other neighbouring countries, including Djibouti and Kenya; and the GFDRE is receiving significant support from other regional and international actors, including China, Türkiye and the UAE.<sup>34</sup>

As illustrated below, Eritrea had a direct involvement in the Tigray war and Sudan was indirectly involved. Eritrean troops fought alongside the Ethiopian government and regional allies throughout the two years of the conflict. Several reports suggest that Eritrean forces committed grave human rights violations and war crimes in Tigray. For its part, Sudan annexed large swathes of land along the common border following the outbreak of the Tigray war, leading to a diplomatic row between the Ethiopian and Sudanese governments that was further exacerbated due to Sudan's alleged support to the TPLF. The US played

<sup>28</sup> Voice of America Amharic (2023), 'በትግራይ ክልል ከአንድ ሺሕ በላይ ሰዎች በረገጥ እንደሞቱ ተገለጸ' [Tigray Interim Administration said that more than one thousand people died of starvation in the Tigray region], 24 July 2023, <https://amharic.voanews.com/a/tigray-humanitarian-update/7193882.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Tigray Television (2023), 'Tigray State Council launches its Summit this morning discussing unfolding issues', 23 January 2023, <https://tigraitv.com/en/tigray-state-council-launches-its-summit-this-morning-discussing-unfolding-issues>.

<sup>30</sup> Garowe Online (2023), 'Tigray Interim Administration will be established only after mutual consultations', 6 March 2023, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/world/africa/tplf-tigray-interim-administration-will-be-established-only-after-mutual-consultations>.

<sup>31</sup> The name 'Tigray Defence Forces' was adopted by Tigrayan fighters during the war. Many of the group – including at senior leadership level – are not members of the TPLF.

<sup>32</sup> Research interview with opposition leader in Tigray, 18 January 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Research interview with Tigray opposition leader, Addis Ababa, 2 March 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Annette Weber, EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa (2022), *EUSR mission to Ethiopia, 14–16 September 2022*, <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/files/2022/09/02-Weber-brf-comments-250922.pdf>.

a key role in the negotiation process, and was trying to build a concerted regional mechanism to respond to Ethiopia's crisis alongside the AU, IGAD, UAE, Kenya and Djibouti. The UAE, Türkiye and China played a role in providing military equipment to the GFDRE.

**Figure 2.** Spheres of interest and influence in the Tigray war



Note: IGAD – the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

Among Ethiopia's closest neighbours, Eritrea has both the motive and the means to sustain the conflict in several respects (see Chapter 3). Relations between Ethiopia and Sudan had seen a significant improvement before war broke out in Khartoum in April 2023. The conflict in Sudan notwithstanding, any sustained improvement in bilateral relations is likely to lie in reaching a lasting settlement on their disputed border region.<sup>35</sup> Egypt, a close ally of Sudan's military regime, wants to see a resolution of the long-standing disagreement over the operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD),<sup>36</sup> and may be opposed to a thawing of relations between Sudan and Ethiopia for fear that a unified negotiating bloc might emerge to oppose Egyptian interests. With a power

<sup>35</sup> Interviews with Sudanese officials suggest that relations between Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed and Sudanese leader Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan have improved considerably following meetings in Nairobi (in July 2022), Bahir Dar (October 2022) and Khartoum (January 2023). Before the war in Sudan started, Abiy and Burhan had agreed to resolve the Ethiopia–Sudan border dispute through negotiations. Abiy agreed to loosen ties with the paramilitary leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) and ensure that Sudan would be able to receive sustainable supplies of electricity from Ethiopia. In exchange, Burhan agreed that Sudan would refrain from supporting Ethiopian opposition groups – without, however, specifying them. <sup>36</sup> Egypt and Sudan opposed the construction of the \$4.6 billion GERD mega dam, in the Benishangul-Gumuz region about 40 kilometres from the border with Sudan, from the outset in 2011, with Egypt claiming historic rights over the usage of Nile waters based on the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian agreement and the 1959 bilateral agreement between Egypt and Sudan. For its part, Ethiopia argues that these agreements are obsolete, and Ethiopia was not properly represented. The long-standing dispute over the Nile in general, and GERD in particular, has led to persistent tensions in the bilateral relationship between Ethiopia and Egypt.

generation capacity of 6,450 MW, the GERD, when completed, is expected to be the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa as well as among the 20 largest in the world.<sup>37</sup>

Other regional neighbours have worries about the regional impacts of the Tigray conflict. Djibouti, which relies heavily on its role as a transit port for landlocked Ethiopia's trade, is anxious that conflicts in Ethiopia could further weaken its economy and drive a resurgence of irredentism on the part of its Afar and Issa-Somali communities. Djibouti is also concerned about the thawing of relations between Eritrea and other countries in the region (Somalia and Kenya in particular), notably in the wake of Eritrea rejoining the regional bloc IGAD in June 2023, after a 16-year absence. Somalia is concerned that its war on the Islamist insurgent group al-Shabaab could be affected by Ethiopia's internal turmoil, given that Somalia relies on support from its fellow frontline states, including Ethiopian troops. For Kenya, crises in Ethiopia could exacerbate intercommunal conflicts along the two states' common borders and create a refugee crisis.<sup>38</sup> As Kenya is among the few countries in Africa to which Ethiopians are able to travel without a visa, the Kenyan government was concerned that the conflict in Ethiopia would affect its internal security.

Ensuring that these tangled regional interests are aligned with a sustainable peace in Tigray will demand enhanced coordination, the harmonization of parallel mediation tracks and careful sequencing between Ethiopia's partners, particularly the US and the EU (and the latter's member states). The US and EU played a crucial role in the mediation process between the TPLF and GFDRE, and in subsequent trust-building initiatives between the two parties. But fulfilling this role continues to demand a nuanced understanding of the motives and aspirations of the state parties involved, as well as effective coordination with existing actors. Furthermore, it necessitates a more strategic approach that takes into consideration the limited direct influence that can be wielded by the US and EU towards Eritrea, as well as recognizing the limitations of 'adverse' measures, such as aid conditionality and withdrawal. Such an approach should be nuanced, balanced, and based on incentives and benchmarks.

The following chapter offers an overview of the key regional players and their roles with respect to Ethiopia's Tigray conflict. Some of these actors have chosen to ally themselves with the GFDRE, while others have supported the Tigrayan forces. Notably, the inaction of some key players has contributed to the protracted misery affecting the northern part of the country. This chapter seeks to provide insights as to how the principal regional actors can work together to achieve consolidated peace in northern Ethiopia.

---

<sup>37</sup> Tsegay Hagos, 'Ethiopia: GERD increases generation capacity', 28 February 2017, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201702280364.html>; The Economist (2020), 'The bitter dispute over Africa's largest dam', 14 July 2020, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/07/04/the-bitter-dispute-over-africas-largest-dam>.  
<sup>38</sup> Kaledzi, I. (2021), 'Ethiopia's war triggers fears in Kenya, South Sudan', Deutsche Welle, 11 August 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopias-war-triggers-fears-in-kenya-south-sudan/a-59758399>.

---

# 03

## Key regional players and their interests

**Eritrea and Sudan, the principal regional actors in relation to the Tigray conflict, have both historically had charged relations with Ethiopia. Their diverging interests present distinct challenges for Ethiopia and must be carefully balanced in the process of consolidating peace.**

---

### Eritrea

Eritrea remains a major force in Ethiopia's political and security dynamics. Eritrea's explicit motivation for engaging in the Tigray war has been the elimination of the TPLF and, by extension, the removal of any perceived threat to the Eritrean government emanating from Ethiopia. This threat had been synonymous with the Ethiopian federal state, of which the TPLF was the leading partner until 2018.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> The TPLF and the Eritrean ruling elites have a long history of shared struggle against the Marxist/Leninist government of the Derg in Ethiopia, dating from the 1970s and lasting until 1991. Hundreds of thousands of civilians lost their lives during the totalitarian Derg regime, and at least a dozen ethnic secessionist groups operated throughout the country. Notable among these were the TPLF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, whose successor, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, is currently the ruling party in Eritrea. In 1991 these two insurgent groups (with support from others) managed to topple the Derg; the TPLF established an ethno-linguistic coalition with other parties in Ethiopia and became the ruling party. The TPLF-led Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime supported the independence of Eritrea, and the two countries had a cordial relationship until the outbreak of the deadly border war in 1998. In 2000 both countries signed the Algiers Agreement, which concluded that the disputed territory of Badme belonged to Eritrea, but both continued to support regime opponents in each other's country until 2018. Eritrea's President Isaias has held the TPLF/EPRDF regime responsible for Eritrea's diplomatic isolation and underdevelopment.

