



Immediate and longer-term impacts of Covid-19 on geopolitics in East Africa

Luke Kelly

University of Manchester

17 July 2020

Question

What is the evidence telling us about the immediate and medium/longer-term impacts of C19 on geopolitics within the region and for relationships between states in East Africa?

Contents

1. Summary
2. Regional effects
3. Countries in the region
4. References

The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

Helpdesk reports are commissioned by the UK Department for International Development and other Government departments, but the views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of DFID, the UK Government, K4D or any other contributing organisation. For further information, please contact helpdesk@k4d.info.

1. Summary

This rapid literature review finds that the medium- to long-term effects of Covid-19 on geopolitics in East Africa are unknown. In the immediate term, the pandemic is likely to put stress on economies and healthcare systems, and thereby have the potential to exacerbate regional conflicts. It is also likely to lead to East African countries re-evaluating their relationships with other countries in the region and further afield as they seek financial help from abroad (e.g. debt relief), and to build more resilience to global shocks.

This rapid literature review outlines the main geopolitical issues in the region and notes where authors have suggested Covid-19 may lead to a change. For the purposes of this review, East Africa is taken to include Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia. This literature review notes the main issues for the region, and where Covid-19 has been posited to have an effect. This is a companion review to one on conflict and security in the region (Mergersa, 2020).

The main issues highlighted in the literature are:

- Covid-19 will lead to a short-term reduction in trade, investment and aid from abroad, and will have severe economic, social and political effects on some states. Predictions on how long Covid-related economic downturns will last vary (e.g. World Bank, 2020d, 2020a, 2020c, 2020b, 2020e). Some have pointed to Covid-19 as a long-term opportunity for increased African integration and localisation of production (e.g. pharmaceuticals).
- There is no evidence on the specific effect of Covid-19 on regional conflicts or border disputes between states. While some discussions have stalled (e.g. Somalia-Kenya maritime dispute; Egypt and Ethiopia's dispute over the GERD dam), there is no evidence that Covid-19 specifically is having an effect on the outcome of disputes.
- The need for aid and debt relief from the economic downturn may lead East African states to reconfigure their relationships with the rest of the world. States in the region already seek to benefit from competition between different Middle Eastern powers, the US and China, through investment and support, and are likely to need increased aid and loans in the near future. Covid-19 may increase all African states' wariness towards Chinese investment amid worries about 'debt-trap diplomacy', or conversely to seek increased infrastructural support from China.
- The World Bank, IMF, China and others have provided emergency financing and cancelled some debts. However, given the falls in trade across the region, financial support will continue to be needed, and may present an opportunity for increased leverage by these actors.
- Despite some 'health diplomacy', it is unclear whether China and other foreign states will seek to maintain their investment and aid in East Africa after Covid-19, as domestic pressures may lead them to reduce foreign investment.
- Covid-19 may increase intra-African co-operation through the African Union and the AfCFTA, although some states may turn inwards. Most commentators highlight the value of increased integration within the continent.
- There is no evidence on the specific effect of Covid-19 on national foreign policies in the region, although all countries are likely to face increased economic and social strains, and may therefore seek increased outside support and seek to re-orient foreign policies.

The evidence base for this question is weak. Most analyses of East African geopolitics pre-date Covid-19. This literature review has therefore included policy briefs, blogs and news articles alongside peer-reviewed articles and longer reports. Nevertheless, discussions of the effects of Covid-19 are focused on the short-term effects on health systems and economies, with some discussion of internal politics (e.g. increased authoritarianism or instability). Where longer-term geopolitics are mentioned, discussion is brief and conclusions are tentative. The evidence was largely 'gender-blind' and did not discuss disability.

2. Regional effects

East Africa is characterised by a number of regional disputes as well as global contests.

South Sudan and Somalia remain unstable, while aid and investment from China, the US and the Middle East means the region is significantly influenced by global events (IARAN, 2017, pp. 9–12). The Horn of Africa has become the site of great power competition. Its location at a 'chokepoint' for global trade, its proximity to the Middle East, and the security issues arising from terrorism and piracy in the region, make it significant to a number of countries (HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). For example, Djibouti's position on the Bad al-Mandab strait, a 'chokepoint' on global trade routes, gives it a position of economic and political significance. Its ports aim to become logistics hubs. It may also become a site of US-China competition, as China has built its first overseas base a few miles from a US base. China's Belt and Road Initiative aims to develop Djibouti, but some have expressed fears that it is a 'debt trap' and an outlet for Chinese excess production. While Covid-19 will have hurt Djibouti's economy, **'it is too early to discern the long-term implications for Djibouti's economic trajectory or for China's role in the region'**. In the short-term some African countries may default or call for a renegotiation of rates. In the longer-term, some may seek to reduce dependence on Chinese money and trade (Vertin, 2020).

