

No. 4/2021

Horn of Dilemmas

Toward a Transatlantic To-Do List for the Horn of Africa

Munich Security Brief
December 2021

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Summary

The Horn of Africa is adrift. Turmoil in Ethiopia and Sudan is sending shockwaves through the broader region – with knock-on effects for European and American interests. While the African Union is in the lead to address these issues, transatlantic partners must coordinate and do their part to tackle the crises in Europe's extended neighborhood.

In the Horn of Africa, hope and havoc are next-door neighbors. It is a place where a new, young generation is fighting for democracy. It is an arena where regional and global powers compete for influence. And it is also a region where conflicts are threatening the very essence of statehood. In Ethiopia and Sudan, after 30 years of authoritarian rule, two democratic transitions have first blossomed and then faced backlash within a matter of just three years. War in Ethiopia, a derailed democratic transition in Sudan, an escalating border dispute between these two neighbors, and a conflict over the Nile waters between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan represent only a shortlist of the Horn's complex conflict network. Europe and the United States must develop a deeper understanding of the Horn of Africa's conflict landscape and come to terms with the region's intricate dilemmas.

To start with, Europe and the US need to face two realities: first, conflict dynamics in the Horn of Africa impact their very own interests not least with regard to freedom of navigation, peace, security, good governance, and migration – although not to the same extent: Europe's exposure to turmoil in the region is much more direct. Second, transatlantic partners are not the only external actors who take an interest in the Horn of Africa. Instead, the region is at the center of an intense geopolitical competition. To prevent further deterioration of the region's conflicts, a coordinated transatlantic agenda is required.

This Munich Security Brief is part of the MSC's "Road to Munich 2022" campaign, which aims to highlight key items on the agenda for renewing transatlantic cooperation. It is informed by the MSC's Roundtable series on the Horn of Africa, which has been taking place since December 2020.

Horn of Dilemmas

Toward a Transatlantic To-Do List for the Horn of Africa



“With every passing day, what we’re seeing is increasing communal tensions that risk ripping [Ethiopia] apart and spilling over into other countries of the region.”⁷

Antony Blinken,
US Secretary of State,
CNN Interview,
November 22, 2021

The Horn of Africa¹ is undergoing momentous shifts, and transatlantic decision-makers are watching closely: in May 2021, the EU stated that hopes and opportunities for lasting regional reconciliation had recently been undermined by conflict, instability, and fragmentation. It went on to name the Horn of Africa a “geostrategic priority,” citing the “unprecedented developments” sweeping through the region and their potential ripple effects for European interests concerning freedom of navigation and human rights.² Just a few months later, the White House asserted that the ongoing crisis in Ethiopia, with its knock-on effects in the wider region, has “sparked one of the worst humanitarian and human rights crises in the world.”³

Since November 2020, what had been a positive dynamic in the Horn of Africa rapidly deteriorated. The civil war in Ethiopia’s Tigray region quickly impacted Ethiopia’s wider north and a humanitarian emergency is now threatening the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.⁴ But the Tigray war is only part of a broader pattern of conflict and fragility in Ethiopia. Meanwhile, a military coup in neighboring Sudan has also raised major concerns about the country’s transition to civilian rule – a transition that came after three decades of dictatorship and was thus deemed “historic” by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas.⁵ Skirmishes along the Sudanese-Ethiopian border and violence surrounding the delayed elections in Somalia add another layer of complexity to the regional conflict landscape. At the same time, the Horn of Africa has emerged as a theater of substantial geopolitical competition in which regional heavyweights and international actors are scrambling for dominance.⁶

To move from joint messaging to joint action in response to the crises that unfold in the Horn, a more coordinated transatlantic approach is required. The objective is twofold: first, urgently addressing the most pressing crises in the region, and, second, developing a more strategic approach to the region in the long run. Faced with massive humanitarian emergencies and mounting conflicts in the Horn of Africa, Europe and the United States have to demonstrate their readiness to act and engage with regional stakeholders



