

On the Brink of the Abyss: Ethiopia and Sudan at Risk of Conflict

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The Horn of Africa is currently facing one of the deepest crises of recent decades. What has been a latent tension between Addis Ababa and Khartoum for years has turned into a potential frontal clash that threatens to ignite the entire region.

The Reasons for Discord

The causes of a possible conflict are layered and interconnected, ranging from territorial disputes to issues of national survival:

1. **The al-Fashaga Issue:** This fertile border region is at the heart of the territorial dispute. Although colonial-era treaties assign it to Sudan, Ethiopia has allowed its Amhara farmers to cultivate it for decades. With Sudan's internal instability, Khartoum's armed forces have reoccupied the area, provoking periodic clashes with Ethiopian militias.
2. **The GERD (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam):** Officially completed in September 2025, the dam on the Blue Nile is seen by Ethiopia as the engine of future development.

However, for Sudan, Addis Ababa's unilateral management of the waters represents a direct threat to water security and the stability of its electrical infrastructure.

3. **Accusations of Complicity and Drones:** Recently (May 2026), the Sudanese government formally accused Ethiopia of allowing the use of its airspace for drone attacks against strategic targets in Khartoum, exacerbating the climate of mutual suspicion.
4. **Spillover Effect of Civil Wars:** Both countries are torn by internal conflicts. The Sudanese civil war between SAF (regular army) and RSF (paramilitaries) and the persistent ethnic tensions in Ethiopia (Tigray and Amhara) create a power vacuum where governments often seek external enemies to rally the internal front.



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The Consequences for Key Players

An open conflict between these two demographic and military powers would not remain confined within their borders.

1. Egypt: An Existential Threat

For Cairo, the Nile is life itself. Egypt looks with extreme fear at any instability that could give Ethiopia total control over the river's waters. A war between Sudan and Ethiopia would force Egypt to intervene, likely alongside Khartoum, to ensure water flow, turning a border conflict into a **regional war for resources**.

2. Horn of Africa: Domino Effect

The destabilization of the Ethiopia-Sudan axis would lead to the collapse of security in the Horn of Africa. There are fears of:

- **Humanitarian Crisis:** Millions of refugees would pour into neighboring countries, already at breaking point.
- **Resurgence of Extremist Groups:** Al-Shabaab and other formations could take advantage of the chaos to expand their influence beyond Somalia.

3. Djibouti: The Logistics Hub in Danger

Djibouti is Ethiopia's gateway to the sea. A conflict would disrupt rail and road trade flows, crippling Djibouti's economy, which depends almost entirely on Ethiopian port fees. Additionally, the presence of numerous foreign military bases (USA, China, France, Italy) would make Djibouti a highly sensitive diplomatic ground and potentially involved.



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4. Italy: Security and Migration

Italy watches with extreme concern for three main reasons:

- **Migratory Routes:** Instability in the Horn of Africa is one of the main drivers of migratory flows to the Central Mediterranean. A large-scale conflict would exponentially increase departures towards Italian coasts.
- **Military Presence:** Italy manages the BMNS base in Djibouti. A regional war would endanger the security of the contingent and the stability of maritime routes in the Red Sea (strategic for Italian exports).

- **Diplomacy and Development:** Italy is historically a key partner for Ethiopia. The destruction of infrastructure and the blockade of cooperation projects would represent a severe blow to Italian investments and influence in East Africa.

In conclusion, the tension between Ethiopia and Sudan is no longer a local issue. It is a Gordian knot involving the energy, food, and migratory security of the entire Euro-Mediterranean area.