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Security Council (SC)

Research Report Guide

Topic three: Resolving the conflict between Ethiopia and Sudan



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Introduction

Since the 19th century, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Republic of Sudan has contested the Ethiopia-Sudan border. The length of the shared border between Sudan and Ethiopia is 744 kilometers (462 mi). One of the most contentious locations is the fertile agricultural region of al-Fashaga, a rich agricultural region that both Sudan and Ethiopia claim as their own¹. The dispute over this region has drawn the two nations into conflict. Although the conflict first arose in 1902, it has recently flared up again as a result of Ethiopia's civil war and concerns about the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance dam, which Ethiopia fears will give it control over the region's water supply².



¹ EconomistMagazine, director. Could Ethiopia's War in Tigray Spark Conflict with Sudan? YouTube, The Economist, 19 May 2022

² "Containing the Volatile Sudan-Ethiopia Border Dispute." Crisis Group, 9 Aug. 2021,

Definition of key terms

TPLF: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, also called the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, is a left-wing ethnic nationalist paramilitary group, a banned political party, and the former ruling party of Ethiopia.

GERD: The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is a gravity dam on the Blue Nile River in Ethiopia that has been under construction since 2011.

Amhara: Amharas are a Semitic-speaking ethnic group that is indigenous to Ethiopia, traditionally inhabiting parts of the northwest Highlands of Ethiopia, particularly inhabiting the Amhara Region.

Abiy Ahmed: Abiy Ahmed Ali is an Ethiopian politician who has been the 4th prime minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia since 2 April 2018.

Al Fashaga: a disputed border area between Ethiopia and Sudan characterized by enormous fertility.

Border demarcation: a geopolitical border, often agreed upon as part of an armistice or ceasefire.

Overview

The two largest nations in the Horn of Africa, Sudan and Ethiopia, are at odds with one another in a conflict that neither can afford to start. The 260 sq km al-Fashaga borderland, which Ethiopians refer to as the Mazega, has been the source of conflict between Ethiopia and Sudan for decades. According to maps from the colonial era created more than a century ago, Khartoum claims that the territory, which spans the western borders of Ethiopia's Amhara and Tigray regions and the eastern frontier of Sudan's breadbasket Gedaref state, legitimately belongs to Sudan. But its borders were never firmly defined.

Back in 2007, in order to reduce the urgency of border demarcation, a cooperation agreement was made that contained a compromise that permitted both Ethiopian and Sudanese citizens to raise crops, pasture their animals, and engage in trade in the region³. Yet, the fertile al-Fashaga borderland was taken over by Sudan in mid-December 2020 while Ethiopia was preoccupied with the Tigray conflict. Sudan disregarded a largely amicable land-use agreement that had governed the area for more than a decade and evicted thousands of farmers, mostly from the Amhara, Ethiopia's second-largest ethnic group. Ethiopia sent out federal forces and militias in response to Sudan's abrupt action, which sparked violent fighting with Sudanese forces. On December 15, 2020, four Sudanese military troops were ambushed and killed by Amhara rebels who the Ethiopian government allegedly supported⁴. This incident occurred in the Abu Tyour area, close to the Ethiopia-Sudan border.

Moreover, Sudan has since reclaimed the majority of the contentious border. Despite the fact that it is still technically Sudanese territory, the Amhara Region's government has referred to the Sudanese deployment as an invasion and claimed that al-Fashaga is their property. Remarks made by Abiy Ahmed have supported that assertion. Sudan has expelled the Amhara terrorists, allowing Sudanese farmers to start cultivating their land for the first time in 25 years. Sudanese farmers have also been killed by Amhara extremists.⁵

Major Parties Involved

Sudan

Sudan's military commanders have used the conflict to bolster their nationalist credentials. Sudan wants Ethiopia to accept immediate border demarcation as well as the concurrent resolution of all significant disputes between Addis Ababa and Khartoum, including the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

³ Addis Standard. "In-Depth Analysis: Ethio-Sudan Border Dispute: Manageable or Time Bomb?" Addis Standard, 2 June 2022