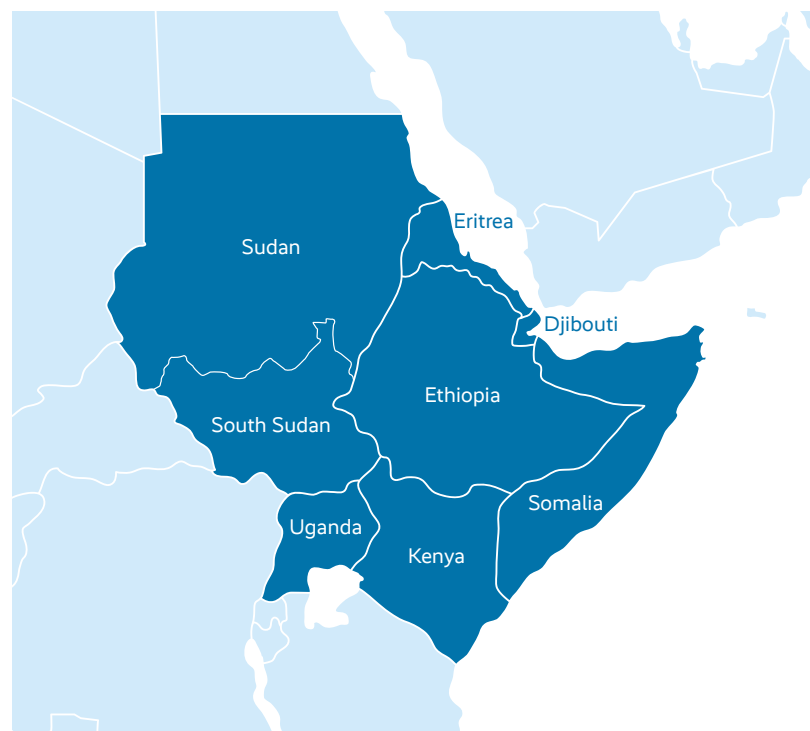
“In a country of over 110 million people, over 90 different ethnic groups and 80 languages, no one can predict what continued fighting and insecurity will bring.”⁹

Rosemary DiCarlo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UN Security Council, November 8, 2021

and international powers. However, the partners need to tread carefully, as attempts to tackle the region’s ills might have unintended consequences which could create additional tensions.

To understand what is at stake for the region itself and for transatlantic partners, it is necessary to trace the most important developments in the Horn of Africa’s conflict landscape and explore the geopolitical forces at play in the region. In this context, the core transatlantic interests in the region require closer scrutiny.

Figure 1
The Horn of Africa



Data: European Council. Illustration: Munich Security Conference

The Horn of Africa's Conflict Network



“The Tigray conflict has been marked by extreme brutality. The gravity and seriousness of the violations and abuses we have documented underscore the need to hold perpetrators accountable on all sides.”¹⁷

Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, November 3, 2021

After a moment of hope regarding democratic openings and a regional rapprochement, the Horn of Africa is now experiencing democratic backsliding, fragmentation, and conflict. While two of Africa's biggest countries, Ethiopia and Sudan, embarked on ambitious paths of internal renewal and democratization in 2018 and 2019 respectively,⁸ their democratic transitions have become imperiled. A conflict network has evolved in the Horn of Africa that threatens to undermine stability in the entire region. It harbors a host of interrelated conflicts, which are conditioning each other in profound ways.

In early November 2020, Ethiopia's government, led by Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Abiy Ahmed, launched a military operation in the country's northern Tigray region.¹⁰ This operation followed a period in which the forces from the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) defied central authority from Addis Ababa by opposing the federal electoral process and attacking a base of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF).¹¹ The ENDF offensive quickly went beyond what the government initially called a “law enforcement” operation.¹² The conflict soon engulfed Ethiopia's north and sent shockwaves through the wider Horn of Africa, with ethnic militias and Eritrean soldiers entering the fray.¹³ In the face of fierce resistance by the Tigrayan forces, which consisted of “a large paramilitary force and a well-drilled local militia” numbering around 250,000 people,¹⁴ the central government's forces were pushed back from Tigray's regional capital Mekelle in mid-2021. In response, Abiy Ahmed's government blockaded the region.¹⁵ After Tigrayan forces made decisive advances into adjacent provinces, fears rose of a push of TPLF-affiliated forces toward the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.¹⁶

Since fighting began, more than 2.1 million people have been displaced in northern Ethiopia – upwards of a third of Tigray's population.¹⁸ Thousands of people have been injured or killed.¹⁹ According to the US State Department, “up to 900,000 people are living in famine-like conditions” in the Tigray region, a crisis exacerbated by the Ethiopian government's restrictions on humanitarian aid.²⁰ This makes the Tigray famine the most severe one of the last decade.²¹ While poverty and the consequences of climate change have exacerbated this humanitarian emergency,²² it is mostly “man-made.”²³ Former UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock asserted that food is being used as a “weapon of war,”²⁴ referring to