The immediate effects of Covid-19 in East Africa will be economic. The global economic effects of coronavirus mean there will likely be falls in trade, remittances and FDI in the region (Kacana Sipangule Khadjavi et al., 2020). The Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2035 are less likely to be fulfilled. Similarly, potential reductions in migration, and therefore remittances, may lead to weaker economies and more violence in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere (Sidiropoulos, 2020). The fall in global oil prices will hit many African countries, such as South Sudan, which is highly dependent on oil exports. Workers in the informal economy will be hit by lockdowns. **The region as a whole is dependent on global trade more than intra-African trade, meaning downturns in Europe, Asia and America will certainly have an effect.** Covid-19 and the associated economic downturn may severely test failed or fragile states.

African countries have called for debt relief. The World Bank and the IMF initiated a Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) and provided emergency financing (IMF, 2020; World Bank, 2020a). However, the requirement that participants in the DSSI not seek any non-concessional loans that year, combined with fears that participation may be considered a default by creditors, has limited use and cancellations have been limited. China has cancelled interest-free loans to Africa, accounting for under 5% of Africa's debt to China. Although small, it does not prevent these countries taking other loans, and shows China has 'warmed to the idea of cancellations'. It may increase Chinese leverage in Africa, and decrease the ability of the West to link economic or governance reforms to their own aid (Paduano, 2020). Co-ordination between creditors is necessary to ensure the efficacy of these measures at a time when they are vital for the region (Paduano, 2020). Moreover, the situation presents an opportunity for the West and China to

compete in gaining influence in the region in the longer-term. One expert argued that China's provision of infrastructure is more valuable to East African states than Western humanitarian aid, and may increase in the medium term.

There is wide agreement that Covid-19 means Africa should look to increase its integration. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was due to come into effect this year, but has been delayed by covid-19. Many suggest that it will help African economies grow and achieve more resilience to global shocks in future. An OECD analysis of the economic effects of Covid-19 points to lower trade and investment from China, a demand slump from OECD countries and a supply shock from lockdowns within Africa. It recommends that 'recovery strategies should include a strong structural component to reduce dependence on external financial flows and global markets, and develop more value-adding, knowledge-intensive and industrialised economies, underpinned by a more competitive and efficient services sector. Effective implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Union's productive transformation agenda can strengthen regional value chains, reduce vulnerability to external shocks, advance the digital transition, and build economic resilience against future crises' (OECD, 2020; See also Khadjavi et al., 2020; UN, 2020).

Many commentators point to the value of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for the whole of Africa, but there is no solid evidence on what the effect of Covid-19 might be beyond delaying its implementation.¹ There is little information on its specific effects on the Horn of Africa, although most commentators point to its likely positive effects on economic growth. A briefing by the Nanyang Business School (Singapore) on the effects of Covid-19 in Africa suggests that trading under the AfCFTA may be delayed by border closures. In the medium to long-term, these and xenophobia or falls in trade may lead to 'friction' between signatories and jeopardise free trade on the continent (Gopaladas, 2020). Brookings argues AfCFTA can make Africa more resilient by increasing intra-Africa trade.² However, border restrictions have been put in place in response to Covid-19 and some have suggested that countries may withdraw to protect import taxes or to protect local industry (Bouët & Laborde, 2020; Signé & van der Ven, 2020). A UN brief argues that the pandemic's effects show the need for Africa's free trade deal, as well as increased food security, the realisation of its pharmaceutical manufacturing plan, and resilient infrastructure (UN, 2020).

Covid-19 may also delay reforms to the African Union (AU). The new African Union commission for 2021 will feature more merit-based recruitment (Institute for Security Studies, 2020). The current review 'includes a review of the financing model of its operational and programme budgets, the transformation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) into the AU Development Agency (AUDA), and the integration of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and its budget into existing AU structures' (Institute for Security Studies, 2020).

Evidence on covid-19's effects on integration within the EAC is also limited. A report in April 2020 argued that the East African Community (EAC) is the only sub-regional community

¹ A continent-wide free-trade area aiming to create a single market and remove barriers to trade. It was due to be launched on 1 July 2020, but has now been delayed. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2020/coronavirus/implementing-africa%E2%80%99s-free-trade-pact-best-stimulus-post-covid-19-economies>

² <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/04/30/how-the-afcfta-will-improve-access-to-essential-products-and-bolster-africas-resilience-to-respond-to-future-pandemics/>

that appeared to have adopted an extensive formal collective approach to the Covid-19 response, including relating cross-national boundary movements (Mboce & Muigua, 2020). However, there have been some suggestions that Covid-19 may prove to be a threat to EAC integration. Covid has led to unilateral border closures and some states thinking more about self-sufficiency in health matters, and possibly economic matters (Moses Tetui, 2020). UNCTAD has offered training in national trade facilitation to EAC members to help keep goods flowing after Covid-19 (UNCTAD, 2020); however, it is unclear what effect this will have in the long term. Covid-19 may also compound other short-term issues such as a locust infestation.³

