

# Sudan and Ethiopia border clashes fuel wider tensions

Author:

Wed, 2021-03-17 01:41

KHARTOUM: A decades-old border dispute over fertile farmland between Sudan and Ethiopia is feeding regional rivalry and even sparking fears of broader conflict, analysts say.

The border quarrel is over Ethiopian farmers cultivating land claimed by Sudan – but it is also stoking wider tensions over Ethiopia's Blue Nile mega-dam, which downriver Khartoum and Cairo view as a threat to their water supply.

The territorial argument also comes amid the fallout from unrest in Ethiopia's troubled Tigray region, with tens of thousands of refugees having fled into Sudan.

Arguments over Al-Fashaqa, an agricultural area sandwiched between two rivers, where Ethiopia's northern Amhara and Tigray regions meet Sudan's eastern Gedaref state, date back decades.

With the zone contested, the exact area is not clear, but Al-Fashaqa covers some 12,000 square kilometers (4,630 square miles), an area claimed by both Sudan and Ethiopia.

But analysts and observers point to a flashpoint zone directly along the border, covering some 250 square kilometers (just under 100 square miles).

On paper, according to colonial-era treaties from 1902 and 1907, the international boundary runs east of Al-Fashaqa, meaning the land belongs to Sudan, according to Alex de Waal, a professor at Tufts University in the US and an expert on the region.

But on the ground, over the years, thousands of Ethiopian farmers have entered the region to cultivate land during the rainy season.

At times, Sudanese forces have sought to expel the farmers, only for them to return.

Tensions soared in 1995, according to analysts, when relations between Khartoum and Addis Ababa soured after a failed assassination attempt against Egypt's then-president Hosni Mubarak while he was in Addis Ababa.

Ethiopia blamed Sudan for the attack, and then pushed into Al-Fashaqa, allowing its farmers to cultivate land there.

Since then, thousands of Ethiopian farmers have settled in the area, working the land and paying taxes to Ethiopian authorities.

Khartoum and Addis Ababa have held border talks over the years, but no clear demarcation lines were ever marked out.

## **BACKGROUND**

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Al-Fashaqa lies close to Ethiopia's troubled Tigray region, where deadly conflict erupted in November between Ethiopia's federal and Tigray's regional forces.

The fighting sent some 60,000 Ethiopian refugees fleeing into Sudan. As violence in Ethiopia came closer, Khartoum sent troops into the Al-Fashaqa region, "to recapture the stolen lands and take up positions on the international lines," Sudan's state media reported.

"Authorities feared the situation in Tigray would slip out of control, and armed fighters infiltrate into the country," Sudanese military expert Amin Ismail said.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has leaned heavily on security forces from his country's Amhara region during the fighting in Tigray.

Amhara officials view Al-Fashaqa as rightfully theirs, and there are fears Abiy will struggle to keep expansionist elements in check.

In December, Khartoum dispatched reinforcements to Al-Fashaqa after "Ethiopian forces and militias" allegedly ambushed Sudanese troops, killing at least four soldiers.

Tensions escalated, although Addis Ababa sought to downplay the fighting. A string of deadly clashes followed, with both sides trading accusations of violence and territorial violations.

Sudan has in recent weeks claimed to have regained control of large swathes of the region, insisting it had always fallen within its boundaries.

Meanwhile, Addis Ababa accused Khartoum of having "invaded land that is part of Ethiopia's territory," warning it would resort to a military response if needed.

Both Sudan and Ethiopia face their own domestic challenges, including economic woes and deadly conflicts.

Sudan is navigating a rocky transitional period following the April 2019 ouster of dictator Omar Al-Bashir.

Aside from Tigray, Ethiopia faces internal unrest including in the Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia regions.

The border tensions have intensified strains in relations between Khartoum and Addis Ababa, who, along with Egypt, have failed to strike a deal over the filling and operation of Ethiopia's Blue Nile mega-dam.

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, set to be Africa's largest hydroelectric project, has been a source of tension in the Nile basin ever since Ethiopia broke ground on it nearly a decade ago.

Sudan views the barrage as a threat to its own dams without a binding deal over the filling and operation of Ethiopia's dam.

Khartoum is nowadays diplomatically close to Cairo. This month, top Egyptian and Sudanese army officials signed a deal on bilateral military cooperation. Egypt, which depends on the Nile for about 97 percent of its irrigation and drinking water, sees the dam as an existential threat.

The border dispute is a local issue separate from the dam, but it feeds into wider politics.

Sudanese military expert Ismail believes Sudan and Ethiopia will have to find a diplomatic resolution to the border crisis, saying "there cannot be an all-out military confrontation.

"It is simply not in the interest of both countries," Ismail said. "It will be a major risk for both sides."



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Group reports health facilities looted in Ethiopia's Tigray UN envoy:  
Hostilities along Sudan, Ethiopia border 'deeply concerning'

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## [Lebanese activist released after 10 months in jail for collaborating with Israel](#)

Tue, 2021-03-16 23:35

BEIRUT: A Lebanese social media activist serving a three-year prison sentence for "collaborating" with Israel, was granted bail on Tuesday, her lawyer told Arab News.