“Make no mistake, this famine is man-made. In addition to destroying critical cultural and economic infrastructure, the armies of Ethiopia and Eritrea have laid waste to Ethiopia’s food supplies.”³¹

Samantha Power, USAID Administrator, US-EU High-Level Roundtable on the Humanitarian Emergency in Tigray, June 10, 2021



“The military coup in the Sudan is a catastrophic development. It is putting the country in a perilous situation and is calling the Sudan’s democratic and peaceful future, an objective that the international community has been working to achieve, into question.”³⁸

Heiko Maas, German Foreign Minister, October 27, 2021

the systematic destruction of arable land, food reserves, and livestock by the Ethiopian army and its affiliated forces from neighboring Eritrea.²⁵ Various official statements from both sides of the Atlantic suggest war crimes; they point to violations of UN Security Council Resolution 2417 (2018), which condemns the use of civilian starvation as a method of warfare.²⁶

The “humanitarian situation in Tigray is a moment of truth for the international community,” asserted the US Ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, pointing at the international community’s inadequate response to the humanitarian emergency in Ethiopia.²⁷ With a man-made famine, massacres of civilians by Eritrean forces,²⁸ and systematic acts of sexual violence by government-allied forces,²⁹ Ethiopia’s civil war threatens international peace and security. However, in the first six months of the conflict, the UN Security Council failed to address the conflict in a public session, putting “the UN’s credibility on the line.”³⁰

The Tigray war overlaps with other conflicts in the Horn of Africa. The dispute over the al-Fashaga region on the Sudan-Ethiopia border, with its roots in colonial times, reemerged with new skirmishes between the two armies in December 2020. Shortly after Ethiopian troops withdrew from the area due to the fighting in Tigray, “Sudanese troops went on the offensive,” capturing parts of the disputed area.³² “If tensions escalate over al-Fashaga,” writes the International Crisis Group, Sudan might “decide to lend support” to Tigrayan forces in their fight against the central government led by Prime Minister Abiy.³³ The conflict seems bound for further escalation, after Ethiopian forces advanced into the al-Fashaga area in November 2021, leaving 20 Sudanese dead.³⁴

Meanwhile, turmoil has also engulfed Sudan itself. At the end of October 2021, Sudan’s military dissolved the civilian-led government, detaining several cabinet members. The move sparked international outrage and concerns that this would mark the end of the country’s path to democracy.³⁵ While the West provided substantial support for Sudan’s transition, it was unable to avert the coup.³⁶ A deal recently struck between the military and the civilian prime minister was “hailed as an important step forward” by the signatories, but, at the same time, was met with a “wave of anger on the streets.”³⁷



“Our humble attempt to light the houses of millions of Ethiopians and create hope [with the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam] is being politicized in front of global bodies.”⁴¹

Demeke Mekonnen Hassen, Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, UN General Assembly, September 26, 2021

Adding to the Horn of Africa’s explosive conflict mix, there is the deadlocked dispute between Ethiopia on one side and Sudan and Egypt on the other over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) built by Ethiopia. At its core, the row concerns the use and distribution of the waters of the Nile. Egypt and Sudan are extremely sensitive to changes in the Nile flows, most of which originate in the Ethiopian highlands further upstream. The filling of the dam’s massive reservoir by the Ethiopian authorities is directly impacting water supply in both Egypt and Sudan. Yet, for Ethiopia, the dam is a huge opportunity to tap its domestic hydroelectric potential. The stalled trilateral negotiations over the GERD have strained diplomatic relations between Cairo, Addis Ababa, and Khartoum for years.³⁹ As military confrontations have been hinted at by Egypt and Ethiopia on several occasions, the Nile dam conflict adds another layer to the regional challenges.⁴⁰

The crisis in the Horn of Africa has been exacerbated by the volatile situation in Somalia. While the country has been highly fragile ever since the state collapsed in 1991, “Somalia was meant to enter a new phase of stabilization in 2021,” with elections and a revamped African Union mission.⁴² However, an electoral crisis and resurging violence in the country has undermined hopes for a more positive trajectory.⁴³ The turmoil in Somalia, which is exacerbated by the insurgency of the al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabaab,⁴⁴ is unfolding against the backdrop of various other unresolved regional conflicts, like the simmering war in South Sudan,⁴⁵ and renewed violence in Darfur.⁴⁶

Back in 2019, the then EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, Alexander Rondos, full of hope, spoke of a “1989 moment”⁴⁷ in the region. Only two years later, the Horn has departed from its hopeful trajectory toward democracy and regional reconciliation; pessimism about the region’s future has returned.

