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SOMALIA AND ETHIOPIA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Good morning. Good afternoon. I am Vanda Felbab-Brown, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and director of the Brookings Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors and co-director of our Africa Security Initiative. I am delighted that you are all joining us today for our webinar on Crises and Elections in Ethiopia and Somalia and the regional setting of Horn of Africa, a very important issue that has been very dramatic and visibly in the news and, of course, unfolding in very important ways in the region. We have an absolutely terrific panel to discuss those very complex, very important issues with us that I will introduce in a minute.

You know, I mentioned that Ethiopia and Somalia have been going through some very dramatic events in the past few months including, in the case of Somalia in the past few days and weeks. There are, of course, more dramatic changes in both countries taking place in the past few years such as in the past five years that have preceded those dramatic crises and to some extent, influenced them to other extent, but have not been able to prevent them.

Dramatically, we have seen the rise of the Horn of Africa as a region in the world a strategic significance, including a country like Somalia that for a very long time, had simply been seen through the lens simply of counterterrorism, of instability, civil war, its own strategic significance has increased dramatically. We have seen the arrival of countries like China, the United Arab Emirates into not simply the region, the broader region, but very involved in local issues in places like Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and with that has come the competition between some of the Gulf countries such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

And as I mentioned, there have been significant domestic internal changes in the past five years or so. The end of the TPLF regime in Ethiopia that gave rise to Prime Minister Abiy's arrival in power. The instability in Oromia, but also Eritrea and, ultimately, however profound questions about state formation in both countries in both Somalia and Ethiopia. The emergence of federalism in Somalia and it's still highly incomplete nature that has given an impetus to the current crisis.

And we have seen a set of crises now. Of course, in Ethiopia over the past year, the Tigray leadership became increasingly dissatisfied with the loss of its predominant and politically

disproportionate power that characterized the TPLF regime. Also increasingly threatened by Prime Minister's Abiy targeting prosecution efforts against members of the former TPLF regime that many of the Tigray politicians interpreted as disproportionately centering on them. The postponement of elections in Ethiopia, and ultimately, in November, we see the outbreak of the Tigray insurrection. The war with which Prime Minister Abiy responds, an unfolding entrenched insurgency still ongoing today, and very difficult humanitarian situations, all of which impacts the neighboring countries of South Sudan, Sudan has pulled in Eritrea including in terms of troops. And now we are few days away from elections in Ethiopia.

In Somalia, we have some of the issues unfolding in not in the same ways but dealing with some of the basic questions of the power distribution between the center and the periphery. Minister Farmaajo's much more centralist approach generating a lot of disenchantment and political contestation throughout his presidency increasingly characterized by deteriorated relations between the federal member states of Somalia and the federal government of Somalia, which over time takes on very explicit planned dynamics and planned contestation issues.

Ultimately, the decision to postpone the elections in Somalia. Elections that have never been held easily, but then became -- the process became particularly troubled in 2020. Then there was the September deal that seemed to provide a pathway forward for elections by February 2021. They did not take place. Both the mandate of the parliament and of the president, of President Mohamed expired in February. And we see dramatic set of events unfolding that increasingly become violent. Finally, in April his maneuver in the Somali parliament to extend his rule by two years and a response of violent conflict at the end of April in which the country has come arguably as close to civil war as it had at any point since the early 2000s or late 1990s.

And civil war, in my view, far more impactful than the ongoing and increased Shabab insurgency. Now, we have been hearing a lot of characterizations lately that Shabab has benefited from the political instability, the edge of civil war situation that is obviously the case. But Shabab has been gaining strength really for the past three, four years prior to what's been unfolding now.

And so, we don't know when the elections in Somalia will take place. In fact, some of the negotiations between President Mohamed and key influential politicians are supposed to start taking

place today. But Somaliland, a state within Somalia that has sought independence, has not been recognized as an independent state, but has sought independence, is holding elections in June.

So, this is the sort of lay of the land that we have an absolutely wonderful panel to take us through and explore with us many dimensions of both the internal developments, as well of the geopolitical and regional political dynamics. And thank you all, by the way, for submitting your questions. We have received tons of questions. There is no way that we will have an opportunity to go through of them. But I will bundle the questions along topics that have been raised and guide our conversation through them in that form.