There are three main regional organisations in East Africa: the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

Figure 1: Membership of regional organisations

Country	COMESA	EAC	IGAD
Djibouti	X		X
Ethiopia	X		X
Kenya	X	X	X
Somalia	X		X
South Sudan		X	X
Sudan	X		X

Source: Reproduce with kind permission from Mwita Chacha, University of Birmingham

A Centre for Strategic and International Studies blog suggests that **Africa as a whole may reassess its relationships with the world**. It may become more assertive on climate change, trade and other issues. It argues that 'Africans almost certainly will renew their commitment to regional integration and multilateralism'. However, they may re-evaluate ties with foreign countries, such as China (Judd Devermont, 2020). Africa is particularly reliant on multi-lateral institutions for support, so American and Chinese rivalry, a weak UN response, and undermining of the WHO, are therefore bad signs for Africa (de Waal, 2020).

Some have speculated that Africa should seek to change the terms of trade and finance. A blog post argues that Africa, suffering from demand and supply shocks, should use Covid-19 to free itself of structural dependence on the rest of the world. It calls for Africa to seek debt cancellation, and to create pan-African credit facilities. It includes no specific discussion of East Africa (Carlos Cardoso & Toby Green, 2020).

³ <https://igad.int/2429-igad-calls-for-increased-regional-collaboration-to-fight-desert-locust>

The EU and Africa may reshape their relationship, although there is no concrete evidence of what this might mean for East Africa specifically. The Cotonou agreement between the EU and AU runs out in 2021, making it a 'pivotal year' for relations (Nicole Koenig & Anna Stahl, 2020). The EU-African Union Summit in Brussels in October 2020 aims to realign the relationship between the regions. The focus will be on green transition and energy access, digital transformation, sustainable growth and jobs, peace and governance, migration and mobility. Priorities include a desire for a less securitised relationship, migration and green investment. Covid-19 has also created possible opportunities for Africa from Europe 'relocalising' production (Andrew Lebovich, 2020). However, there are no specific predictions for the effect on the EU-East Africa relationship.

The influence of Middle Eastern countries in the Horn of Africa has grown in recent years. The region has become a site of competition between, on the one hand, the Gulf Cooperation countries of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and on the other, Turkey and Qatar (Melvin, 2019). Eritrea and Sudan have committed troops to Saudi Arabia and the UAE's war in Yemen. Turkey, Qatar, the UAE have invested in ports and infrastructure on the Horn.

Commentators are divided on how Africa may re-align its engagement with China. China invests in and trades with all the countries surveyed. Many states have called for debt relief. However, it is unclear how this will play out (Maini, 2020; Van Staden, 2020). Covid may also change public opinion on China. China has practised health diplomacy by sending medical equipment to fight Covid and helped build an African Centre for Disease Prevention and Control research facility in Nairobi, but racism against Africans in China has generated outrage (Crisis Group, 2020a; Meservey, 2020; Shiferaw, 2020). One commentator argues that 'South-South cooperation à la China style may accelerate, and may be a conclusive pivot of Africa to China – the result of a combination of China's efforts to change the narrative on COVID-19 and the West's focus on dealing with its own domestic outbreak. However, will China provide debt relief to those countries that have been affected by COVID-19, or will it avoid that?' (Sidiropoulos, 2020).

A number of factors have been highlighted as shaping the relationship between Africa and China. These include (Gopaldas, 2020):

- Covid-based racism against Africans in Guangzhou may taint China's image in Africa. The incidents led to a diplomatic rebuke by countries including Kenya and Uganda.
- Likely to be used by African countries in negotiations over debt. China wants leverage over states and access to infrastructure, but needs goodwill.
- The situation may lead to more criticism of 'debt trap diplomacy'
- Chinese Covid-diplomacy, including sending equipment and supporting infrastructure, may improve China's image.
- Some African states may request reparations from China for Covid-19
- Covid will bring an 'inevitable shift in global supply chain contingencies'
- China may focus its investment inwards, or 'accelerate' its investment in Africa to take advantage of others' retreat from globalism.

China may also curtail 'belt and road' investments to focus on domestic investment (Gopaldas, 2020). However, some argue that China will maintain its interest in the BRI and African investment (Calabrese, 2020). China's investment in East Africa is largely centred on

infrastructure development and strategy, as the countries have relatively few natural resources. South Sudan is particularly dependent on China for oil exports, however.

It is unclear how Covid-19 might affect China's strategic role in the region. The first overseas Chinese military base was opened in Djibouti, near a US base, on the strategically important Bab el-Mandeb Strait. China also has two dialogue platforms for the Red Sea: Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF). Its interest in the Horn is more focused on economic factors than security, but shows a long-term aim to control sea lines of communication. It is unlikely to intervene in local conflicts. However, it does derive some political benefit as Red Sea states have shown support for China in Xinjiang, for example. East African sea states do not want to have to choose between US and China (Cannon & Donelli, 2020; Cheru, 2016; Vertin, 2020).