Transatlantic Interests in the Horn of Africa

The conflict network in the Horn of Africa has repercussions that transcend the region. European and American interests are being affected in profound ways. These interests include stability in the region, containing the terrorist presence in the Horn of Africa, keeping trade routes open along the Red Sea, and importantly, ensuring human security and development to create prospects for the region’s young population. In the short-term, transatlantic partners have a fundamental interest in preventing further political



“We see the Horn of Africa not only as a region of conflicts, but also as a region of potentials.”⁴⁸

Annette Weber, EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, Manama Dialogue, November 21, 2021

fragmentation of Ethiopia and its knock-on effects, including massive displacement of people.

The Horn of Africa is more than the conflicts that make international headlines. It is also a region of youth and aspirations. With an average age of less than 20, it is one of the youngest regions in the world.⁴⁹ Despite the ongoing conflicts, fragility, and grinding poverty, a young generation is rooting for democratic change – “a once-in-a-generation opportunity for democracy,” according to US Special Envoy Jeffrey Feltman.⁵⁰ Due to this significant youth potential, parts of the Horn of Africa have seen impressive economic growth. Before the civil war started, Ethiopia had been “Africa’s fastest-growing economy.”⁵¹ Between 2010 and 2020, Ethiopian GDP grew in the double digits in five out of ten years.⁵² Europe and the United States have expressed their readiness to invest in the region’s economies. For this purpose, they have used formats like the “Friends of Sudan” group⁵³ – a multilateral forum bringing together international organizations, Western governments, and the Arab Gulf states to “find solutions to Sudan’s economic misery.”⁵⁴ Some argue that steady foreign direct investments in the region already grant the transatlantic partners “more leverage in the Red Sea region than is often appreciated.”⁵⁵



“Despite the progress made during the glorious revolution, Sudan continues to face sizable challenges that require the support of the international community and friends.”⁵⁶

Abdalla Hamdok, Sudanese Prime Minister, UN General Assembly, September 25, 2021

But the Horn of Africa’s youthful potential comes with perils. The failure to absorb its youth bulge into the labor market has exacerbated one of the region’s gravest security challenges: the continued presence of terrorists across the Horn of Africa.⁵⁷ When the United States commenced its “Global War on Terror,” Ethiopia became “a key Western ally in an unstable region.”⁵⁸ It served as a major regional linchpin in the fight against al-Qaeda’s largest global affiliate, al-Shabaab, which has its roots in Somalia.⁵⁹ With the advent of Ethiopia’s civil war, this counterterrorism alliance has been called into question. Yet, inhibiting the expansion of al-Shabaab into northern Kenya and preventing a further southbound spread of jihadi groups along the Swahili Coast remains a major US and EU interest. As the US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines put it, the threats of terrorism that emanate from places like Somalia “pose a greater danger than those that might emerge from Afghanistan.”⁶⁰

The evolving terrorist threat in the Horn of Africa also creates immediate risks for another transatlantic interest in the region: the freedom of navigation. The continued presence of violent nonstate actors like al-Shabaab, the Yemen-based Houthis, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian



“The emergence of domestic terror groups funded by international actors [poses] grave socio-economic challenges for Africa.”⁶¹

Uhuru Kenyatta, Kenyan President, UN Security Council, October 29, 2021

Peninsula (AQAP) along the Bab al-Mandeb, the narrow water strait separating the Horn of Africa from Yemen, bears significant risks of maritime attacks.⁶² The Red Sea is a “vital artery” for commerce, carrying upwards of ten percent of global trade and a majority of European trade with Asia.⁶³ In March 2021, the “Ever Given” incident, when a single ship blocked all maritime traffic in the Suez Canal for almost a week, showcased the vulnerability of this trade route and caused massive disruptions in global supply chains.⁶⁴ Shortly afterwards, the EU stated that “the Red Sea region remains crucial to the EU” because of its centrality for international trade and connectivity.⁶⁵