So, it is my great pleasure now to introduce Ms. Lidet Tadesse, who is a policy officer in the Security and Resilience Program. She previously worked as policy advisor of the Life and Peace Institute for the Horn of Africa regional program, where she supporting among other issues, the Life and Peace Institute's engagement in the African Union and IGAD. She also worked as an independent consultant on a whole range of issues surrounding civil society organizations in East Africa. And we are very fortunate that Lidet will be able to join us today.

I am equally thrilled to introduce Minister Abdi Aynte, who is currently the managing director of the Laasfort Consulting Group. As I mentioned, he was the minister of planning and international cooperation in the Somali government, and later on also served as the senior policy advisor to the Somali president. Subsequently, he also was a senior official through the United Nations responsible for external relations, resource mobilization, and strategic planning. Abdi also was a cofounder and executive director of the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies in Mogadishu at a premier Somali thinktank. And prior to that, held various positions as a journalist and editor with BBC, Voice of America, and Al Jazeera English.

And in no way least, although last in my introduction, is Ms. Bronwen Morrison, who is currently the senior director of the Center for Global Security and Stabilization at the Dexis Consulting Group. At Dexis, Bronwen is responsible for work on global security and stabilization in complex operating environments. An area that she brings extraordinary insights to a powerful experience. She also has intimate knowledge of Somalia, where she served as a national security advisor to the Office of

the president. Also, as a senior disarmament demobilization and the integration security sector advisor to the Office of the Prime Minister, and where she also served as the head of research and analysis for the Africa Union Mission in Somalia, AMISOM. She held other positions such as a (inaudible) associate managing 100 million portfolio on stabilization in the overall security sector. And also, having an extraordinary experience in the transition initiatives project of USAID in a wide set of countries in the regions such as Nicaragua, Peru, Serbia, Montenegro, and others.

So, with that, Lidet, let me turn to you. If you would please give us your opening thoughts on where we are in Ethiopia, the significance of the June elections, its implications for Prime Minister Abiy's rule, update on what's happening with the Tigray insurgency and the humanitarian situation, and any other points you would like to raise. Thank you.

MS. TADESSE: Thank you so much for having me, Vanda. And it's great to be with all of you and the participants online. So, interesting but also several questions there. I'll try to address some of them.

So, as Vanda, as you've mentioned, Ethiopia is not only in a political transition, but perhaps in a political shakeup. And the state itself is in a shakeup. I think this is, perhaps, one time in the recent history of the country where Ethiopians are very concerned about the whole stability of the country. So, no longer are our aspirations about democracy and the like, but we've sort of, you know, gone back to talk about the basics of security because there are several hot spots in the country and there are some political progresses in terms of the political arrangements. But still a very difficult time in the history of the country and very much one that could be characterized as, you know, crossroads. And maybe this is also where the election comes into the picture. Because there are several implications that the election sort of proposes, but then also risks that it presents to the country.

So, one of the implications of this election is that right now when you look at the political fissures in the country, one of the big trends that you see or one of the big fissures is what is the vision that we have for the country? There are some political actors that want to maintain the federation the way it is. Ethiopia has a federal system that is largely organized around ethnic identity based on the principle of, you know, self-determination of ethnic groups. And then there are those that say this ethnic federation

system that we have experimented with has not led us anywhere constructive. It's part of the core issue that we have now. It's part of the political crisis and why a lot of people are dying in several places in the country.

So, by problematizing this federal arrangement, some political factors instead propose the country should have a citizen-based federation system. But there are several contestations around this. It goes back to history of how the state is (inaudible) and constructed. So, very much this question that we have around history, questions that we have around the federal dispensation, and based on who wins the election, basically could take the weight of the political fissure between these two visions for the country it can go one or the other. So, very, very important in this regard.

And the second aspect is around legitimacy. So, whoever wins this election, could claim legitimacy. And this then allows this entity to govern and to govern effectively. Or at least that is the aspirations of Ethiopians as well. Because as I mentioned earlier, the main concern now with the election for Ethiopians is will this election be a peaceful one and will whomever comes into power, will it be able to stabilize the country and hold the pieces together? So, that is the fundamental question. And perhaps whoever wins the votes of Ethiopians in this election could perhaps claim legitimacy and basically put down their visions and then push things forward.

What is this sense of legitimacy? It has several applications. One is psychologically in the eyes of people, but also government officials being able to direct or give directions, they need to be perceived as legitimate actors. Now, because of how this change came into being, Abiy and the current existing party or prosperity party, because they came out of the previous, the EPRDF party in which TPLF was a member, there are questions around their legitimacy and perhaps this is one way of -- the election is one way of resolving that if they win votes.