Eritrea is arguably the only one of the primary belligerents in the Tigray war to have achieved some of its goals: a significant weakening of the TPLF and the devastation of northern Ethiopia, including the near-decimation of Tigray's economy. Eritrea has also captured territory that it has long claimed along its shared boundary with Tigray, some in line with that which was delimited by the Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) in the 2002 Algiers Agreement, which was fully accepted by the GFDRE in 2018. Eritrea has used its alliance with the Abiy administration and its participation in the war as pretexts to encroach into vast areas of northern Ethiopia. Until April 2021, both Ethiopia and Eritrea consistently denied the presence of Eritrean forces in Tigray despite mounting evidence – not only of their presence, but also of their involvement in gross human rights violations against civilians in the areas they captured.<sup>40</sup> In February 2021 the UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs claimed that up to 40 per cent of Tigray's territory was controlled by Eritrean forces.<sup>41</sup> Eritrea has also sought to build strong links with elements of certain Ethiopian subnational ethnolinguistic groups.<sup>42</sup> This signifies that Eritrean president Isaias Afewerki has crafted a contingency to protect his interests in Ethiopia, with or without the consent of Prime Minister Abiy and the GFDRE.

Confidential reports suggest that the relationship between the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments has deteriorated considerably since the signing of the CoHA, with tension between the two countries increasing due to Eritrea's exclusion from the negotiation process. Moreover, since the signing of the CoHA, Ethiopia has openly expressed a desire to play an active role in the Red Sea region and to secure its own access to the sea.<sup>43</sup> Prime Minister Abiy is reported to have said that Ethiopia will seek to secure direct port access, either peacefully or by force.<sup>44</sup> This will have caught the attention of Eritrea's leaders, given that Ethiopia lost access to two Red Sea ports – Assab and Massawa – and became landlocked when Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia in 1991.

No matter how this conflict is finally resolved, neither Ethiopia nor Tigray will recover quickly from it. Many Amhara elites believe that the TPLF helped the GFDRE in its fight against Fano insurgents in Amhara region in August 2023, and this is likely to complicate the reconciliation and reconstruction process.<sup>45</sup> The CoHA will likely see the TPLF and other Tigrayan nationalists remain in control of Tigray, contrary to Eritrean aspirations that they will be completely defeated. The GFDRE has also agreed to ensure the withdrawal of Eritrean forces and the protection of Ethiopian

<sup>40</sup> BBC News (2021), 'Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: US calls for Eritrea troops to withdraw', 27 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55825560>.

<sup>41</sup> AP Newswire (2021), 'UN: Ethiopia may not have control of a large part of Tigray', 4 February 2021, *Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/un-ethiopia-may-not-have-control-of-a-large-part-of-tigray-ethiopia-un-eritrea-mark-lowcock-government-b1797612.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Amhara region militias captured vast areas of Western Tigray/Welkait from Tigray in November 2020, and reports suggest that Welkait's provisional administrators visited Asmara for 'consultation' on security in the course of the war. Reports have also indicated that Eritrean members of the Afar ethnic group, under the leadership of commanders from the Eritrean Defence Forces, were deployed inside Ethiopia's Afar region at the height of the conflict in October 2022. See The Africa Report, 'Eritrea plunges back into Ethiopia's Tigray war', 22 September 2022, <https://www.theafricareport.com/243358/eritrea-plunges-back-into-ethiopia-tigray-war>.

<sup>43</sup> ENA (2022), 'Ethiopia to Pursue Interest on Red Sea, Expand Port Options in Region: Demeke Mekonnen', 17 May 2022, [https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en\\_35793](https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en_35793).

<sup>44</sup> Al Jazeera (2023), 'How will landlocked Ethiopia get direct access to a port?', 26 July 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2023/7/26/how-will-landlocked-ethiopia-get-direct-access-to-a-port>.

<sup>45</sup> *Addis Standard* (2023), 'Tigray Interim Administration denies involvement in Amhara conflict, affirms commitment to Pretoria peace agreement', 14 August 2023, <https://addisstandard.com/news-tigray-interim-administration-denies-involvement-in-amhara-conflict-affirms-commitment-to-pretoria-peace-agreement>.

territorial sovereignty. Reports have suggested the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from a few cities and towns in Tigray, which could be a step in the right direction.<sup>46</sup> However, Eritrean forces remain present and active, notably in rural parts of northern Tigray, and dispute is likely to continue over contested areas on either side of the border.<sup>47</sup>

Eritrean interests therefore remain pivotal to consolidating peace in Tigray, while presenting a significant diplomatic challenge. Only a handful of countries have enough influence with Eritrea to attempt to moderate their policy in Ethiopia – and it is unclear if they would be willing to pursue this leverage. Eritrea enjoys support from China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, including for its infrastructure, logistics and military equipment. Saudi Arabia and the UAE were also key players in achieving the landmark 2018 peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea that reversed decades of enmity. China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are also among the largest investors in Ethiopia, and consequently have increasing influence, as well as a shared interest in a more stable Horn of Africa region.

Eritrea has consolidated its relationships with Russia and China since 2018, with both countries' foreign ministers making visits to Asmara – in the case of Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, as recently as January 2023. Isaias's visit to China in May 2023 featured a red carpet, a guard of honour military procession and a 21-gun salute,<sup>48</sup> and during his visit to Moscow in early June he defended Russia's invasion of Ukraine.<sup>49</sup>

## Sudan

Sudan and Ethiopia have a long history of regional rivalry, often played out through proxies and the provision of support to the other's regime opponents.<sup>50</sup> The two countries severed ties following the foiled assassination attempt in 1995 in Addis Ababa against Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, which Ethiopia blamed on Sudan. Relations recovered in 1998 after the outbreak of the Ethiopian–Eritrean war, and remained cordial through to the independence of South Sudan in 2011 and the death of Ethiopian prime minister and former president Meles Zenawi in 2012. The acceptance of Ethiopia's deployment of forces as part of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), following the dispute between Sudan and South Sudan over the territory, as well as its fierce rejection of the arrest warrant issued in 2009

<sup>46</sup> Anna, C. (2023), 'Witnesses: Eritrean troops withdrawing from towns in Tigray', AP News, 20 January 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/politics-ethiopia-government-eritrea-business-50d9739687f39efb780273884f12b890>.

<sup>47</sup> *Addis Standard* (2023), 'Eritrea summons British envoy for remarks by Ambassador in Ethiopia on troops' withdrawal', 11 August 2023, <https://addisstandard.com/asdailycoop-eritrea-summons-british-envoy-for-remarks-by-ambassador-in-ethiopia-on-troops-withdrawal>.

<sup>48</sup> Solomon, S. (2023), 'In State Visit, Eritrea and China Signal Deeper Partnership', Voice of America, 22 May 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/in-state-visit-eritrea-and-china-signal-deeper-partnership-/7104234.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Ruptly (2023), 'Russia: Moscow has "right to defend itself" – Eritrean President Afwerki interviewed during his first visit to Russia', 6 June 2023, <https://www.ruptly.tv/en/videos/20230606-502-Russia-Moscow-has-right-to-defend-itself-Eritrean-President-Afwerki-interviewed-during-his-first-visit-to-Russia>.

<sup>50</sup> During the 1970s and 1980s Ethiopia–Sudan relations appeared to be engaged in a symmetrical dance based on the mantra 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. Ethiopia supported the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) against Sudan, which supported the Eritreans and Tigrayans against Ethiopia. Rapprochement faltered after 1991 when Sudanese diplomats facilitated an attempt to assassinate Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak on Bole Road in Addis Ababa.

by the International Criminal Court against Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir, were key markers in determining the positive relationship between the two countries during the Meles–Bashir era.

However, shifts in the bilateral relationship occurred following the emergence of new governments and leaderships in both countries in 2018 and 2019. Relations deteriorated substantially when Sudan was accused of taking advantage of the Ethiopian government's distraction following the outbreak of the Tigray conflict, moving to occupy the disputed borderland territory of Al Fashaga. Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, chair of Sudan's Sovereign Council and commander-in-chief of the SAF, argued that the decision to take over Al Fashaga aligned with Abiy's request for Sudan to close its border with Tigray following the start of the war.<sup>51</sup> Ethiopia has alleged that Sudan supplied arms to the TPLF during the conflict – a claim denied by both the TPLF and the Sudanese military<sup>52</sup> – although the SAF did maintain close relations with the TPLF during the war,<sup>53</sup> providing safe haven to ex-Tigrayan UN peacekeepers who sought asylum in Sudan and later fought the ENDF and allied forces from eastern Sudan.<sup>54</sup>

**Should a Sudanese military leadership be consolidated through war, there is a risk that it may seek to use the issues around both the GERD and Al Fashaga as a tool to garner national sympathy and mobilization, or as a bargaining chip in a continued proxy conflict.**

The devastating war in Sudan is again likely to alter the dynamics of relations between Ethiopia and Sudan, and the calculations of their leaders, although the strategic interests remain the same. The return of a civilian government in Sudan would probably see a focus on domestic matters and on immediate concerns, including reconstruction efforts. Should a Sudanese military leadership be consolidated through war, there is a risk that it may seek to use the issues around both the GERD and Al Fashaga as a tool to garner national sympathy and mobilization, or as a bargaining chip in a continued proxy conflict. The Sudanese military regime has sought to paint the IGAD Quartet heads of state mediation efforts, which include Ethiopia, as being sympathetic to the RSF. According to well-placed sources, Abiy is working in tandem with Dr Workneh Gebeyehu, the chief executive of IGAD and former Ethiopian minister of foreign affairs, to create a workable peace process behind closed doors.<sup>55</sup> Ethiopia has also facilitated a soft border arrangement whereby more than 27,000 people managed to cross from

<sup>51</sup> Research interview with veteran Sudanese diplomat, Addis Ababa, 23 March 2023.