European and American engagement in the region is also centered on development and human security – not least because the region remains “one of the world’s main refugee producing and hosting regions.”⁶⁶ In 2018, more migrants arrived in conflict-stricken Yemen from the Horn of Africa than entered the entire EU in that year.⁶⁷ As experts asserted regarding Ethiopia and Sudan, “fragmentation of either country would be the largest state collapse in modern history,” causing migration flows that could have destabilizing repercussions far beyond the Horn of Africa.⁶⁸

All this underscores the importance of the region for EU and US interests. However, the dynamics affect transatlantic partners in different ways. Europe’s greater geographic proximity to the Red Sea – the waterways in the region connect the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean – exposes Europe directly and indirectly to the conflicts’ ripple effects. Already highly volatile, Europe’s immediate neighborhood will be the first to feel the immediate consequences of continued turmoil in the Horn of Africa, which could come in the form of forced displacement, illicit flows of arms, and instability. But more is at stake: the collapse of a regional anchor state like Ethiopia and fragility in the Horn of Africa would send shockwaves through the wider African continent. Extremists on both shores of the Red Sea are standing ready to exploit chaos.

A Geopolitical Traffic Jam

In recent years, the Horn of Africa has attracted increased international attention. External actors, both regional and extra-regional, have entered the picture, setting up military bases, investing in strategic infrastructure, and, ultimately, “exporting rivalries in ways that could further destabilize fragile local politics” in the region.⁶⁹ These actors include the Arab Gulf



“We have seen significant proliferation of military bases, which has in turn led to [a] militarization of the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa.”⁷⁶

Eugene L. Wamalwa,
Kenyan Cabinet Secretary
for Defence, Manama
Dialogue, November 21, 2021

monarchies but also international powers like Russia, Turkey, or China.⁷⁰

The Horn of Africa has become a launchpad for military operations in the wider Red Sea region and beyond. The small port nation of Djibouti is home to the greatest number of foreign military bases on the African continent,⁷¹ hosting not only China’s first overseas base but also the United States’ only permanent base in Africa – and both are only six miles apart.⁷² The US base in Djibouti is instrumental in the ongoing fight against al-Qaeda in the region, specifically in Somalia and Yemen.⁷³ For its part, Russia wants to establish a military foothold in Sudan to create “Moscow’s gateway to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, military bases across the Horn of Africa by Arab Gulf states are not only crucial in an operational sense for the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen; they are also relevant because these states are asserting themselves more actively in the region, based on a concern “that the United States is no longer a reliable guarantor of regional security.”⁷⁵

The Gulf states and other actors are also pursuing commercial interests in the Horn of Africa. For instance, the United Arab Emirates’ (UAE) commercial footprint across the region is expanding through Dubai-based port operator DP World, providing an opportunity for the UAE to “bring the main ports around the Gulf of Aden under their control.”⁷⁷ Experts note that due to their vast economic ties to the Horn of Africa, the Gulf states may act as “a considerable spoiler to the European political and developmental activities in the region,” as they pursue agendas that often deviate from and at times undermine Western stabilization efforts.⁷⁸ The region’s heavyweights on the Arabian Peninsula are joined by other actors that are pivoting toward the Horn of Africa. In China, too, there is “a growing notion [...] that the Red Sea is a strategic theater.”⁷⁹ Being one of the busiest maritime trade routes on earth, the Red Sea region is an essential part of China’s Maritime Silk Road.⁸⁰

With the number of actors engaged in the Horn of Africa growing considerably, geopolitical rivalries are entering the region and leaving their imprint on the conflict network. The stiff Middle Eastern competition – first and foremost between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi on one side and Doha with Ankara on the other – has shaped fault lines from Sudan to Somalia.⁸¹ For instance, Qatar and Turkey have supported Somalia’s internationally recognized government in Mogadishu, while the UAE is investing political and financial capital in the semi-autonomous breakaway state of



“Since the onset of the [Tigray] conflict, the EU has postponed budget support payments [to Ethiopia]. At the same time, we did not suspend our cooperation projects [...]. In doing so, we stand firm on our values, the first of which being human dignity and wellbeing [...].”⁹⁹

Jutta Urpilainen, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships, US-EU High-Level Roundtable on the Humanitarian Emergency in Tigray, June 10, 2021

Somaliland, further complicating attempts to resolve Somalia’s statehood troubles.⁸² Also, during the 2019 uprising in Sudan against long-time dictator Omar Al-Bashir, “divergent attitudes toward Islamism” prompted Saudi Arabia and the UAE to intervene in the transition process, sidelining forces supposedly supported by Qatar and Turkey.⁸³ Although the two camps have taken steps toward a regional rapprochement with “notable signs of détente,”⁸⁴ potential for friction remains significant. Without coordination with the growing number of regional and international powers active in the Horn of Africa, transatlantic partners will have limited leeway to support regional stabilization.