And so, whoever is perceived to have legitimacy in Ethiopia, the sense of, you know, government is so strong, then this also trickles down to, you know, the extent to which civil servants, for example, would be able to execute. The extent to which security actors are, for example, to also dispense their duty. So, a very important factor.

The other thing is this election, particularly within, you know, the most important parties,

including the incumbent, could also resolve questions around the party, questions around who is in power because there are some members of the incumbent that are not very clear who's going to be on the winning side. So, they are sort of on the fence wondering if it is the incumbent that will win or if it is other parties that will win. And because they are not sure which party will win, then their allegiances are also split. This means that they are not doing their work effectively.

And perhaps this election will also bring clarity on who is in power, which is an important decision especially when you go at the local level, for local governance, who is in power is a very important political economic calculation a lot of political actors make. So, maybe that will also give clarity.

The other thing is whoever also, you know, comes out victorious or depending on how this election goes, what kind of legal and political agendas are pushed forward would also be determined by that. And this includes things like national dialog, for example. Part of the reason why the country has not been able to serious entertain the question around national dialog is because the question around national dialog has been put forth as some parties wanting to question the legitimacy of the current party and then suggesting instead that there needs to be -- there ought to be a transitional government. And this is something that the current existing party doesn't accept.

So, because of these contestations, even discussions around a national dialog, couldn't be legitimately held. And perhaps having clarity now going forward with the elections maybe discussions around national dialog that don't necessarily involve a transitional government. They may, but in any case, knowing who has the -- who is the legitimate power holder might sort of give a new momentum or a clean slate to talk about a national dialog in the country.

And the other is and this is for Ethiopians as I said, the main question right now for Ethiopians is will this be peaceful and whoever comes into power, would they be able to do their jobs properly, keep the country, keep security and stability. But that said, this election could also herald the possibility that Ethiopia might start exercising multi-party democracy, particularly if we don't see what we used to see before, which is, you know, the incumbent winning 100% or a significant majority. So, depending on, you know, what the distribution of seats in the parliament would be, there is perhaps some hope that this would be a time where Ethiopia goes forward by way of exercising multi-party democracy.

So, these are some of the main points around what the election means for Ethiopians.

And just to say, you know, something about the conflict in Tigray, as I said, this election is happening at a time where not only in Tigray, but in many other parts of Ethiopia where there's instability, but, of course, the scale of violence that was witnessed in Tigray is of a different scale. And the intensity of it is of a different scale. The humanitarian context is also one I think that as a nation, we don't even -- it's quite tragic -- and we don't even know the scale of that tragedy because the political -- because the situation has been so politicized that all of the numbers, all of the facts, all of the allegations have been so politicized that at this point we don't even have, you know, an independent entity that we could say that could guide us and that could show us the scale of the tragedy, the scale of the situation there. So, but that's said, as I mentioned, there are also several other locations within the country that are struggling with humanitarian issues, but then also political breakdown.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you so much, Lidet. Let us come back to Tigray and some of the other areas in the second round. If I can just quickly and very quickly and under a minute, please, get your take on -- and some basic facts are people in Tigray going to be able to vote or perhaps only people in Mekelle? What will it look like in terms of elections there? And, of course, much of the Tigray leadership is either in hiding or has been arrested. And more broadly, of course, even prior to 2020, Prime Minister Abiy who at first had a lot of applause for his loosening of authoritarian measures came to be criticized for suppression of civil liberties, freedom of expression. How is it that all playing in the election? So, one issue is, will the elections be safe, secure from violence? The other is how free are they in fact? So, under a minute if you could just give us very quickly your take on those as we then go to Minister Abdi.

MS. TADESSE: Yeah, so, no, so, the election is not going to be held in Tigray. The electoral board has a different schedule for Tigray. And then also other locations in the country. So, people there are not going to vote because of the violence that is still apparent in the region. To your other question on how free this election is going to be and authoritarian tendencies, of course, one of the things that we have to see there is I think we could say there is some focus in terms of loosening up the political space, particularly formally. So, now, political parties can formally organize and register and fun

and they can campaign. But informally, some of them have also complained that in action when you go to different regions on the ground, they do face a lot of suppression.