<sup>52</sup> Sudan Tribune (2022), 'Ethiopia downed plane carrying weapons to TPLF rebels', 24 August 2022, <https://sudantribune.com/article263195>.

<sup>53</sup> Research interview with mid-ranking Ethiopian diplomat, Addis Ababa, 17 November 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Marks, S. and Alamin, M. (2022), 'Ex-UN Peacekeepers Battle for Control of Key Ethiopian Town', 2 September 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-02/ex-un-peacekeepers-battle-for-control-of-key-ethiopian-town>.

<sup>55</sup> Research interview with Western diplomat, Addis Ababa, 18 May 2023.

Sudan into Ethiopia between 21 April and 22 May 2023.<sup>56</sup> Ethiopia is concerned that the prolonged crisis in Sudan could lead to increased arms-trafficking, other forms of illicit trade and the establishment of 'safe havens' for anti-government insurgent groups along its border with Sudan.

Historically, however, Sudan has been anxious about Ethiopia being close to Eritrea, particularly given Eritrean involvement in eastern Sudan (including through groups such as the Beja), and about the alliance between Eritrea and elements in Ethiopia's Amhara region.<sup>57</sup> Despite some media reporting of clashes along the border following the outbreak of conflict in Khartoum, Ethiopia is trying to remain neutral in the Sudanese conflict. Abiy seems interested in resolving the issue amicably, despite calls from some Ethiopian constituencies to use the security vacuum in Sudan to restore lands which are alleged to have been annexed through force. The future of the contested Al Fashaga region remains uncertain, as does what these interlinked dynamics might mean for regional peace.

Divergences remain between Ethiopia and Sudan over the GERD, informed by Sudan's strengthened relationship with Egypt in the past few years. This relationship is largely dictated by the historical link between the armed forces of both countries, which signed a military cooperation agreement covering training and border security in 2021.<sup>58</sup> Differences may intensify as the need for negotiations and data exchanges on overspill flood releases from the dam becomes more urgent. Sudan's demands over the GERD are limited and largely technical, but further progress on alignment has been prevented by Ethiopian anger over the occupation of Al Fashaga.<sup>59</sup> Burhan's visit to Ethiopia in October 2022 signalled a *détente*, which was consolidated by Abiy's reciprocal visit to Sudan in late January 2023. However, there has yet to be any demonstrable or tangible change in Ethiopian-Sudanese relations following the start of the war in Sudan.

---

<sup>56</sup> Bolliger, S. and Valassopoulou, Y. (2023), 'On the border: Sudan conflict forces thousands to flee to Ethiopia', European Commission, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 1 June 2023, [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/border-sudan-conflict-forces-thousands-flee-ethiopia\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/border-sudan-conflict-forces-thousands-flee-ethiopia_en).

<sup>57</sup> Research interview with senior Sudanese diplomat, Khartoum, 17 May 2022.

<sup>58</sup> Farhat, B. (2023), 'Egypt, Sudan hold joint military drills as Nile dispute with Ethiopia drags on', Al-Monitor, 4 April 2023, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/04/egypt-sudan-hold-joint-military-drills-nile-dispute-ethiopia-drags>.

<sup>59</sup> Research interview with senior Sudanese government official, Khartoum, 18 May 2022.

---

# 04 Other influential regional players

**Kenya has played a key role in regional mediation efforts on the Tigray conflict and has promoted the need for unity and integrity of states across Africa. If relations between Ethiopia and Egypt can be progressed after years of tensions centring on the use of the Nile waters, it could provide opportunities to lessen external interference and enhance outcomes towards regional stability, including in Tigray.**

---

## Kenya

The bilateral relationship between Kenya and Ethiopia was maintained during the Tigray conflict, with Kenya's overriding concern remaining the humanitarian, regional security and economic impacts of any significant sociopolitical shocks occurring on its northern neighbour's territory (for example, exposure to Ethiopian internal unrest in the context of a long and porous border, and the presence of multiple cross-border ethnic groups). Kenyan officials repeatedly stated that the Kenyan government sought to avoid the disintegration of Ethiopia at any cost, and to shift the focus of the AU back to the protection of the unity and integrity of African states. Kenya's interest in mediating in the conflict in Tigray (and in the separate conflict in Oromia) was also framed by the country's significant economic interest in Ethiopia.<sup>60</sup> Kenya's Safaricom was awarded a licence to operate telecommunications services in Ethiopia in May 2021, for a fee of \$850 million, making it the single largest foreign direct investment into Ethiopia at that time.<sup>61</sup> Kenya also indirectly benefited from Ethiopia's suspension from the US's African

---

<sup>60</sup> Ngugi, B. (2021), 'Safaricom consortium wins Ethiopia licence bid on Sh91.8bn offer', *Business Daily*, 22 May 2021, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/news/safaricom-consortium-wins-ethiopia-license-bid-3410236>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) preferential trade programme in January 2022, following the onset of the Tigray war.<sup>62</sup> Kenya hosts one of the largest Ethiopian refugee populations in Africa – at the peak of the political crackdown in 2021, several thousand Ethiopians fled to Kenya, and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) was reported to have sought refuge within Kenya's Oromo communities.<sup>63</sup> In March 2022, Ethiopia named Major General Bacha Debele, a controversial military figure who was the face of the Tigray war, as its ambassador to Kenya. The move heralded a shift in Ethiopia's policy towards Kenya, with security interests amplified alongside economic priorities.

**In March 2022, Ethiopia named Major General Bacha Debele, a controversial military figure who was the face of the Tigray war, as its ambassador to Kenya. The move heralded a shift in Ethiopia's policy towards Kenya, with security interests amplified alongside economic priorities.**

With significant economic, diplomatic and military means at its disposal, Kenyatta spearheaded regional mediation efforts with backing from the US, which between 2021 and 2022 included outreach to Ethiopian prime minister Abiy and Tigrayan representatives. As a rotating member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) representing Africa between 2020 and 2022, Kenya also played an active role in withstanding calls for sanctions against the GFDRE. In mid-September 2022 the new Kenyan president William Ruto appointed his predecessor Kenyatta as a peace envoy to Ethiopia and the Great Lakes region.<sup>64</sup> Following pressure from the US and TPLF, Kenyatta was invited to join the AU-led mediation team on the Tigray conflict. His inclusion was intended to balance Obasanjo, who had been a difficult interlocutor for the West and who was viewed with suspicion by senior TPLF leaders. Kenyatta was seen as neutral, and his seniority positioned him as a much-needed bridge between the AU and Kenyan mediation tracks. He is reported to have played a crucial role at the Pretoria talks, helping to achieve agreement on the two most contentious obstacles – the future of Western Tigray/Welkait and the need for the removal of Eritrean forces from Tigray.<sup>65</sup> In the wake of the Pretoria peace conference, Kenya also facilitated two further meetings in which the majority of the proposals for implementing the CoHA were discussed by representatives of the TPLF and the GFDRE.

<sup>62</sup> Following Ethiopia's suspension from the AGOA, many companies relocated to Kenya. According to one report, Kenya earned an additional 10.2 billion Kenyan shillings (around \$82 million) from its exports to the US in 2022 because of companies moving to Kenya from Ethiopia. Standard Media via AGOA.info (2022), 'Kenya "reaps Sh10 billion after Ethiopia's ban from AGOA deal"', 24 May 2022, <https://agoa.info/news/article/15991-kenya-reaps-sh10-billion-after-ethiopia-s-ban-from-agoa-deal.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Research interview with Horn of Africa researcher, Nairobi, 29 November 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Maina, M. (2022), 'President William Ruto appoints Uhuru Kenyatta as envoy to Ethiopia, Great Lakes region', *The Standard*, 15 September 2022, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/counties/article/2001455632/president-ruto-appoints-uhuru-as-envoy-to-ethiopia-great-lakes-region>.

<sup>65</sup> Research interview with senior official in the GFDRE, Addis Ababa, 3 December 2022.

## Egypt

Ethiopia's relations with Egypt have been characterized by long-running tensions centred around their strategic interests in utilizing the waters of the Nile. Both countries have populations in excess of 100 million, for whom the Nile waters are a critical resource: for Egypt, the priority is water security, with 95 per cent of its population living close to the Nile Basin, while for Ethiopia, the hydroelectric potential of the Abay (known outside Ethiopia as the Blue Nile), which will be realized with the completion of the GERD, represents a crucial element of the government's development ambitions. Egypt has also been hostile to Ethiopia's interest to establish a naval or military base on the Red Sea via Djibouti or Eritrea,<sup>66</sup> leveraging its substantial diplomatic heft to ensure that Ethiopia was not included in the Red Sea Council, a forum established by Saudi Arabia in 2020 that has so far had little bearing on cross-regional issues.<sup>67</sup>

The construction of the GERD has put the two countries increasingly at odds within the region over the last 12 years. For several years Egypt strengthened its alliance with the government of Eritrea, in part due to the latter's hostile relations with Ethiopia between 1998 and 2018. Egypt's relationship with Eritrea – which had been largely tactical and aimed at containing Ethiopia – was weakened after Abiy came to power in Ethiopia, due to the resumption of diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the conclusion of the peace agreement between the two countries in 2018. It was further undermined by the collaboration between Ethiopia and Eritrea from 2020 in the context of the Tigray war. During the war, Ethiopia alleged Egyptian collusion with the TPLF and other Ethiopian armed groups, but did not provide evidence to back up these claims.<sup>68</sup>

Egypt has long sought to influence outcomes in Sudan to maintain its own security and economic interests, with its southerly neighbour viewed as Egypt's gateway to sub-Saharan Africa and a critical ally in asserting its interests on the Nile, including tripartite negotiations over the GERD. Egypt has cultivated good relations with the post-coup authorities in Sudan and maintains significant influence on key Sudanese actors, most notably through its military cooperation with the SAF. Egypt is aware that if a pro-democracy civilian government were to take root in Sudan, its own influence would likely wane, and that this could have consequences for its interests with respect to the Nile waters and the GERD, particularly as the project moves towards completion.