Toward a Transatlantic To-Do List for the Horn of Africa

In recent months, transatlantic partners have shown that they are ready to respond to a deteriorating situation in the Horn of Africa. In early November 2021, the Biden Administration terminated Ethiopia’s special trade status under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), citing “gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.”⁸⁵ This move followed targeted US sanctions on Eritrean and Ethiopian officials for human rights abuses earlier that year.⁸⁶ While the EU has been less robust, Brussels, too, has imposed sanctions on government officials in Eritrea and frozen aid budgets for Ethiopia,⁸⁷ while intensifying public messaging on the Tigray conflict and the fragile transition in Sudan. After the coup in Sudan, the US froze 700 million US dollars in aid.⁸⁸ With regard to the conflict in Ethiopia, the US and the EU have been eager to coordinate their messaging, a public high-level roundtable on the humanitarian emergency in Tigray in June 2021 being one example.⁸⁹

Europe and the US have also allocated substantial resources to the Horn of Africa in recent years. Between 2016 and 2020, the US provided 4.2 billion US dollars of development and humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia.⁹¹ Through its Trust Fund for Africa, the EU has invested the same amount in the Horn of Africa region.⁹² In addition, the US is the largest single funder of UN peacekeeping missions worldwide and no region in the world hosts more peacekeeping missions than the Horn of Africa.⁹³ Three European operations are ongoing in the region⁹⁴ – EUTM Somalia, EUCAP Somalia, and the maritime Operation Atalanta – all aiming at enhancing peace and security in the region. In conjunction with Operation Atalanta, the multilateral naval Combined Task Forces 150/151 and NATO’s Operation Ocean Shield contributed to improving maritime security in the region.⁹⁵



“The humanitarian situation in Tigray is a moment of truth for the international community.”⁹⁰

Linda Thomas-Greenfield,
US Ambassador to the UN,
US-EU High-Level Round-
table on the Humanitarian
Emergency in Tigray,
June 10, 2021

Yet, in the past, insufficient coordination across the Atlantic has had adverse effects on conflict dynamics in the region: for instance, in the Nile dam conflict, US President Donald Trump abandoned his country’s neutral stance and openly sided with Egypt, even insinuating that Egypt could destroy the dam, which prompted EU High Representative Josep Borrell to state: “Now is the time for action and not for increasing tensions.”⁹⁶ Even under the new US administration, transatlantic approaches have not been entirely in sync. As opposed to Washington, European states have “not put in place sanctions”⁹⁷ targeting Ethiopian officials. Furthermore, a push by the Biden administration to withhold World Bank and International Monetary Fund loans to Ethiopia has not received substantial support from Europe.⁹⁸

“Condemnation requires a chorus,” said USAID Administrator Samantha Power, referring to Ethiopia’s civil war.¹⁰⁰ Cooperation between Washington, Brussels, and European capitals is of paramount importance in the face of the deteriorating conflict dynamics in this geostrategic region. To begin with, Europe and the United States need to develop a better understanding of each other’s approaches to the Horn of Africa. To do so, the Horn of Africa and the wider Red Sea region could be incorporated in the EU-US Security & Defense Dialogue and transatlantic consultations on the region could be launched. At the same time, a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate dilemmas of the Horn of Africa’s conflict network is necessary.

More transatlantic exchange about what a joint agenda could look like should be the order of the day. Yet, some items for joint action are already apparent: foremost, a transatlantic to-do list for the Horn of Africa should aim at preventing further state fragmentation in Ethiopia and Sudan. To do so, first, an immediate ceasefire in Ethiopia “is core precondition.”¹⁰¹ Second, support for regional mediators, such as Kenya, is imperative to support African solutions to African problems. Third, concerted messaging, support for reform-oriented actors in Sudan and Ethiopia, and financial assistance conditional on clear governance and human right benchmarks are essential. Fourth, close coordination with the African Union, its newly appointed High Representative for the Horn of Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo, will be vital moving forward. At the same time, coordinating with the Arab Gulf countries and extra-regional powers like China, Russia, and Turkey is more necessary than ever.