There are many **border disputes** in East Africa including the Kenya-Somalia maritime dispute; the ongoing dispute over the Ilemi Triangle between Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia; and dispute over Lake Victoria's Migingo Island with Uganda. Somalia and Ethiopia also dispute a border (Onguny, 2020). Egypt and Sudan dispute Ethiopia's right to operate the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) upstream from them on the Nile, as it will likely affect their water supplies (Crisis Group, 2020b). The relationship between Somalia and Somaliland also remains an issue. In Djibouti, supported by Ethiopia and Djibouti, Somaliland and Somalia established a 'joint technical committee to resume talks over Somaliland's claim to sovereignty which broke down in 2015; in following days, committee failed to make significant headway, but both sides agreed to form joint subcommittees to discuss technical issues in July'.⁴ Moreover, the federal government of Somalia remains wary of foreign interference with its regions. Some peace processes have been postponed, while others are continuing via video-link.

3. Countries in the region

Sudan

The removal of President al-Bashir in late 2019 may lead to a weakening of Sudan's role. A recent article argues that Sudan will have less influence abroad, while foreign states will have more influence in Sudan. Sudan's role in brokering peace in South Sudan may decline, for example. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt are supporting the transitional government economically: all want Sudan onside with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and to prevent the Muslim brotherhood gaining ground (ISSAfrica.org, 2020b). In addition, Sudan recently agreed to pay compensation to US victims of terrorism in order to be 'de-listed' as a state sponsor of terrorism and improve relations with the US (Fabricius, 2020).

Covid-19's economic effects may make Sudan's transitional government more reliant on foreign support. It may also threaten social stability in the country (Mergersa, 2020). However, it is unclear what effect these destabilising factors will have on Sudan's international position.

South Sudan

South Sudan is highly fragile economically and politically. It is reliant on oil exports, which will be hit by the economic downturn. Its debt-to-GDP ratio and low capacity to service its debt

⁴ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/july-alerts-and-june-trends-2020#somalia>

indicate 'unsustainable debt dynamics' (World Bank, 2020e). It is also reliant on humanitarian aid and peacekeeping forces, both of which are likely to be affected by Covid-19 (Mergersa, 2020). **Covid-19 is therefore a threat to its stability in the short-term.**

Since removal of Al Bashir in Sudan, South Sudan has lost its 'guarantor' for the 2018 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Another country, the AU or IGAD may have to fill this role (Atta-Asamoah & Mahmood, 2019). The UK, US, South Africa and Norway have also put pressure on the country's factions to share power (*A Major Step Toward Ending South Sudan's Civil War*, 2020). It is therefore unclear how exactly Covid-19 will affect the peace process and South Sudan's role in the region, beyond noting uncertainty.

Kenya

Kenya hopes to drive development and exercise regional leadership. Its Blue Economy project is focused on ocean-based resources through the Lamu Port, South Sudan, Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET) project with South Sudan and Ethiopia (David Goldman, 2020). Kenya has recently been elected to the Security Council, meaning that it can influence the Council's stance on issues such as peace in Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan (ISSAfrica.org, 2020b). The country has also recently begun bilateral trade negotiations with the US, which some argue potentially jeopardises its obligations under AfCFTA and the EAC (Ogotu, 2020).

Kenya's relationship with Somalia is one of its most significant, and has several dimensions. These include the involvement of the Kenyan Defence Forces in Somalia under the African Union Mission in Somalia's (AMISOM) efforts to cripple Al-Shabaab insurgency; security fears around al-Shabaab among Somali refugees in Kenya; and concerns over piracy and criminal activities along the countries' shared coastline (Oguny, 2020). The two countries also dispute a 100km maritime border. From Kenya's perspective, Somalia's claim would restrict Kenya's access to Mombasa and its influence in the Indian Ocean. The disputed area contains significant oil and gas reserves (HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019, p. 22). Kenya has begun withdrawal from ANISOM in Somalia. This marks return to its traditional 'passive and restrained' foreign policy, but leaves al-Shabaab with power, and Ethiopia in a stronger position in Somalia (Hansen, 2020)

The country's relationship with China may be re-evaluated in the light of Covid-19, although there is little substantial evidence on this. China is partly interested in Kenya as South Sudanese and Ugandan oil can be exported through the country. It has invested in infrastructure, and is one of Kenya's biggest trading partners (Joy Muthanje Mwaniki, 2020). Since the Covid outbreak, there have been several high-profile incidents: racism against Kenyans in Wuhan and Guangzhou, but also Chinese health diplomacy in supplying Covid equipment. A recent article suggests the possibility of increasing its manufacturing capacity to improve its balance of trade with China. It also suggests Kenya should seek to renegotiate its debt with China, but may have to take out more loans instead. There is, however, no evidence on the viability of these suggestions (Joy Muthanje Mwaniki, 2020).