Egypt's 'red lines' on the Nile waters remain unclear, despite repeated statements from the Egyptian government that it views water security as a national security priority. In mid-July 2023, following a meeting between Prime Minister Abiy and Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Cairo, Ethiopia and Egypt agreed to restart negotiations towards reaching agreement on the filling of the GERD

<sup>66</sup> Gomaa, A. (2021), 'Ethiopia's plan to build Red Sea military bases fuels tension with Egypt', Al-Monitor, 8 June 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/06/ethiopias-plan-build-red-sea-military-bases-fuels-tension-egypt>.

<sup>67</sup> Bagnetto, L. A. (2020), 'New Red Sea alliance launched by Saudi Arabia, but excludes key players', RFI, 10 January 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20200108-new-red-sea-alliance-formed-saudi-arabia-notable-exclusions>.

<sup>68</sup> Anadolu (2021), 'Egypt working to destabilize Ethiopia', East Africa, 23 January 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/egypt-working-to-destabilize-ethiopia-east-africa/2120191>.

and its operations within four months.<sup>69</sup> This dramatic shift and signal towards the possibility of an improved bilateral relationship has been enabled because of several factors. First, the construction of over 90 per cent of the dam and the commencement of the fourth filling during the rainy season (June to September) means that Egypt must now accommodate the reality of the dam. Second, Ethiopia's assurance that it will prevent significant harm to downstream countries during the current filling goes some way towards establishing trust ahead of tripartite negotiations, expected to take place in the UAE. Third, the domestic landscape in Egypt, which includes significant economic pressures and an election in 2024, have encouraged el-Sisi to demonstrate regional statesmanship and an ability to manage the GERD issue.

---

<sup>69</sup> Anna, C. (2023), 'Egypt, Ethiopia hope to reach agreement within 4 months after long dispute over Africa's largest dam', AP News, 13 July 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/ethiopia-egypt-dam-dispute-nile-0f71472e426d9399c273d09aedc04e62>.

---

# 05

# The role of the international community

**Ethiopia has a multifaceted network of relationships with major international actors such as Türkiye, China and Russia, as well as Western partners, and could also leverage the recent surge in geopolitical interest in the Horn of Africa among Gulf states in support of peace negotiations.**

---

## The UAE and other Gulf states

Prime Minister Abiy has developed close relations with UAE president Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Bin Zayed paid a two-day visit to Addis Ababa in mid-August 2023<sup>70</sup> and the two leaders have signed more than a dozen bilateral agreements. The UAE has promised to support Ethiopia's ailing economy and has supported its military extensively, training the Republican Guard (a specialist military unit tasked with protecting Ethiopia's highest-ranking public officials and major installations) and providing crucial military support to the GFDRE throughout the Tigray war. The provision of military supplies to Ethiopia by the UAE was scaled up at the peak of the war in the second half of 2021.<sup>71</sup> This materiel included drones which destroyed Tigrayan artillery and weapons depots and played an instrumental role in halting the TPLF's advance towards

---

<sup>70</sup> AlArabiya, 'UAE President lands in Ethiopia for state visit, to discuss bilateral ties', 19 August 2023, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2023/08/18/UAE-President-lands-in-Ethiopia-for-state-visit-to-discuss-bilateral-ties>.

<sup>71</sup> Drones were also used heavily on numerous occasions during 2021 in the war against the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in Western Oromia, hitting civilians and public infrastructure in addition to military targets. See Walsh, D. (2021), 'Foreign Drones Tip the Balance in Ethiopia's Civil War', *New York Times*, 20 December 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/20/world/africa/drones-ethiopia-war-turkey-emirates.html>.

Addis Ababa, which threatened to overthrow the federal government.<sup>72</sup> Despite the UAE's partisan military engagement, there is also optimism that its government might encourage peace negotiations. For example, it is among the very few international actors to have the capacity to influence President Isaias of Eritrea. As noted above, the UAE jointly brokered the 2018 peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and it continues to mediate in tripartite negotiations on the Nile waters between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan.

Geopolitical interest in the Horn of Africa on the part of the Gulf states has expanded and formalized since the start of the Yemeni civil war in 2014. The UAE established a military base at Assab in Eritrea – provoking considerable concern in Addis Ababa – and has invested heavily in ports around the region, most often through its Dubai Ports World logistics company, including in the Somali arena. Gulf actors, particularly the UAE, have deep pockets and are interested in strategic control of the Red Sea, and access to land for the purposes of food security. The UAE has sought to mediate in the Al Fashaga dispute, proposing a deal in 2021 that would involve commercial agricultural production and the leasing of large areas in Al Fashaga and adjoining the Blue Nile.<sup>73</sup> In addition, the UAE government injected \$3 billion into Ethiopia's economy in 2018 to help the latter to resolve foreign-currency shortages,<sup>74</sup> partly in exchange for real-estate holdings in Addis Ababa.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, in January 2023 the UAE renewable energy company Masdar signed an agreement with Ethiopia for the joint development of a solar project with a capacity of 500 megawatts.<sup>76</sup> The Emirates' substantial economic holdings in Ethiopia give it a direct incentive to support sustainable peace and stability in the country.

## Türkiye, China and Russia

At the peak of the Tigrayan advance to Addis Ababa in August 2021, Prime Minister Abiy signed a military pact with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Türkiye, which was followed by significant Turkish defence and aviation exports to Ethiopia.<sup>77</sup> In January 2022 evidence emerged that Ethiopia had used a Turkish drone in an attack that killed 58 civilians sheltering in a school at Dedebeit in Tigray.<sup>78</sup> The drones

<sup>72</sup> The Tigrayan forces came within 200 km of Addis Ababa. See Walsh (2021), 'Foreign Drones Tip the Balance in Ethiopia's Civil War'.

<sup>73</sup> A 2021 report in the *Sudan Tribune* cited the senior Sudanese official Malik Agar, who suggested that the UAE had proposed an initiative under which it would invest in the development of the Al Fashaga area, with the income from the investment projects being divided so that Sudan and the UAE each received a 40 per cent share and Ethiopian farmers would receive 20 per cent. *Sudan Tribune* (2021), 'UAE's initiative aims to divide Al Fashaga between Sudan, Ethiopia: Agar', 8 April 2021, <https://sudantribune.com/article67525>.

<sup>74</sup> Maasho, A. (2018), 'UAE to give Ethiopia \$3 billion in aid and investments', Reuters, 16 June 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozabs-uk-ethiopia-emirates-idAFKBN1JC07G-OZABS>.

<sup>75</sup> In 2018, the UAE-based developer Eagle Hills had launched a real-estate development at La Gare in central Addis Ababa, with plans for more than 4,000 residential units as well as commercial, hospitality, retail and leisure facilities on a single 360,000 sq m site close to the international airport. See Bridge, S. (2018), 'UAE developer enters Ethiopia with La Gare mega project', *Arabian Business*, 22 November 2018, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/industries/construction/408367-uae-developer-enters-ethiopia-with-la-gare-mega-project>.

<sup>76</sup> *The Reporter* (2023), 'Ethiopia signs deal with UAE's Masdar for 500 MW solar plant', 21 January 2023, <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/29982>.

<sup>77</sup> The value of such exports rose to \$95 million in 2022, up from a few hundred thousand US dollars in previous years. See Spicer, J., Paravicini, G. and Coskun, O. (2021), 'EXCLUSIVE: U.S. concerned over Turkey's drone sales to conflict-hit Ethiopia', Reuters, 22 December 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-us-concerned-over-turkeys-drone-sales-conflict-hit-ethiopia-2021-12-22>.

<sup>78</sup> Marks, S. (2022), 'Evidence from civilian bombing in Ethiopia points to Turkish drone', Politico, 25 January 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/evidence-civilian-bombing-ethiopia-turkish-drone>.

significantly shifted the power balance in the GFDRE's favour.<sup>79</sup> Türkiye aspires to protect its geopolitical influence in the region as well as its sizeable business interests inside Ethiopia. Turkish investments in Ethiopia were its largest in Africa in 2020, rising to \$2.5 billion,<sup>80</sup> and bilateral trade between the two countries is thought to amount to some \$650 million annually. While Türkiye has remained disengaged from the Tigray peace process, its constructive engagement should be sought by international partners, especially given the importance of its economic and security relations with the GFDRE.