Now, this raises questions around there are also some parties that have boycotted, particularly two main parties that have boycotted that would have been quite important for (inaudible) region. But it's so complex because there are several debates around, you know, why they boycotted and whether or not there is also legitimacy to them taking this decision. But I'll maybe elaborate that at a later point.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you so much. Excellent. Minister Aynte, if I can go now to you to talk about the equally great complexities in Somalia and that came to a pitched moment regarding the elections, but of course, the elections is just one symptom of the basic unanswered questions of power division and resource division between Mogadishu and federal member states, state formation, planned dynamics. A lot happening there. Over to you, please.

MR. AYNTE: Thank you Vanda. Good morning to you. Good afternoon to other colleagues. It's a real honor to join you today for this very important discussion on the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia and Somalia are inextricably linked to each other. So, I was very delighted to hear Lidet's intervention in this regard. And so, I'll pick it up from there.

You know, this meeting also comes at a very important moment, this discussion because today, maybe in the next few hours, in fact, we are going to have a highly anticipated dialog on the electoral processes in Somalia in Mogadishu led by the prime minister, which would see the federal member states also reconvene in Mogadishu. This is probably the third or fourth time they come to Mogadishu to try and have this dialog because the previous dialogs have all failed.

Why have they failed? I'll get to that in the specifics in a minute. But let me just also, you know, put this in context. Since the revival of the Somali government 20 years ago in Djibouti, they've had five -- this is the fifth presidential elections we're having. And each four years, Somalia was very unique in actually in the Horn of Africa to organize elections that are broadly acceptable to the key stakeholders of the country. By no means were these elections were free and fair, but they were broadly acceptable to the key stakeholders because they were negotiated in good faith by the sitting

administration, but also with the consent and consensus of the opposition and the federal member states.

This is the first time in 20 years that a sitting president's mandate expires without having an agreement on the way forward. Which is why on the 8th of February when the mandate of the current president expired, we all knew that we were in an uncharted territory, which could lead to all sorts of things including violence. Regrettably, when the President Farmaajo extended his own mandate on the 12 of April, through the parliament, through the lower house of parliament, I should say because parliament has two houses and each (inaudible) houses. But in this case, the president went for the least resistant path, which is the lower house of the parliament where he has greater control.

When that happened, we knew that this was the seeds for a potential. And unfortunately, that's exactly what happened on the 25 and 26 and 27 of April where you saw gun battles in Mogadishu and tens of thousands of people being displaced. And ultimately, the national security forces really splitting into various groups and factions because some of them did not want to be part of an illegal extension of mandate.

Now, why did all of this happen? There are three dimensions that one needs to look into when you talk about how did we even get here in the first place? The first dimension is that President Farmaajo as soon as he came to power really wanted to dismantle the federal system of Somalia because he saw it as an impediment to his centralist political ideology. And I say this not because it's a theory, but because I have actually worked at his office in the first few months of his administration and I saw this firsthand. I had a front row seat to this, where he saw the federal architecture of the country as an elite driven process and President Farmaajo really thought that the elites of Somalia essentially do not want to see him in power. That's the assumption that he came with even though he had just been elected with overwhelming majority and an extraordinary amount of support across the country. And so, that ideology was put in motion immediately after the president came to power and it really, I think, set the tone for what would happen over the next four years between 2017 to 2020.

Related to that and my second point or the second dimension to look at is that the president essentially never prepared for a one person, one vote universal suffrage election. Even though the president continues to insist that he wanted all along a one person, one vote, the fact of the matter is

that there were no practical preparations on the ground. Two months after the president was elected, there was this major international conference in London where, among other things, it was agreed by 42 international partners and all Somali stakeholders that a one person, one vote must be put, must be organized within four years' time and that preparation must start immediately. That was in May 2017.

The first meeting about an election between the federal government and the federal member states took place in June 2018, nearly 15 months after the president was elected. And that was the only meeting between the president and the federal member states about elections. It was the first and the last one because even though they have in theory agreed on an electoral system, we all knew that we were already running too late at that point in time because to organize a universal suffrage election for a country like Somalia, which hasn't organized one for 50 years, since 1969, you need to do extraordinary amount of prep work. As we now know in other parts of the country, which wasn't the case in the sovereign part of the country. So, that was essentially, you know, a failure.