Somalia

Somalia will be affected by the economic problems brought by Covid-19 in the near-term. For instance, approximately 40% of its population receives remittances, which may come under strain from Covid-related economic downturns in the West (Nisar Majid et al., 2020). The World Bank suggests that the country's growth outlook is 'only moderately downgraded' in the medium-

term, but this is 'Presuming that the global health pandemic related to COVID-19 is contained within the next two months' (World Bank, 2020d). It is also likely to face more instability as its federal states or al-Shabaab resist federal control, which is likely to be worsened if severe health, economic or public order effects of Covid-19 erode the legitimacy of the federal government (Weber, 2020).

Somalia remains fractured, and many states have some sort of economic or strategic influence in Somalia. Ethiopia and Turkey support the central government, but countries have also built relationships with Somalia's semi-autonomous provinces (e.g. Somaliland, Jubaland). Since, 2017 Turkey has trained the Somali National Army. It has also invested in Somaliland, and helped to push out investment from the UAE (Cannon & Donelli, 2020). AMISOM, the AU's peacekeeping mission, has had troops deployed in the country since 2007 and Ethiopia and Kenya have both sought to influence the country. Taiwan has recently established ties with Somaliland, which may exacerbate US-China competition in the Horn (Aspinwall, 2020).

Foreign powers intervening in Somalia do so for a number of reasons (HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019, p. 20):

- Religious and cultural ties (Islam and Arab cultural influence)
- Geographical proximity to the Middle East
- Geostrategic location along the Indian Ocean and one of the busiest sea trade routes in the world.
- Commercial position as a stabilising economy and trade hub, evident in several busy sea and air ports (e.g. Kismayu, Mogadishu and Berbera).
- To counter terrorism and counter Islamist fundamentalism (e.g. al Shabaab).
- Peacekeeping. AMISOM has operated in Somalia since 2007.
- Political competition between the Saudi Arabia-UAE alliance and the Qatar-Turkey 'coalition.'
- Military objectives; military bases (Turkish base in Mogadishu, and a UAE base in Berbera, the latter used in the war in Yemen)

With regards to the strength of Turkish and Qatari links with Somalia, Donelli (2020) argues that Covid-19 may not diminish the relationship. Turkish presence in Somalia 'has not developed dependency relationships, but has sought to establish co-operative or even partnership relationships. As a result, many of the bonds established in recent years by Turkey with African countries may be maintained even in the face of a drastic reduction in resources allocated to the continent.' In addition, Qatari natural gas means it is expected to be able to weather Covid-19, meaning it will continue to be able to support Somalia in the short-term. Following Covid-19, Middle Eastern rivals have sought to help Somalia with medical equipment, although the strategic implications of this remain to be seen (Donelli, 2020).

Covid-19 has delayed the possible resolution of a dispute between Somalia and Kenya.

Somalia disputes a 100km² sea boundary with Kenya. It contains hydro-carbons and is therefore economically significant to both countries. The dispute has been taken to the International Court of Justice, but the ruling has been postponed until 2021 because of Covid-19. Somalia is also

worried by Kenya's relationship with its Jubaland province and the Somaliland province, which exercises de facto independence. The economic and health implications of Covid-19 may further weaken the federal government's authority.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is the dominant power in the horn of Africa. One scholar describes Ethiopia as an 'imperfect hegemon' in the Horn of Africa (Le Gourellec, 2018). Its size, with the second largest population in Africa, fast economic growth, and the third largest armed forces in Africa, provide a basis for it to exercise power. Its sense of exceptionalism is another factor leading it to seek hegemonic status. Since 2002, it has focused on economic development, aiming to become a lower middle-income country by 2025. It has sought regional stability, acting to 'police' the region, to help attain this. Peacekeeping forces create an image of the country as a 'security provider' and enable it to present itself as a safe place for investment, as well as to protect trade links across the region and to the sea. It dominates IGAD, the regional body, and has gained legitimacy on the world stage by being seen to fight terrorism through interventions in Somalia. Ethiopia's neighbours see its engagement as more self-interested, however (Le Gourellec, 2018). As the world's most populous landlocked country, it seeks access to the sea through neighbouring countries' ports, namely Asmara (Eritrea), Djibouti, or Lamu (Kenya), Kismayu (Somalia) (Cannon, 2017; David Goldman, 2020). As part of this strategy, President Abiy has worked to improve relation with Eritrea in recent years (Ylönen, 2018). Disruptions to these relationships may weaken Ethiopia's position.