## **It is difficult to determine the total amount of Ethiopia's debt to China, but estimates suggest that the government has borrowed \$13.7 billion from China since 2000 and has been seeking to restructure its debt since 2021.**

China has long been involved in trade and investment throughout the Horn of Africa and has substantial strategic interests in the region which align with its Belt and Road Initiative. These interests range from massive investments in infrastructure, to sizeable loans, notably from the Export-Import Bank of China,<sup>81</sup> to regional security in the Red Sea trade corridor between China and Europe, which is underpinned by China's first overseas military base in Djibouti, opened in 2017. Relations between Beijing and the TPLF-led Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government were especially close between 1991 and 2018. It is difficult to determine the total amount of Ethiopia's debt to China, but estimates suggest that the government has borrowed \$13.7 billion from China since 2000 and has been seeking to restructure its debt since 2021.<sup>82</sup> China's leverage over Ethiopia is therefore substantial, particularly with respect to the latter's economic decisions, and it has in the past sought to invest further or to write off part of the debt to protect its existing assets. For example, the cancellation by China of \$4.5 million in debt owed by Ethiopia was announced in January 2023 during the first tour of the African continent by Qin Gang, the incoming Chinese foreign minister. The West and international financial institutions have demanded clarity on the exact amount Ethiopia has borrowed from China, in order to assess Ethiopia's request to restructure its debt, but reports suggest that Ethiopia is not yet able to provide sufficient documentation in this regard.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Gatepoulous, A. (2021), 'How armed drones may have helped turn the tide in Ethiopia's war', Al Jazeera, 10 December 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/12/10/how-armed-drones-may-have-helped-turn-tide-in-ethiopia-conflict>.

<sup>80</sup> Ethiopia News Agency (2020), 'Ethiopia, Turkey Working to Boost Trade Exchange by Half-billion USD: Ambassador Alp', 14 February 2020, [https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en\\_12585](https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en_12585).

<sup>81</sup> Maasho, A. (2018), 'UPDATE 1-Ethiopia PM says China will restructure railway loan', Reuters, 6 September 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ethiopia-china-loan-idUSL5N1VS4IW>.

<sup>82</sup> Endeshaw, D. (2023), 'China's top foreign envoy Qin announces partial debt relief for Ethiopia', *Business Day*, 11 January 2023, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/world/africa/2023-01-11-chinas-top-foreign-envoy-qin-announces-partial-debt-relief-for-ethiopia>.

<sup>83</sup> Research interview with economist working closely with the Ethiopian government, Addis Ababa, 2 March 2023.

Russia has sought to boost its relationships with African countries in response to widespread condemnation of its war in Ukraine. Many African countries, Ethiopia included, have been keen to maintain a non-aligned stance over the Ukraine war, as evidenced through their abstentions from votes at the UN on successive resolutions against Russia. Ethiopia did not vote at the UN General Assembly in March 2022 on the adoption of a resolution condemning Russia's invasion, while Sudan abstained and Eritrea was among only five countries which voted against it.<sup>84</sup>

Russian foreign minister Lavrov visited Ethiopia in July 2022 during his first tour of Africa since the invasion of Ukraine began, avowing Russia's 'firm support' to the GFDRE at a time when the latter's relations with both the US and EU had come under strain.<sup>85</sup> He returned to the region in January 2023, this time visiting Asmara, where he expressed his gratitude to Eritrean leaders for their support of Russia at the UN.<sup>86</sup> Lavrov also declared Moscow's intention to utilize transit opportunities presented by the Red Sea port and airport at Massawa, in Eritrea.<sup>87</sup> Russia had for some time been seeking port access on the Red Sea, to further assert its influence in the region and as part of its geopolitical competition with the US and China. Relationships between Russia and key states in the Horn of Africa region have the potential to influence competition in the Red Sea region, through which at least 10 per cent of global trade transits each year.<sup>88</sup>

Russia's key lever in Africa is its ability to act as a diplomatic counterweight to Western states, notably by wielding its UNSC veto power in support of African countries that have a difficult relationship with the West over human rights and democracy. Economic and development cooperation between Russia and Africa remains at a very low level.<sup>89</sup> In his meeting with Catherine Colonna and Annalena Baerbock, the respective foreign ministers of France and Germany, in January 2023, Prime Minister Abiy reportedly stated that maintaining Ethiopia's relationship with Russia was as important as mending ties with the West. Given the very limited economic relationship between Russia and Ethiopia, the main reason for this is Russia's veto power at the UNSC.<sup>90</sup> Russia has sought to strengthen its security relationships and connected trade in the region, often linked to the extraction of mineral resources. It is also important to note that a significant proportion of Ethiopia's military hardware is of Russian origin. Meanwhile, bilateral cooperation

---

<sup>84</sup> European External Action Service (2022), 'UN General Assembly demands Russian Federation withdraw all military forces from the territory of Ukraine', 2 March 2022, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/un-general-assembly-demands-russian-federation-withdraw-all-military-forces-territory-ukraine\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/un-general-assembly-demands-russian-federation-withdraw-all-military-forces-territory-ukraine_en).

<sup>85</sup> Reuters (2022), 'Lavrov denigrates West's stance towards Africa on Ethiopia visit', Al Jazeera, 27 July 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/27/lavrov-denigrates-west-stance-towards-africa-on-ethiopia-visit>.

<sup>86</sup> TASS (2023), 'Russia grateful to Eritrea for its balanced stance on Ukraine', 27 January 2023, <https://tass.com/world/1567763>.

<sup>87</sup> Miriri, D. (2023), 'Lavrov shores up Eritrean support for Russia over Ukraine conflict', Reuters, 27 January 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/lavrov-bolsters-eritrean-support-russia-conflict-with-ukraine-2023-01-27>.

<sup>88</sup> Dunne, C. W. (2021), 'The Complicated Nature of Red Sea Geopolitics', Arab Center Washington DC, 27 October 2021, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-complicated-nature-of-red-sea-geopolitics>.

<sup>89</sup> Vines, A. and Amare, T. (2023), 'Russia-Africa summit fails to deliver concrete results', Chatham House Expert Comment, 2 August 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/08/russia-africa-summit-fails-deliver-concrete-results>.

<sup>90</sup> Research interview with Western diplomat, 20 January 2023.

between Russia and the military leadership in Sudan has centred on the latter's lucrative gold-mining industry, with Russia's private military corporation Wagner Group having invested in the sector.<sup>91</sup>

## Western donors and the UN

During the Tigray war many of Ethiopia's Western partners – notably the US and the EU – upheld a critical line that maintained principles of international humanitarian law and the responsibility to protect, while also treading carefully in the face of Ethiopia's sensitivities over its sovereignty.<sup>92</sup> This was not well received by either party to the conflict. Western calls for de-escalation, negotiation and humanitarian access elicited an aggressive response from the GFDRE, which framed calls for peace and humanitarian access by the West as neo-colonial and as tacitly supporting the TPLF.<sup>93</sup> Conversely, Tigrayan and Oromo activists accused the international community of being overly accommodating of the GFDRE, substantive evidence of war crimes notwithstanding. Much of the polarized campaign between the two camps was waged on social media platforms, with substantial criticism focused on the inaction of the UN secretary-general and the UNSC on stopping the violence.<sup>94</sup>

The GFDRE's approach in responding to international condemnation over the Tigray war was constrained by the dependence of the Ethiopian economy on Western support. Growing Ethiopian diplomatic and developmental isolation during the war had clear economic consequences, including an increase in the rate of inflation to the highest level for almost a decade, which affected much of the population.<sup>95</sup> The violence in Amhara from the beginning of August 2023 could lead to further economic decline.<sup>96</sup> None of the allegations of Western support for the TPLF or the OLA were borne out with concrete evidence, though the sentiment of a politically biased 'West' remains, and this served to shore up support for the federal government both domestically and within influential diaspora communities. Economic pressures and the desperate need to unlock external funding ultimately hastened Prime Minister Abiy's decision to mend relations with Ethiopia's donors – a dynamic which created the conditions for the CoHA. The Tigray war and conflict across the country have exerted a huge toll on Ethiopia's economy and societal well-being. Major infrastructure projects, including those built with finance provided by external

---

<sup>91</sup> Fitzpatrick, M. (2022), 'How Russian mercenaries colluded with Khartoum regime to exploit Sudan's gold', RFI, 6 November 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20221106-how-russian-mercenaries-colluded-with-khartoum-regime-to-exploit-sudan-s-gold>.

<sup>92</sup> Not all Western countries were on the same page with respect to their approach towards Addis Ababa. For example, Italy and Spain advocated for less pressure on the GFDRE at the peak of the Tigray war, while countries such as Ireland played a key role in maintaining pressure on the Ethiopian regime.

<sup>93</sup> The GFDRE collaborated with some diaspora groups on an anti-war social media campaign under the hashtag #NoMore. The aim of the campaign was to stop 'the ongoing Western media disinformation campaign, Western economic warfare, diplomatic propaganda and military interventions in Africa in general, and the "Horn of Africa" in particular', Borkena Ethiopia News (2021), 'Ethiopia: What is the African #NoMore movement about?', 21 November 2021, <https://borkena.com/2021/11/21/nomore-movement-about-ethiopia-what-is-the-african>.