⁴ Al Jazeera. "Sudan's Military Strikes Disputed Region Bordering Ethiopia." Border Disputes News | Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 29 June 2022

⁵ Al Jazeera. "Sudan's Military Strikes Disputed Region Bordering Ethiopia." Border Disputes News | Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 29 June 2022

Ethiopia

Ethiopian authorities have denied that any deaths or other violent military actions were carried out by government troops. A military spokesman for Ethiopia accused Sudanese forces of invading the country without authorization and engaging in combat with a local militia. Ethiopia claims that Sudan entered Ethiopian territory by taking advantage of the deadly conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray area. It has demanded that Sudanese soldiers return to the places they occupied prior to the violence that broke out in Ethiopia's Tigray region in November 2020, pitting Ethiopian federal forces against local militants.

Egypt

It is crucial to stop further firefights in al-Fashaga; any intensification of the conflict between Ethiopia and Sudan could potentially involve Egypt (in favor of Khartoum). Ethiopia's relations with Egypt have also reached a low point; due to the GERD project that Ethiopia is working on, which can have detrimental effects on the Egyptian economy and resources, Egypt has created a strong alliance with Sudan, which would also be directly affected by the GERD project.

Eritrea

The changing relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea complicate matters for Sudan. As uprisings by the TPLF becomes more dangerous, Sudan might decide to back the Tigrayan resistance if tensions over the al-Fashaga rise, either by providing its leaders with a rear location or allowing them to bring in supplies through eastern Sudan.

African Union

After hostilities between Ethiopia and Sudan in a disputed border territory, the African Union urged caution and expressed grave worry over "the growing military tension" between Ethiopia and Sudan after a border incident resulted in the deaths of seven Sudanese troops and a civilian⁶.

⁶ Ap. "African Union Urges Calm in Ethiopia-Sudan Border Dispute." The Hindu, 29 June 2022,

Timeline of Important Events

Date	Event
December 15 2020	An officer and three soldiers were killed in an ambush of numerous Sudanese forces by Ethiopian terrorists who were allegedly supported by the Ethiopian government.
December 28 2020	The villages of Asmara, Lebbaki, Pasha, Lamlam, Melkamo, Males, Ashkar, Arqa, and Umm Pasha Teddy were allegedly taken by Sudan. Eleven communities that had been under the hands of Ethiopian militias were all taken.
February 14 2021	Both nations accused the others of crossing borders without authorization
November 27 2021	An attack by Ethiopian forces on a Sudanese army position close to their shared border resulted in the deaths of six Sudanese soldiers.
December 15 2021	Sudanese military declared complete control of the disputed area.
August 24 2022	A jet carrying weaponry that the Ethiopian Air Force believed was headed for the Tigray People's Liberation Front was shot down as it crossed the Sudanese border. Nabil Abdallah, a spokesman for the Sudanese army, said over the phone that Sudan was not involved in the event.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

2008 agreement

Under the leadership of President Omar al-Bashir and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia and Sudan came to a somewhat amicable land use agreement in 2008, allowing residents of both nations to farm the land until the final demarcation was completed⁷. However, the deal was never formally ratified. Since then, there have been government changes as a result of the political unrest and instability in both nations, and the al-Fashaga issue has reversed course to become one of its frequent clashes. Farmers have been particularly vulnerable to this protracted conflict and fighting between the two countries throughout, largely because there isn't a clear delineation and the border is mobile.

Possible Solutions

Possible Solutions for the Ethiopia-Sudan conflict could be; sending UN peacekeepers, national governments agreeing to increase efforts to keep local militia in check, or all involved parties (national, regional, and local) brought into a dialogue about what is needed. As a border being agreed upon is unlikely, a solution would be to keep a blurred/soft border but increase violence prevention.

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⁷ Addis Standard. “In-Depth Analysis: Ethio-Sudan Border Dispute: Manageable or Time Bomb?” Addis Standard, 2 June 2022

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