Ethiopia has received significant funding from the Middle East and elsewhere, but has sought to remain neutral with respect to broader geopolitical disputes. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Abu Dhabi are funding the Addis Ababa-Berbera highway, and the UAE is funding development in Berbera. The latter project is an implicit recognition of Somaliland. For Ethiopia it provides access to the sea. Moreover, a stable Somaliland can act as a buffer against an unstable Somalia and Al Shabaab (ISSAfrica.org, 2020a). It has attempted to stay neutral with regards to the competing power bases in the Middle East (Turkey and Qatar; Saudi Arabia and the UAE; and Iran) and has received investment from both Turkey and Saudi Arabia (Cannon & Donelli, 2020). China is a significant trading partner and has helped finance Ethiopia's infrastructure building, including contributing towards the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (Cheru, 2016). The economic downturn has already hit Ethiopia's service sector and, combined, with a locust infestation, may, like everywhere else, have a significant effect on the country's economy, depending on how much it is contained (World Bank, 2020b). It may make Ethiopia more reliant on outside investment, reduce the availability of this investment, or increase the leverage of the investing countries.

Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia remain in dispute following the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The dispute has the potential to escalate and resolution may require the help of regional or global actors. Following the collapse of talks in recent weeks, Ethiopia began filling the reservoir in July 2020 (Institute for Global Dialogue, 2020; Crisis Group, 2020; BBC, 'Nile Dam Reservoir Filling up - Ethiopia', 2020). Ethiopia sees the dam as vital to its development (Pilling, 2020). Egypt and Sudan see it as a threat to their water supplies. Egypt is keen to get Ethiopia to agree to drought mitigation measures, as well as to agree to dispute resolution mechanisms in case of disagreements. Egypt fears a loss of water security, whereas Ethiopia sees some of the suggested provisions as a threat to its sovereign rights to resources, for which its citizens have contributed through patriotic bonds, and fears that an international

dispute resolution mechanism would likely favour Egypt (Ylönen, 2020). All sides see the dispute as integral to their national interests, and have yet to agree a compromise (Crisis Group, 2020b).

Covid-19 is exacerbating political tensions in the country as opponents of the government express unhappiness with restrictive measures, delays to the elections, and economic problems (Yusuf, 2020). Elections have been called off and opposition groups have shown dissatisfaction (Mergersa, 2020). It is unclear what effect these internal disturbances will have on Ethiopia's external position or strategy.

4. References

- A Major Step Toward Ending South Sudan's Civil War. (2020, February 25). Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/south-sudan/major-step-toward-ending-south-sudans-civil-war>
- Aspinwall, N. (2020). Taiwan Throws a Diplomatic Curveball by Establishing Ties With Somaliland. Retrieved 15 July 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/taiwan-throws-a-diplomatic-curveball-by-establishing-ties-with-somaliland/>
- Atta-Asamoah, A., & Mahmood, O. S. (2019). Sudan after Bashir: Regional opportunities and challenges. <https://issafrica.org/research/east-africa-report/sudan-after-bashir-regional-opportunities-and-challenges>
- Nile dam reservoir filling up—Ethiopia. (2020, July 15). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53416277>
- Bouët, A., & Laborde, D. (2020). COVID-19 border policies create problems for African trade and economic pain for communities. <https://wca.ifpri.info/2020/05/14/covid-19-border-policies-create-problems-for-african-trade-and-economic-pain-for-communities/>
- Calabrese, L. (2020). China and global development: 12 things to read and watch in July. ODI. <https://www.odi.org/blogs/17143-china-and-global-development-12-things-read-and-watch-july>
- Cannon, B. J. (2017). Ethiopia, Berbera Port and the Shifting Balance of Power in the Horn of Africa. 23. <https://1filedownload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Ethiopia-Berbera-Port-And-The-Shifting-Balance-Of-Power.pdf>
- Cannon, B. J., & Donelli, F. (2020). Asymmetric alliances and high polarity: Evaluating regional security complexes in the Middle East and Horn of Africa. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(3), 505–524. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1693255>
- Cardoso, Carlos & Toby Green. (2020, June 25). How Africa can take this moment to end a 500-years-old economic model. *African Arguments*. <https://africanarguments.org/2020/06/25/how-africa-can-take-this-moment-to-end-a-500-years-old-economic-model/>
- Cheru, F. (2016). Emerging Southern powers and new forms of South–South cooperation: Ethiopia's strategic engagement with China and India. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(4), 592–610. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1116368>
- Crisis Group. (2020, June 17). Nile Dam Talks: A Short Window to Embrace Compromise. Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/nile-dam-talks-short-window-embrace-compromise>
- Crisis Group. (2020a). COVID-19 and Conflict: Seven Trends to Watch | Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/sb4-covid-19-and-conflict-seven-trends-watch>
- Devermont, Judd. (2020). A Seat at the Table: African Leadership in a Post-Covid-19 World. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/seat-table-african-leadership-post-covid-19-world>
- de Waal, A. (2020). Governance Implications of Epidemic Disease in Africa: Updating the Agenda for COVID-19.