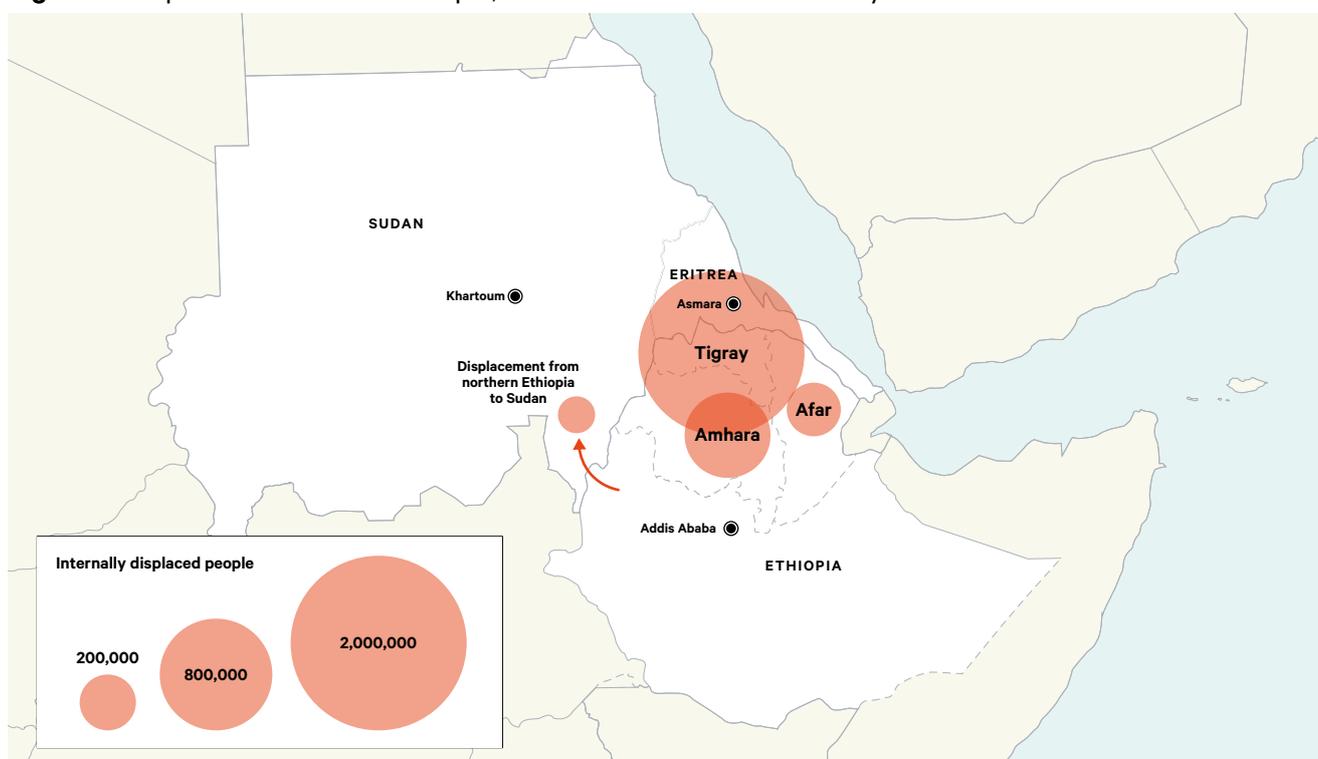
<sup>94</sup> These observations arose from an unpublished survey of social media use, covering the period from June to July 2021.

<sup>95</sup> Malingha, D. (2022), 'Ethiopian Inflation Tops 35% in December as Food Costs Surge', Bloomberg, 24 January 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-24/ethiopian-inflation-tops-35-in-december-as-food-costs-surge>.

<sup>96</sup> Dawit (2023), 'Ethiopia declares six-month state of emergency in Amhara after clashes'.

loans, have been destroyed or incapacitated.<sup>97</sup> As stated above, the GFDRE has estimated that at least \$20 billion is needed to finance relief and rehabilitation activities in Tigray and adjacent regions, and has appealed to the international community to step in with funding.<sup>98</sup> Reconstruction will take years, even in the most positive scenario of a sustainable resolution of the conflict. To this end, it is important that a lasting solution be found to the displacement of nearly 2.5 million people in northern Ethiopia – of whom the majority are from the Tigray region. According to assessments by the International Organization for Migration, between December 2020 and February 2022 more than 1.8 million people out of Tigray's total population of 5 million were internally displaced. The conflict has also affected some 462,500 people in Amhara region and more than 175,000 people in Afar.<sup>99</sup>

**Figure 3.** Displacement across Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan in the first year of the conflict



Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Notes: IOM teams had restricted access for data collection in Tigray. The time frame for IOM data was 22 December 2020 to 15 February 2022, and the UNHCR data was collected in May 2022.

The US played an instrumental role in the CoHA negotiating process. US expectations in advance of the negotiations were focused on averting further large-scale atrocities in Tigray and preventing Ethiopia from becoming a pariah state, given its importance to regional peace and security efforts and to continental diplomacy.<sup>100</sup> Both objectives were met, at least for the time being. There has been a notable difference in approach

<sup>97</sup> These include airports, tertiary education facilities, agro-processing and industrial complexes and many others in the Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions.

<sup>98</sup> Dibaba, S. (undated), 'Int'l Support Imperative to Provide Humanitarian Aid, Rehabilitate War Torn Tigray, Neighboring Regions', Ethiopian News Agency, <https://www.ena.et/en/?p=39989>.

<sup>99</sup> International Organization for Migration (undated), 'Ethiopia Displacement – [IDPs] – Site Assessment – Tigray', <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/ethiopia-displacement-northern-region-tigray-idps-site-assessment-iom-dtm>.

<sup>100</sup> Research interview with Western diplomat based in Addis Ababa, 22 December 2022.

between the Biden administration and US Congress when it comes to Ethiopia, with the latter taking a much tougher line and calling for sanctions on those engaging in severe human rights violations. The Biden administration, through its special envoy to the Horn of Africa, Ambassador Mike Hammer, continued to engage with the GFDRE and its leader, Prime Minister Abiy, which had a positive influence on the CoHA talks. The gradual improvement in bilateral relations has continued, with the US resuming some bilateral assistance intended to support implementation of sustainable peace. In June 2023 the US government revoked its previous designation of Ethiopia as a state responsible for gross violations of human rights, paving the way for the resumption of development assistance.<sup>101</sup> Ethiopia also wants to return to the US's AGOA preferential trade programme, from which it was suspended in January 2022 (see above).

The EU has had strained relations with the GFDRE since the start of the war. Regrettable remarks made in October 2022 by Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policy, were instrumentalized by the GFDRE to exclude the EU from observing the Pretoria negotiations.<sup>102</sup> In Ethiopia, Borrell is seen as the leading anti-government voice, and this has constrained the work of Annette Weber, the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa. During their visit to Ethiopia in January 2023, the French and German foreign ministers encouraged the conflicting parties to implement the CoHA in full. Prime Minister Abiy has been keen to hasten the recovery of Ethiopia's relations with the EU, stressing the need for the urgent resumption of EU development cooperation and highlighting the political and economic reforms in the rest of the country.<sup>103</sup> EU leaders have continued to seek assurances over accountability and justice for rights violations and crimes committed in Tigray and adjacent areas during the two-year war, as preconditions for resuming full bilateral cooperation with Ethiopia.<sup>104</sup> In response, the GFDRE produced a set of draft policy options on transitional justice in January 2023<sup>105</sup> and it intends to use them as a basis for addressing issues not only in Tigray but also in the rest of the country.<sup>106</sup> Many Ethiopians doubt their government's political commitment on this issue, emphasizing the lack of local structures and capacities needed to ensure justice and accountability.

---

<sup>101</sup> Gramer (2023), 'U.S. Lifts Human Rights Violation Designation on Ethiopia'.

<sup>102</sup> Speaking in Belgium at the launch of the European Diplomatic Academy in October 2022, Josep Borrell said: 'Europe is a garden, but most of the rest of the world is a jungle [...] And the jungle could invade the garden.' His remarks were widely condemned. See A News (2022), 'Borrell draws fire after calling Europe "garden", outside world "jungle"', 16 October 2022, <https://www.anews.com.tr/world/2022/10/16/borrell-draws-fire-after-calling-europe-garden-outside-world-jungle>.

<sup>103</sup> Research interview with Western diplomat based in the Horn of Africa, 20 January 2023.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> See United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023), 'The policy options for transitional justice in Ethiopia', <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/01/policy-options-transitional-justice-ethiopia>.

<sup>106</sup> European External Action Service (2022), 'Ethiopia: EU and US Special Envoys Visit to Mekelle, Tigray', press release, 2 August 2022, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ethiopia-eu-and-us-special-envoys-visit-mekelle-tigray\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ethiopia-eu-and-us-special-envoys-visit-mekelle-tigray_en).