What the president wanted to do instead was to neutralize domestic elite competition and ultimately hold a rubber stamp universal suffrage election. Very similar to what you see in other parts of the region, probably even in Ethiopia. And so, the first priority was to dismantle the federal system and to along the way, neutralize the potential domestic competition. So, that got in the way of organizing, of doing what needed to be done to organize universal suffrage elections.

Now, to give you more context to this point, the parliament passed a full electoral law in February 2020. Just a few months before the president's own mandate was to expire. A year before it was to expire and nine months before the parliament's own mandate was to expire. At that point in time, everyone knew that you simply could not organize, you know, universal suffrage elections. So, the insistence by President Farmaajo that he wanted to do this all along was really does not hold truth.

The third and important dimension to how we got here is the external dynamics. And this is extremely important and very much linked to what Lidet was talking about and I know my colleague Bronwen will expand on this a bit later. First, you had the Gulf Crisis in June 2017, which gave President Farmaajo an excellent opportunity to essentially exploit the Gulf Crisis and side with one of the warring parties in the Gulf that is Qatar against UAE and Saudi Arabia who are the traditional allies of Somalia. I

mean, keep in mind that UAE until five years ago was the largest trading partner of Somalia.

So, that offered the president's administration an incredible amount of support from Qatar. Some say a bottomless cache coming from Doha to the administration and gave them, you know, huge leverage domestically by having, you know, incredible amount of resources to expand to solve all kinds of domestic problems.

The second element of the external dynamic is the dramatic change that took place in Ethiopia in 2018. The rise of Prime Minister Abiy. The fall of the TPLF administration. And the coming out of cage of Isaias Afwerki in Eritrea. Immediately after that happened, President Farmaajo aligned himself immediately with Afwerki and with Abiy and the three of them have formed the famous regional alliance and regional integration. Now, of course, you know, we all know Afwerki is not exactly the greatest, you know, proponent of democracy. And I think that gave President Farmaajo an opportunity to align himself with autocrats of the region.

The third sort of element of the external actors was the uncritical support that President Farmaajo's administration received from the U.S. and EU for the first 3-1/2 years of his administration. And I say uncritical because, you know, I know that probably the U.S. and EU meant well and wanted to support, see success of the Somali administration, but ultimately, they've allowed Farmaajo to rig local elections. Three local elections in three different federal member states. And they've endorsed the outcome of those elections, which set the stage for what's going to be an incredibly difficult negotiations about federal elections.

Of course, as I said, the vision of President Farmaajo was that once you rig local elections, it'll pave the way for more successful federal elections on your side. Of course, federal elections are a lot more complicated than rigging a local election. But I say that the EU and the U.S. have publicly endorsed rigging those elections and have, you know, indirectly contributed to where we are today. Now, of course, now they are extremely critical of it and I think they have a buyer's remorse on this.

And then, finally, then my final point is, you know, is one person, one vote an electoral process even possible in Somalia? I say absolutely, yes. And we see this example now in Somaliland.

Vanda, you mentioned this in your opening remarks. Somaliland now is going to organize, you know, an electoral process that was endorsed by all political parties in Somaliland, all three of them, and are participatory and this is local and parliamentary elections. And Somaliland has really demonstrated that you can organize and hold elections, free and fair elections, you know, if you make it participatory and engaging for all political forces.

But also, Puntland, another state in Somalia that is not seeking independence like Somaliland, is now organizing in July actually they are organizing local elections in three districts. Those are pilot elections and should these pilot elections go as planned, they are hoping to expand that into other districts within Puntland. So, it is possible. The key thing is you have to have a political consensus.

So, let me stop here and I look forward to future interventions.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Great. Well, thank you so much. You know, lots of issues you brought to the table. I very much want to return to the issue of Eritrea and its role in the region and want us to explore the further many dimensions including the role of the United States and the international community.

Let me just give you one one-minute question, please, Abdi that specifically, has to do with the one man, one vote and the exemplars of Somaliland and Puntland. The difference there, of course, is that the al-Shabab insurgency is far less potent in Somaliland and even Puntland than it is in the rest of Somalia. So, apart from the political division and very different ideas about the federal state or the absence of federal state, how does the al-Shabab insurgency affect any possibilities of holding one man, one vote elections either to resolve the current expired mandate or even in the next round afterwards?