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/104471/1/De_Waal_governance_implications_of_epidemic_disease_africa_published.pdf

Donelli, F. (2020, May 29). Somalia and Beyond: Turkey in the Horn of Africa [Text]. ISPI. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/somalia-and-beyond-turkey-horn-africa-26379>

Fabricius, P. (2020, May 29). Sudan does an about-turn in US relations. ISS Africa. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/sudan-does-an-about-turn-in-us-relations>

Goldman, D., (2020). Kenya-Somalia Maritime Row: The Geopolitical Dimension of Regional Economics & Security – Strategic Intelligence Service. <https://intelligencebriefs.com/kenya-somalia-maritime-row-the-geopolitical-dimension-of-regional-economics-security/>

Gopaldas, R. (2020). Africa Current Issues - COVID-19 in Africa: Outcomes and Scenarios. Nanyang Business School. <https://doi.org/10.32655/AfricaCurrentIssues.2020.19>

Hansen, S. J. (2020). What Kenya stands to lose and gain by withdrawing from Somalia. The Conversation. <http://theconversation.com/what-kenya-stands-to-lose-and-gain-by-withdrawing-from-somalia-133640>

HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2019). Flirting with hyenas: HOW EXTERNAL INTERESTS ARE FUELING INSTABILITY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA. <https://horninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Flirting-With-Hyenas.pdf>

IARAN. (2017). East Africa and the Horn in 2022 an Outlook for Strategic Positioning in the Region. <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/IARAN-East-Africa-to-2022-revised.pdf>

IMF. (2020). Emergency Financing by Region. IMF. <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/COVID-Lending-Tracker>

Institute for Global Dialogue. (2020). Spotlight on Africa mapping geopolitical trends Q1 2020. <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/spotlight-africa-mapping-geopolitical-trends-quarter-one-2020/>

Institute for Security Studies. (2020). Peace & Security Council Report. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/psc-125.pdf>

ISSAfrica.org. (2020, June 5). Abiy helps Somaliland put more facts on the ground. ISS Africa. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/abiy-helps-somaliland-put-more-facts-on-the-ground>

ISSAfrica.org. (2020b, June 22). SA passes Kenya the baton in the Security Council relay. ISS Africa. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/sa-passes-kenya-the-baton-in-the-security-council-relay>

Kacana Sipangule Khadjavi, Tobias Stohr, & Rainer Thiele. (2020). EMERGING FROM COVID-19: SCENARIOS FOR AFRICA. KIELER BEITRÄGE ZUR WIRTSCHAFTSPOLITIK, 26(June), 49–55. https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/-ifw/Kieler_Beitraege_zur_Wirtschaftspolitik/wipo_26.pdf

Koenig, Nicole, & Anna Stahl. (2020). How the coronavirus pandemic affects the EU's geopolitical agenda. Hertie School Jacques Delors Centre. https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-hsog/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/3520/file/20200424_EU_Solidarity_Koenig_Stahl.pdf

- Le Gouriellec, S. (2018). Regional power and contested hierarchy: Ethiopia, an 'imperfect hegemon' in the Horn of Africa. *International Affairs*, 94(5), 1059–1075.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy117>
- Lebovich, A (2020). After covid: Resetting Europe-Africa relations for mutual benefit. ECFR.
https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_after_covid_resetting_europe_africa_relations_for_mutual_benefit
- Mahmood, Omar s, & Atta-Asamoah, Andrews, (2019, September 18). With Bashir gone, the Horn faces a power shake-up. ISS Africa. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/with-bashir-gone-the-horn-faces-a-power-shake-up>
- Maini, T. S. (2020). Post-COVID-19: Will China's 'Debt Trap Diplomacy' in Africa Falter? *The Geopolitics*. <https://thegeopolitics.com/post-covid-19-will-chinas-debt-trap-diplomacy-in-africa-falter/>
- Majid, N., Abdirahman, K., Adan, G., & Kleist, N.. (2020, April 7). How Will Remittances Affect the Somali COVID-19 Response? [Text]. Conflict Research Programme Blog.
<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/crp/2020/04/07/remittances-affect-the-somali-covid-19-response/>
- Mboce, H. N., & Muigua, K. (2020). Africa's Regional Co-Operation and Integration: The Corona Virus Litmus Test. 4, 20. <http://journalofcmsd.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Clean-Regional-Co-operation-The-Corona-Virus-Disease-Litmus-Test.pdf>
- Melvin, N. (2019). The new external security politics of the Horn of Africa Region. 32.
<https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/new-external-security-politics-horn-africa-region>
- Megersa, K. (2020). COVID-19 in Eastern Africa: impact analysis on conflict and security. K4D Helpdesk Report 847. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies
- Meservey, J. (2020). China's Palace Diplomacy in Africa—War on the Rocks.
<https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/chinas-palace-diplomacy-in-africa/>
- Muthanje Mwaniki, Joy (2020). The Double Edged Sword: China-Kenya Relations in the wake of COVID-19 Pandemic. *Horn Bulletin*, 3(4). <https://horninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HORN-Bulletin-Vol-III-%E2%80%A2-Iss-IV-%E2%80%A2-July-August-2020.pdf>
- Ogutu, M. (2020). Caught between Africa and the West: Kenya's proposed US free trade agreement. *Africa Portal*. <https://www.africaportal.org/features/caught-between-africa-and-the-west-kenyas-proposed-us-free-trade-agreement/>
- Onguny, P. (2020). Why the Kenya-Somalia Maritime Dispute Is Far from Over, Regardless of the International Court of Justice Ruling. *Africa Policy Journal*, pp. 41–51.
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2403112253?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>
- Paduano, S. (2020). As Africa Faces COVID-19, Chinese Debt Relief is a Welcome Development. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/africa-faces-covid-19-chinese-debt-relief-welcome-development>