---

# 06

## Navigating the regional context: what role for the international community?

**Regional and international partners need to carefully craft their Ethiopia re-engagement policies and work collaboratively to support the implementation of the CoHA, ensuring accountability that brings the widest possible benefits internally and to the Horn region.**

---

As has become evident, during the conflict in Tigray and more recently in the context of Sudan, continental and regional mechanisms on their own have proved ineffective at resolving protracted conflict, while Ethiopia's Western partners have limited leverage when it comes to conflict resolution in the region. The Tigray conflict provides a lesson in the benefits of greater consolidation and coordination of efforts by continental, regional and Western actors – and the need for them to work in tandem to prevent and resolve security crises in the Horn of Africa. Such introspection should inform enduring commitments to the implementation of the CoHA and sustainable peace in northern Ethiopia, with practical and hands-on monitoring of cessation arrangements in the region, and it should include a consideration of innovative approaches for engagement with regional actors.

The international community can take several immediate steps towards consolidating the gains of the CoHA. Ethiopia's international partners must recommit to monitoring and supporting the implementation of the agreement, including by providing financial backing and technical resources to both the AU and IGAD – as has been demonstrated by the government of the UK<sup>107</sup> – and other actors should follow suit. Renewed engagement with Ethiopia needs to be more nuanced, with much-needed financial support and debt relief being tied to agreed objective benchmarks, notably on comprehensive peace and accountability. This will help to build and maintain political support for compromise within the GFDRE.

Ethiopia's Western partners, notably the EU, UK and US, need to maintain the push for justice and accountability as they begin to resume development assistance, since dealings between the GFDRE and the TPLF to date offer little insight as to the commitment of both parties to this crucial issue for the people of northern Ethiopia. Now is the time to ensure that the relative peace in Ethiopia does not come at the expense of accountability. The provision of sustained and broad humanitarian access in Tigray and other parts of northern Ethiopia is vital to demonstrate the utility of the CoHA and to ensure that moderate voices in the TPLF and wider Tigray region retain the upper hand. At the same time, it is important to secure aid delivery so that it reaches those most in need; neither diversion of aid nor political manipulation should be tolerated.

Tackling wider regional dynamics over the medium to long term is a much more challenging prospect. The analysis in this paper points to three priorities that can bolster a sustainable resolution to the Tigray crisis, and which should be supported by Ethiopia's international partners. If correctly sequenced and coordinated, the following recommendations offer Western partners, including the EU, UK and US, as well as the AU and IGAD a potential route to removing the regional obstacles to delivering a sustainable CoHA in Tigray. Kenya, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and China all have business and geopolitical interests in Ethiopia and can all offer access points and opportunities to influence Ethiopian thinking. The recommendations can also reduce the risk that the Tigray conflict will pivot into renewed hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea, either directly or via proxies.

— **Attempts should be made to moderate the role of Eritrea.** The influence and leverage maintained by Eritrea over the GFDRE, as well as over stakeholders within the Amhara and Afar regions, will continue to deter any meaningful progress in implementing initiatives to end the Tigray war. The Eritrean government has historical, personal and geopolitical motives to stay involved in Tigrayan and wider Ethiopian politics, with intentions that go beyond defeating the TPLF. Any meaningful political process requires the total withdrawal of Eritrean forces from Tigray and the lessening of Eritrea's influence within the Ethiopian body politic. Here, the role of the GFDRE is crucial. It needs to ensure that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Ethiopian state is maintained, and it should clearly communicate this priority to Eritrea. In the longer term, the nurturing of deeper trust between the GFDRE and the Tigrayan administration,

<sup>107</sup> *Addis Standard* (2023), 'UK commits funding to support Pretoria peace agreement implementation in Tigray region', 10 August 2023, <https://addisstandard.com/news-uk-commits-funding-to-support-pretoria-peace-agreement-implementation-in-tigray-region/>.

including on security sector reforms, will be needed to keep Eritrea within its own borders. For this to be achieved, it is important for international partners to work with the GFDRE and the AU mediation team. AU High Representative Obasanjo's call, in late 2022, for Eritrea to withdraw from Tigray was a step in the right direction (this call was echoed by the British ambassador to Ethiopia in August 2023),<sup>108</sup> and strengthening the role and coverage of the AU monitoring, verification and compliance team will be required to ensure this comes into effect.<sup>109</sup>

- **To achieve sustainable peace, Eritrea's interests will also need to be considered.** Contested territories such as Badme, which had been awarded to Eritrea in 2000 by the EEBC, will not willingly be returned to Tigray by the Eritrean government.<sup>110</sup> The best way forward for both countries would be to implement the EEBC decision: current facts on the ground, as well as continued steps towards sustainable peace, as laid down in the CoHA, provide an opportunity for the acceptance of this decision in Tigray. However, if Eritrea refuses to leave other occupied parts of Tigray – particularly given the GFDRE's insistence on it doing so – then there is potential for another confrontation. In this scenario, the Ethiopian government would be concerned that Eritrea might seek to instrumentalize disenfranchised armed groups as proxies against it.

Western countries have no direct leverage over Eritrea. But they can engage the UAE and Saudi Arabia, states which have a measure of good relations with Eritrea and which have an incentive to proactively ensure that the CoHA is respected. Stronger coordination between Western partners and the Gulf countries on Horn of Africa policymaking is needed to address the many overlapping layers of interests and actors. Neither China, Russia nor Türkiye played a significant role in concluding the CoHA – this is unsurprising in the case of Russia, given its current focus on its war in Ukraine, but more surprising in the case of China and Türkiye. There may be an opportunity for Western partners to engage China to support implementation of the agreement – given its strong ties with both Eritrea and Ethiopia and the appointment in 2022 of its own special envoy for Horn of Africa affairs.<sup>111</sup>

- **The Sudan–Ethiopia border dispute centring on Al Fashaga must be addressed with a view to a sustainable solution.** The Al Fashaga dispute and contestation over the border is the most significant factor in the unstable relations between the two countries. Without a commitment to working towards a resolution of this dispute, it is unlikely that the GFDRE will have the capacity to address the fundamental challenges facing it in Tigray and the Amhara region – including in the contested areas of Western Tigray/Welkait. Amhara elites

<sup>108</sup> *Addis Standard* (2023), 'Eritrea summons British envoy for remarks by Ambassador in Ethiopia on troops' withdrawal'.

<sup>109</sup> During his visit to Mekelle following the signing of the CoHA, former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo declared, in a direct reference to Eritrean forces: 'No country should accept the presence of foreign countries on its land'. See, for instance, *Addis Standard* (2022), 'News: "No country should accept the presence of foreign [sic] country on its land": Obasanjo', 25 November 2022, <https://addisstandard.com/news-no-country-should-accept-the-presence-of-foreign-country-on-its-land-obasanjo/>.

<sup>110</sup> Solomon, S. (2018), 'Ethiopia Vows to Give Disputed Badme Town to Eritrea', *Voice of America*, 5 June 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/ethiopia-vows-to-give-disputed-badme-town-to-eritrea/4425902.html>.

<sup>111</sup> Reuters (2022), 'China appoints new special envoy for turbulent Horn of Africa region' 22 February 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china-appoints-new-special-envoy-turbulent-horn-africa-region-2022-02-22>.

see Western Tigray/Welkai as consolation for losing the fertile farmlands of Al Fashaga. As Sudan descends deeper into a political and security quagmire, it is important to ensure the peaceful and orderly movement of goods and people across the mutual border. Thus far, Prime Minister Abiy has not shown an interest in exploiting the vulnerabilities in Sudan. Restraint on the part of the GFDRE should continue until avenues can be restored for dialogue with Sudan that can resolve these issues conclusively. The Ethiopian government should also continue to work to support IGAD–AU peace initiatives in Sudan.

Recent positive communications between the Ethiopian and Sudanese leaderships, in spite of heightened tension along the mutual border, have offered an opening for traction on this issue.<sup>112</sup> As the continental and regional bodies tasked with peace and security in the region, the AU and the IGAD have an opportunity to redeem themselves and to work towards resolving the considerable insecurity in the Horn of Africa region. However, for this to happen the international community needs to throw its weight behind the efforts of these two blocs, notably by formally extending and expanding the mandate of the AU's High Representative for the region (until recently, Obasanjo) to cover the Ethiopia–Sudan border issue and by connecting this with the work of a reformed IGAD, under Ethiopian executive secretary Workneh. Both offices could support trust-building between the Sudanese and Ethiopian governments.

To date, the position of successive Sudanese regimes has been that any resolution to the dispute must begin with an acknowledgment of the boundary as demarcated in 1903 by Major Gwynn. Recognition and delimitation of the boundary by Ethiopia could arise from discussions around joint trade and border development, as well as security in the area, and the reaching of a formalized agreement that is closer in concept to the soft border arrangement that existed between the two countries for the decade prior to the death of Meles in 2012. Such a deal would require the technical and financial support of international partners. As a former colonial power, the UK had an involvement in both the demarcation of the contested Ethiopia–Sudan border in 1902 and the shaping of the current geopolitical context of discussions around the Nile waters. The strength of its bilateral engagements in the Horn of Africa, notably in Ethiopia and Sudan, places the UK in a favourable position *vis-à-vis* most other external parties when it comes to supporting technical options for finding a sustainable resolution to the boundary dispute.<sup>113</sup> However, the reduction in UK foreign aid to Africa, including Ethiopia and Sudan, is a disadvantage.<sup>114</sup> International intervention on this issue would be best served through a triangulation of efforts between influential partners, such as the UAE, who have previously proposed

---

<sup>112</sup> On 26 January 2023 Ethiopian prime minister Abiy made an unannounced visit to Khartoum, his first since the military coup of 2021. In Khartoum, Abiy and Sudanese leader Lieutenant General al-Burhan stated their commitment to finding a peaceful means of resolving the border crisis, but the outbreak of conflict between Sudan's two most important armed factions – the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces – just months later, in April, thrust Sudan into a state of chaos and sharply diminished the opportunity for implementing this commitment.