MR. AYNTTE: I mean, there is no doubt that the potency of al-Shabab in sovereign Somalia is a major challenge for organizing one person, one vote. But it is not the biggest challenge. al-Shabab is now a disruptive force more than it is a dominant force. It's no longer the dominant force in sovereign Somalia. In fact, the most recent assessment by the Pentagon was that it no longer poses an existential threat to the Somali government.

That said, you know, the key thing is that you have to have a political consensus because

elections were going to be organized in the main towns of the country. They were not going to be organized in the countryside. And as we know in other parts of the world, you know, if you have 30 to 40% of participation of the public of these elections, that's good enough for a country like Somalia. So, al-Shabab is a problem, but it's not the problem. I think that's what I would say. Thank you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Great. Thank you. And that's also, you know, an excellent transition to Bronwen, to you, because AMISOM is a very important factor in security in Somalia in what role it plays or does not play in organizing the security of the elections. And also, in how it's responding or not to al-Shabab. I guess my own assessment of the strength of the insurgency, of the al-Shabab insurgency, is more bleak, I believe that they're more potent. And they still have the capacity to pose a threat to the Somali state, particularly if the challenges between Mogadishu and federal member states continue to escalate and we don't see some easing of that. But even in the absence of it, I think it's power and potency is significant and has increased over the three years.

And AMISOM has been a very important actor in limiting the extent to which al-Shabab explicitly rules territories. But, of course, the mandate of AMISOM is supposed to expire once again at the end of this year and then there are questions as to how it will be renewed to Ethiopia that's had both forces within AMISOM and independent forces in Somalia. Both of which have been very critical, some of the heftiest anti-Shabab actors.

And there are questions as to whether the mandate will be renewed. We have heard some words from Ethiopian military forces that they are not looking to renew the extension. So, that's one element of the regional complexities, the issue of Eritrea and the tripartite alliance that Minister Aynte brought in another very important dimension. Bronwen, over to you, please, to help guide us and help explore with us the regional dimensions.

MS. MORRISON: Thank you so much, Vanda. It's a real honor to be invited to this distinguished panel hosted by Brookings and delighted to be here. I always like to say, and it's true, if there's one thing I know about the region it's that I don't know. It's a complicated place, and particularly, Somalia. I'm not Somali nor Ethiopian, but I have worked in that region and I would be delighted to share some impressions based on that.

But I'd first like to just pick up on what Abdi was saying regarding the ability to organize elections in Somalia. I first started my career with the Peace Corps and then later with the U.N. in election peace operation missions. And in Cambodia, we registered over 4 million voters and conducted an election in '92. And I went on to work in others. And I do think that it's possible to do. And, however, agree that it takes a long time and easily three years at a minimum, I believe.

So, and I also obviously, wanted to come on the heels of his mention of the tripartite and AMISOM. So, for those that may not be as familiar, African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia is comprised of troop contributing countries. And so, troops are coming from Ethiopia, they're coming from Djibouti, and they're coming from Kenya, as well as Burundi. Burundi's the only country that's not bordering Somalia. So, you can imagine how complicated that can be in either perceptions or reality. And sometimes perception is reality in these complex environments.

So, when I first arrived in 2012 -- although I had previously worked a little bit in '10 and '06 -- to Somalia, you know, the Ethiopian relationship was on the heels of the invasion in '07 and there had been some bitterness, obviously, still residual in 2012. A bit of a reproachment under former President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. And Farmaajo came in 2017, pretty much staunchly saying, you know, you won't see as much Ethiopians in Somalia.

However, as mentioned, in 2018, in September, I believe, he met with President Abiy and Afwerki and signed this tripartite agreement. Now, what's interesting is two years later, they met again in Eritrea to solidify their security pact in January of 2020. And then in March, Somali security forces candidates were sent to Eritrea to get trained as a bilateral agreement.

And in the history of Somalia, generally the relationship with Eritrea was rather contested because there was allegations of Eritrea supporting al-Shabab. So, this was clearly a turn around. And I, for this panel, was thinking about how if you look at the crises in Ethiopia and Somalia, in my opinion, it warrants a close look at this tripartite agreement. Because what you have is now Farmaajo had gotten so close to Ethiopia thinking that it would be able to isolate the federal member states that previously had one-on-one relationships with Ethiopia. However, with the advent of this crisis in Tigray, you see a waning relationship with Ethiopia. And I give an example of President Deni from Puntland traveled to

Addis. There are open communication channels, you know, with Jubaland. So, you're seeing something that had diminished previously.