- Pilling, D. (2020). Ethiopia's Nile mega-dam is changing dynamics in Horn of Africa. <https://www.ft.com/content/bdb2c384-2406-4f64-bde1-c2878ff520cd>
- Shiferaw, L. T. (2020). Testing the relationship: China's 'Corona diplomacy' in Africa. ECDPM. <https://ecdpm.org/talking-points/testing-relationship-china-corona-diplomacy-africa/>
- Sidiropoulos, E. (2020). Africa after COVID-19 and the retreat of globalism. <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/africa-after-covid-19-and-retreat-globalism/>
- Signé, L., & van der Ven, C. (2020). How the AfCFTA will improve access to 'essential products' and bolster Africa's resilience to respond to future pandemics. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/04/30/how-the-afcfta-will-improve-access-to-essential-products-and-bolster-africas-resilience-to-respond-to-future-pandemics/>
- Tetui, Moses (2020). Coronavirus in East Africa | Think Global Health. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/coronavirus-east-africa>
- UNCTAD. (2020). COVID-19 accelerates greater trade coordination in East Africa. Unctad.Org. <https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=2411>
- Van Staden, C. (2020). COVID-19: Not much give from China in its relationship with Africa. Africa Portal. <https://www.africaportal.org/features/covid-19-not-much-give-china-its-relationship-africa/>
- Vertin, Z. (2020). Great power rivalry in the Red Sea: China's experiment in Djibouti and implications for the United States. GLOBAL CHINA, 31. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FP_20200615_china_djibouti_vertin.pdf
- Weber, A. (2020). Covid-19 in the Horn of Africa. Gaining Trust in a Crisis (p. 8). https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2020C20_HornofAfrica.pdf
- World Bank. (2020a). COVID 19: Debt Service Suspension Initiative [Text/HTML]. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/debt/brief/covid-19-debt-service-suspension-initiative>
- World Bank. (2020b). Ethiopia global outlook. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/471041492188157207/mpo-eth.pdf>
- World Bank. (2020c). Kenya global outlook. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/171341492188161402/mpo-ken.pdf>
- World Bank. (2020d). Somalia global outlook. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/752311492188170790/mpo-som.pdf>
- World Bank. (2020e). South Sudan global outlook. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/713731492188171377/mpo-ssd.pdf>
- World Bank. (2020f). Sudan global outlook. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/375291492188168999/mpo-sdn.pdf>
- Ylönen, A. (2018). Is the Horn of Africa's 'Cold War' over? Abiy Ahmed's early reforms and the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. *African Security Review*, 27(3–4), 245–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2019.1569079>

Ylönen, A. (2020). Aspects, Current Concerns, and the Stalemate in Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. 40. <https://horninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HORN-Bulletin-Vol-III-%E2%80%A2-Iss-IV-%E2%80%A2-July-August-2020.pdf>

Yusuf, Semir, POLICY BRIEF COVID-19 and Political Stability in Ethiopia, Institute for Security Studies. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/pb143-2.pdf>

Acknowledgements

We thank the following experts who voluntarily provided suggestions for relevant literature or other advice to the author to support the preparation of this report. The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the opinions of any of the experts consulted.

- Mwita Chacha, University of Birmingham
- Federico Donelli, University of Genoa
- David Styan, Birkbeck University
- Christopher Clapham, Cambridge University
- Manu Lekunze, University of Aberdeen
- Stephen Paduano, London School of Economics
- Philip Onguny, Université Saint-Paul

Suggested citation

Kelly, L. (2020). *Immediate and longer-term impacts of Covid-19 on geopolitics in East Africa*. K4D Helpdesk Report 846. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

About this report

This report is based on six days of desk-based research. The K4D research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development. For any enquiries, contact helpdesk@k4d.info.

K4D services are provided by a consortium of leading organisations working in international development, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), with Education Development Trust, Itad, University of Leeds Nuffield Centre for International Health and Development, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), University of Birmingham International Development Department (IDD) and the University of Manchester Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI).

This report was prepared for the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and its partners in support of pro-poor programmes. It is licensed for non-commercial purposes only. K4D cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information contained in this report. Any views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of DFID, K4D or any other contributing organisation. © DFID - Crown copyright 2020.