<sup>113</sup> The border agreed in the 1902 Anglo-Ethiopian treaty was unilaterally demarcated in 1903 by British surveyors, who gave the territory of Al Fashaga – a desirable area of farmland – to Sudan. Ethiopia contests this decision to the present day. With respect to the GERD, the Egyptian claim of historic rights to the Nile is, among other things, based on the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the Nile and its tributaries.

<sup>114</sup> Champion, S. (2022), 'Cutting foreign aid shrinks our global influence', *The World Today*, 2 December 2022, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2022-12/cutting-foreign-aid-shrinks-our-global-influence>.

an initiative to resolve the border dispute between Ethiopia and Sudan and have the means to finance the process. One challenge for the UAE's involvement will be the perception that it has taken sides in the Sudan war. Multilateral bodies including IGAD and the UN Development Programme also have border development programmes in the Horn of Africa, and their active involvement is vital to resolving the issue.<sup>115</sup>

- **Ethiopia's stabilizing role in the Horn of Africa region should be leveraged.** Ethiopia is the largest and most populous country in the Horn of Africa, and has sought to assert a hegemonic diplomatic role in the region. In addition to supporting Somalia's offensive against al-Shabaab, it played an instrumental role in the peace efforts in both Sudan and South Sudan. Moreover, Ethiopia was the leading provider of troops to UN peacekeeping missions in 2020, with 6,646 personnel as of May,<sup>116</sup> but since the Tigray war it has fallen to 13th place, supplying only 1,483 troops as of March 2023.<sup>117</sup> The main reason behind the reduction is the reputational damage incurred by the Abiy administration as a consequence of the war.<sup>118</sup>
- **With the 2022 peace deal between the TPLF and the GFDRE, Ethiopia needs to resume its former place in regional forums.** The Tigray war severely undermined Ethiopia's role and participation in regional, continental and global security, economic, development and environment platforms. Allegations of crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide and ethnic cleansing have severely affected its reputation, especially the standing of Ethiopian security forces. Ethiopia's partners need to encourage the federal government to engage more actively in regional diplomatic efforts, including resolving the Sudan war – where Ethiopia can influence outcomes through its role within IGAD.

<sup>115</sup> Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 'IGAD and UNDP to Collaborate on Cross-border Development in the Horn of Africa', 18 August 2022, <https://igad.int/igad-and-undp-to-collaborate-on-cross-border-development-in-the-horn-of-africa>.

<sup>116</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping (2020), 'Summary of Troops Contributing Countries by Ranking: Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troops', [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/02\\_country\\_ranking\\_25.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/02_country_ranking_25.pdf).

<sup>117</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping (2023), 'Contribution of Uniformed Personnel to UN by Country and Personnel Type: Experts on Mission, Formed Police Units, Individual Police, Staff Officer, and Troops. As of: 31/03/2023', [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/01\\_contributions\\_to\\_un\\_peacekeeping\\_operations\\_by\\_country\\_and\\_post\\_60\\_march\\_2023.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/01_contributions_to_un_peacekeeping_operations_by_country_and_post_60_march_2023.pdf).

<sup>118</sup> In April 2021 Sudan demanded the replacement of the Ethiopian troop contingent of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) in connection with the disputes over the Al Fashaga border areas and allegations from the GFDRE on Sudan's support to the TPLF. A year later, in April 2022, the UN announced that more than 500 Ethiopian UNISFA peacekeepers – predominantly Tigrayans – had sought asylum in Sudan, citing concerns for their safety in Ethiopia and noting an escalation in ethnically motivated attacks. Arab News (2021), 'Sudan demands expulsion of Ethiopians from Abyei UN peacekeeping forces', 7 April 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1838971/middle-east>; Arab News (2022), 'Ethiopian peacekeepers from Tigray seek asylum in Sudan', 25 April 2022, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2069866/world>.

## Conclusion

The Tigray war significantly affected Ethiopia's foreign policy and regional integration policy, sowing discord between the West and Ethiopia, and, at the height of the conflict, damaging the capacity, reputation and credibility of the GFDRE's foreign ministry and security forces – two integral institutions of the Ethiopian polity. Having had a reputation as an anchor state in the Horn of Africa region, Ethiopia was increasingly being seen as a promoter of discord and instability within the region.

If the 2022 peace deal between the TPLF and the GFDRE holds and if the violence in some areas of the country can be abated, Ethiopia has an opportunity to resume its former place as a constructive regional player. Ethiopia's partners need to encourage the Abiy government to engage more actively in regional diplomacy, including with respect to the conflict in Sudan – where Ethiopia can bring influence to bear on the peace process through its role within IGAD and the AU. This will be important for supporting the achievement of regional and continental multilateral solutions to the Horn of Africa's peace and security challenges, and for increasing the capacity of these mechanisms.

Importantly, while there remains little chance of Western partners engaging with Russia due to the Ukraine war, there is potential for greater collaboration among Western nations, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, as well as between the West and China. From the outset, the Tigray conflict demonstrated a lack of coordination and coherence among the multitude of international actors. Despite the existence of multiple Horn of Africa envoys and special representatives (from the UN, EU, AU, US and UK, among others), all of whom have sought to coordinate and triangulate their priorities with counterparts in the Gulf, engagement across the Red Sea remains patchy and disjointed. Greater efforts should be made to intensify coordination with respect to both Eritrea and Sudan. Long-standing Eritrean grievances against the UN and the US have been amplified in rhetoric emerging from the war, perhaps limiting the direct role that can be played by the Western donor community, but adroit coordination and consensus-building on how best to engage the Eritrean government could reveal possibilities for greater alignment and mutual engagement in the region. Ethiopia's Western partners should consider more formalized and structured coordination with Gulf countries and China in policymaking towards the Horn of Africa.<sup>119</sup> Until the varying and interlinked situations are addressed more holistically and in closer coordination, the patchwork of actors, influence and interference will continue.

---

<sup>119</sup> One option for consideration could be having a 'Quad' type of mechanism in Ethiopia in addition to that already engaged in Sudan. That Quad, which involves Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the UK and the US, is working closely with the trilateral mechanism composed of the AU, IGAD and the UN.

## About the author

**Dr Abel Abate Demissie** is an associate fellow in the Africa Programme at Chatham House focusing on Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa region. Abel worked as a political adviser for the British Embassy in Addis Ababa between 2015 and 2019, and as a senior researcher and, latterly, programme head at the government-run think tank, the Ethiopian Foreign Relations and Strategic Studies Institute, between 2012 and 2015. He has extensive experience in providing analysis and high-level policy briefings to a wide range of organizations and government departments, and his work has been published widely across international media and in academic literature. Over the years, Abel has worked with and advised several international organizations working on peacebuilding, conflict resolution, governance and democratization.

## Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank all those who contributed towards the research, including via extensive interviews conducted in Addis Ababa, Khartoum, Nairobi and online during 2022 and early 2023. Much gratitude and acknowledgment go to Chatham House colleagues, including Leah de Haan for shepherding the process and Africa Programme colleagues for their support on the paper – particularly Ahmed Soliman and Hanna Desta for their input and review of the drafts and Romane Dideberg for her support in preparing the graphics. Confidential peer reviewers are also due thanks for their constructive feedback. Thanks also to the Chatham House publications team, notably Vera Chapman Browne, for their expert editing, and to Soapbox for design. This research paper was produced by Chatham House for the Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme, funded by UK Aid from the UK government. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the copyright holder. Please direct all enquiries to the publishers.

Chatham House does not express opinions of its own. The opinions expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the author(s).

Copyright © The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2023

This research paper was funded by the XCEPT Programme.

Cover image: Refugees from Ethiopia's Tigray region board buses to a refugee camp after spending time at a UNHCR reception centre in Sudan, 7 December 2020.

Photo credit: Copyright © Byron Smith/Stringer/Getty Images

ISBN 978 1 78413 574 4

DOI 10.55317/9781784135744

Cite this paper: Abate Demissie, A. (2023), *Navigating the regionalization of Ethiopia's Tigray conflict: How regional and international actors can help consolidate peace*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://doi.org/10.55317/9781784135744>.

This publication is printed on FSC-certified paper.  
[designbysoapbox.com](http://designbysoapbox.com)



Independent thinking since 1920



**The Royal Institute of International Affairs**  
**Chatham House**

10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE

T +44 (0)20 7957 5700

[contact@chathamhouse.org](mailto:contact@chathamhouse.org) | [chathamhouse.org](http://chathamhouse.org)

Charity Registration Number: 208223