Kinda Al-Khatib, in her twenties, was arrested in June and charged with collaborating with "the enemy," entering the occupied Palestinian territories and collaborating with Israeli spies.

Lebanon is technically still at war with Israel and forbids its citizens from

traveling there.

Al-Khatib was sentenced to three years in prison in December.

Her lawyer Jocelyne Al-Rai told Arab News on Tuesday that Al-Khatib was granted bail and released after she had appealed the primary ruling against her client.

“The upcoming hearing will be held on April 8 before the Military Cassation Court. We have documents that prove my client’s innocence,” Al-Rai said.

The lawyer said that as part of her defence argument she would seek to acquit her client before Chief Judge Tani Lattouff.

Al-Khatib had pleaded innocent, said Al-Rai who expects the higher court to overturn the primary judgment and acquit her client of all charges.

“The military appeals court on Tuesday decided to release the activist Kinda Al-Khatib in exchange for a bail of three million Lebanese pounds,” (\$1,990 officially, \$200 at the market rate), a judicial source told AFP.

Since mass protests erupted in Lebanon in October 2019, several social media activists have been detained.

Al-Khatib’s family and activists denounced her arrest at the time as “political” and a reaction to her tweets against those in power.

Al-Khatib had used her Twitter account to criticize Hezbollah.

Lebanese media and activists drew a parallel between Khatib’s case and that of actor Ziad Itani, who was also accused of “collaborating” with Israel in 2017.

Itani was declared innocent and released several months later, and a high-ranking security officer was then charged with “fabricating” the case.



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Lebanon jails activist Kinda Al-Khatib for 'collaborating' with Israel  
Protests against detention of Lebanese activist Kinda Al-Khatib

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## [UAE looks to UK drone researchers for rainfall boost](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-03-16 22:43

LONDON: British researchers have been tasked by the UAE to explore ways to induce rainfall in the Gulf by using drones that beam electricity into clouds.

The UAE has paid \$1.4 million to the UK team to test how an electric charge can expand and merge water droplets to develop into rainfall.

This is a new move to promote "cloud seeding" in a country that uses aircraft that drop chemicals into clouds to boost rainfall by up to 30 percent, according to its own figures.

Some 80 percent of the UAE's food supply is imported, promoting concerns about sustainability for the oil-rich nation.

But researchers at the University of Reading hope to buck the rainfall trend by using drones to deliver pulses of charged ions into the atmosphere.

They believe that using low-power electrical bursts on cloud droplets could encourage raindrops to form.

Many countries have used alternative methods to spark rainfall, including spraying salt compounds, silver iodide and dry ice into the atmosphere.

China made headlines before the 2008 Olympic Games opening ceremony in Beijing for influencing the weather with similar methods.

Alya Al-Mazroui, director of the UAE's rain enhancement science research program, said the remote-controlled drones developed in the UK will be tested at a flight center in Dubai.

"Equipped with a payload of electric charge emission instruments and customized sensors, these drones will fly at low altitudes and deliver an electric charge to air molecules, which should encourage precipitation," she said.

Dr. Keri Nicoll, an associate professor at the University of Reading who is involved in the project, said: "If you emit a charge within a cloud, very quickly the charge will be gathered up by the water droplets. Our theory and modeling work has shown that charging these small droplets can increase the likelihood of them merging through electrostatic forces, and ultimately help them become raindrops."

With average rainfall of only 100 mm per year, the UAE is investing heavily in this new research to raise freshwater supplies.

Al-Mazroui said it is too early to predict the efficacy of the study, which is one of nine "rain enhancement" projects that were given \$15 million of funding from the UAE's Ministry of Presidential Affairs in 2017.



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UAE carries out 219 cloud seeding operations in H1 2020 Experts clear air on 'cloud seeding' mechanism

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## [All Palestinian factions attend Cairo dialogue](#)

Tue, 2021-03-16 21:40

CAIRO: The Palestinian national dialogue sessions began with the participation of all factions on Tuesday in Cairo.

A few days ago, Egypt sent calls to the Palestinian factions to complete the national dialogue on March 16 and 17 before the candidacy process began for legislative council elections. This process starts in five days and focuses on rebuilding and restructuring the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

The factions that arrived in Cairo, using the Rafah land crossing, confirmed they would discuss the foundations and mechanisms through which the formation of the new Palestinian National Council would be completed, and that any obstacles that may still exist before the elections would be removed.

"Activating, developing and rebuilding the Palestine Liberation Organization has been a national demand for 16 years," Khalil Al-Hayya, a member of the political bureau of Hamas, said. "We hope that we have reached this important milestone to restore respect to the Palestinian cause and stand together in front of the challenges."

Factions also confirmed that the dialogue would discuss Palestinian National Council elections, integrating the rest of the factions within the PLO framework, and discussing in detail the criteria for forming the council, whether it would be by consensus or by conducting direct elections, and the final number of its members.