“Ethiopia risks to be the new Syria: ongoing cycles of violence, violations of laws and principles, massive suffering of populations, strong involvement of regional and global powers.”¹⁰³

Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Manama Dialogue, November 21, 2021

The Horn of Africa is at an inflection point. Two of Africa’s largest countries are tumbling. The ripple effects for the entire region are already visible. The developments in Afghanistan have been watched closely by extremist forces in places like Yemen or Somalia, who are seeking to exploit states engulfed by internal power battles. Transatlantic partners need to come together in their response to the region’s conflict dynamics. Preparing a transatlantic to-do list can be an important impulse to arrive at shared analyses and turn them into action. In 2018, when looking at the Horn of Africa’s regional rapprochement, UN Secretary-General Guterres spoke of a “powerful wind of hope blowing across the Horn of Africa region.”¹⁰² Three years later, the outlook for the region is sobering. It is not up to the transatlantic partners to solve the Horn of Africa’s ills alone. But together, and by working with African partners, they can make an important contribution to stabilizing the region, solving some of its dilemmas, and returning it to a more hopeful trajectory.





Key Points

- 1 The year 2018 marked the start of a period of hope in the Horn of Africa: two democratic transition processes in Ethiopia and Sudan in addition to a regional reconciliation process gave cause for optimism. However, developments in the region recently went from promise to peril.
- 2 Despite significant support by transatlantic partners and others, the democratic transition processes in Sudan and Ethiopia are facing significant setbacks. A humanitarian emergency resulting from war in Ethiopia and other crises is sending shockwaves through the entire region – and beyond.
- 3 The conflicts in the Horn of Africa are also creating challenges for Europe and the US, whose interests in freedom of navigation, peace, security, good governance, and migration management are affected in profound ways. To come to terms with the region's intricate dilemmas, transatlantic partners must develop a deeper understanding of the Horn of Africa's conflict landscape.
- 4 To prevent further deterioration of the region's conflicts, a coordinated transatlantic agenda is required. A preliminary to-do list for the Horn of Africa provides a basis for further discussion on how to jointly address the unfolding crises in Europe's extended southern neighborhood and how to best support the African Union and other African actors who are in the lead.

Endnotes

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Acknowledgments

The Munich Security Conference would like to thank the Federal Foreign Office for making this report possible.



The Munich Security Brief (MSB) is part of the research project series “Geopolitics in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea,” funded by the Federal Foreign Office. The MSB is informed by the MSC’s Roundtable series on the Horn of Africa, which has been taking place since December 2020. The author and the entire MSC team are grateful to all participants in the event series. The conclusions of the report are those of the author.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Boris Ruge, Dr. Annette Weber, Alexander Rondos, and Johanna-Sophia Kober for their guidance and support since the onset of the project. Special thanks go to Dr. Sophie Eisentraut, Natalie Knapp, Felix Kirner, Hanka Watzke, Stefanie Reisinger, Valentina Valjak, Paulina Zehle, Titus von Hoensbroech, Leonie Haenchen, Iva Miteva, Siobhán Whelan, Kristina Gramberg-Stenson, Dr. Julian Voje, Juliane Gehrmann, Julius Schenkel, and Johannes Deregowski for their indispensable support.



Imprint

Editorial Board

Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, Ambassador Boris Ruge, Dr. Benedikt Franke

Author

Luca Mieke

Managing Editor

Natalie Knapp

Layout Felix Kirner

Design MetaDesign

Printed by Königsdruck

Stiftung Münchner Sicherheitskonferenz gGmbH

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Visit our app and social media channels: www.linktr.ee/MunSecConf

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47342/XXEB4946>

Please cite as: Luca Mieke, “Horn of Dilemmas: Toward a Transatlantic To-Do List for the Horn of Africa,” Munich: Munich Security Conference, Munich Security Brief 4, December 2021, <https://doi.org/10.47342/XXEB4946>.

ISSN (Print): 2702-6574

ISSN (Online): 2702-6558