The meeting will also discuss the development and activation of the PLO so that all factions can enter into the principle of political partnership.

Jamil Mezher, a member of the political bureau of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, said: "The importance of this round is the agreement to reconfigure the Palestinian National Council, and then the Central Council and the Executive Committee, and discuss the separation of authority from the organization as the organization is the political reference."

An agreement was signed on Feb. 9 between the Palestinian factions, sponsored by Egypt, to hold legislative, presidential and national elections for the first time in nearly 15 years.

It was also agreed to complete the dialogue sessions and discuss procedures related to elections and the council.

Faction officials said they viewed the Cairo dialogues as very important.

Mohammad Al-Hindi, a member of the political bureau of Islamic Jihad, said his movement had a proposal aimed at building a new national council through an election.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh expressed hope that the factions would be able to add the final touches to the national consensus to hold the elections.

He thanked Egypt's efforts in hosting the sessions and for its contribution to facilitating the holding of elections.

Hisham Kahil, executive director of the Central Election Commission, confirmed that the committee would participate in the next round of dialogue because the most prominent topic it would discuss was securing the elections.





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UAE sets up \$10bn fund to invest in Israel

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## [Assad responsible for Syrian suffering – joint US, European statement](#)

Tue, 2021-03-16 01:22

LONDON: Syrian President Bashar Assad and his backers bear responsibility for the years of war and human suffering that followed, the US and a number of European countries said on Monday.

“The Assad regime’s response has been one of appalling violence,” the foreign ministers of the US, UK, France, Germany, and Italy said in a joint statement issued on the 10-year anniversary of the Syrian uprising.

“We praise the brave individuals and organizations who over the last ten years have exposed the truth from Syria, documented and pursued abuses, mass atrocities, and grave violations of international law to hold the perpetrators accountable and delivered vital assistance to communities,” they said.

The United States stands with the Syrian people and continues to call for an end to violence, accountability for atrocities, and a political resolution to end this conflict.

[pic.twitter.com/qWN2v6bEHk](https://pic.twitter.com/qWN2v6bEHk)

– Department of State (@StateDept) [March 15, 2021](#)

The foreign ministers also said that a decade of conflict, widespread corruption, and economic upheaval have left the Syrian economy “broken.” More than half of the population, nearly 13 million Syrians, depend upon humanitarian assistance, the statement said.

“Continued conflict has also led to space for terrorists, particularly Daesh, to exploit,” they said, adding that preventing Daesh’s resurgence remains a priority.

The US and Europe said the Syrian regime and its supporters must “engage seriously in the political process and allow humanitarian assistance to reach communities in need.”

Syrians have suffered horrific violence and conflict for 10 years.

The UK has provided vital aid to those in need from the start.

Today we have announced new sanctions against members of the Assad regime

We continue to push for an end to the conflict. <https://t.co/vFeNkAF8G5> [pic.twitter.com/vVLk0sbwFe](https://pic.twitter.com/vVLk0sbwFe)

– Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (@FCDOGovUK) [March 15, 2021](#)

On the proposed presidential election this year, the foreign ministers said they would neither be free nor fair, and should not lead to any normalization of ties with the Syrian regime.

“Any political process needs the participation of all Syrians, including the diaspora and the displaced, to enable all voices to be heard,” they said, adding they must be under the auspices of the UN.

Millions of Syrians have fled the fighting over the last ten years, the majority of which are hosted by Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt, in addition to those who are internally displaced and are unable to return home.

What began with peaceful demonstrations against the Syrian regime 10 years ago is now a conflict with an international dimension.

Here, we provide answers to the 7 most important questions.

<https://t.co/2EkpyPvr2E#Syria10> [#WithSyria](#) <https://t.co/xbuHUt3vKt>

– GermanForeignOffice (@GermanyDiplo) [March 15, 2021](#)

“We will not abandon the Syrian people (and) our nations commit to reinvigorating the pursuit of a peaceful solution which protects the rights and future prosperity of all Syrians, based on UN Security Council Resolution 2254,” the statement said.

The foreign ministers added that they would not tolerate impunity or non-compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, firmly continue to press for accountability for crimes, and welcomed the “ongoing efforts by national courts to investigate and prosecute crimes within their jurisdiction committed in Syria.”

France stands with the Syrian people through these tragic times:

- Humanitarian assistance and stabilization programmes
  - The fight against impunity for crimes committed in [#Syria](#)
  - Defence of international law and [#UNSC](#) resolutions
- [pic.twitter.com/rkkjIflYoe](https://pic.twitter.com/rkkjIflYoe)

– France Diplomacy (@francediplo\_EN) [March 15, 2021](#)

They also called for a nationwide cease-fire, unhindered aid access to those in need, and the release of those arbitrarily detained.

“We reiterate our firm support for UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen’s efforts as the only way to resolve this conflict, the statement said, adding: “We cannot allow this tragedy to last another decade.”



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Thousands rally in Syria's Idlib to mark 10 years since uprising  
UK sanctions allies of Syrian President Assad, including foreign minister