I also think what's interesting is the role of Djibouti. They and Kenya were particularly put on their heels by this tripartite agreement and felt very betrayed. You know, IGAD is the economic pact, sort of the regional bloc, Intergovernmental Authority and Development. Which doesn't have the East Africa word in it, but it's about East Africa. And so, to sort of sneak behind the backs and have a tripartite agreement without notifying Kenya, Djibouti, South Sudan, Sudan, it all pretty much put them on their heels.

And so, what you find, I think, is it isolated Somalia. And Djibouti is particularly important to Somalia because the president of Djibouti is the same clan, Issa, as eight MP seats are allocated to the Issa clan and one upper seat. And so, the relationship there typically is one that you want to have a warm relationship with Djibouti if you're the incumbent.

In this case, as you may know, President Farmaajo was not invited, or didn't attend, either one. Whatever it is, he didn't go to the inauguration of President Guelleh. And so, the PM went, which I think sends -- it's fodder for analysis. And my analysis is it's a frosty relationship with the Farmaajo administration. And that is not a good signal for his election prospects.

Also, remembering that Djibouti has a relationship with Saudi Arabia and Somalia does too. As we know, Qatar and Turkey are closest in their views regarding the Gulf Crisis, but in general. And the UAE was close to Somalia, but in 2018, there was a airplane that was stopped and cash was purported to be delivered for, you know, the salaries of some of the Somali National Army under an agreement. That's the one side of the story. The other side of the story was that it was to stop the sacking of the parliamentary leader. But regardless, Somalia cut off relationships.

And so, what you're seeing now is Qatar has slowly started to move away. There's this we'll return to UAE, but I do not think it would be particularly that successful. The only sort of country that I think is more strategic in their outreach is Ethiopia. They recognize that Kenya has a seat on the U.N. Security Council. And it's quite powerful. And they have more cordial relationships with Kenya. They have relationships with Djibouti and Somaliland, as well as -- and they need those in light of the difficulties

and the conflict, frankly, over the GERD, the dam that is being. Two different sides of points of view between Egypt and Ethiopia, of course. And then Sudan is more aligned with Egypt at the moment.

So, that means Ethiopia really needs Kenya and South Sudan and Uganda. And I think Abiy, during this Tigray crisis, I think many analysts have said, underestimated how long this would drag out. I think many had recognized that it could be opening Pandora's box. And at this juncture, I think the election preparations, it's not surprising that they are not going that well. It takes a while to change centralized government and all of a sudden try to empower at the lowest level when you're not getting the orders from the top anymore.

So, I think that's another consideration we have to think about, so. Thanks for letting me share some thoughts.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Excellent. Thank you for ending with Tigray because it's a perfect example of both the local issue involving and impacting an entire country, but also drawing in Eritrea, (inaudible) issues with Sudan, South Sudan, the regional community having implications for Egypt's behavior regarding the GERD. More I want to explore.

But before turning back to Lidet, Bronwen, you know, one way to look at the development of the past two years in Ethiopia and Somalia is to say that it is Eritrea's President Isaias Afwerki who is the big winner. Who has managed to come out of the isolation in the sense that Eritrea is the pariah supporting al-Shabab. An image that very much had to do with the role of former Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles and his very skillful maneuvering of his former ally into being seen as the pariah, the diplomacy of isolating Eritrea. And this, of course, accounts for Eritrea's dislike of the Tigray leadership and its ready willingness to provide forces, Eritrean forces, to enter the Tigray region.

Prime Minister Abiy recently under pressure asked Eritrea to withdraw the forces, but it's not clear that that has even happened or will happen. But all of a sudden Afwerki has inserted himself or has risen to a position of having significant impact on the survival certainly Abiy's military effort in Tigray with the insurgency entrenched there. And no sign that the insurgency is lessening up. But also, having developed warm relations with Mogadishu such as through the training of the Hardam forces, the elite unit that would belong to President Mohamed and Farmaajo and reduce some of the SNA instability a

sublet of the Somali National Army and the fact that it essentially is still mostly a group of clan militias. Or at least a group of units that have at least dual loyalties, dual allegiances, if they have any allegiance to the broader national Somali state.

Although we saw some of, you know, refusal to extent the rule, but one again is to question is it because of basic commitment to the forming constitution of Somalia or is it primarily because of how we and broadly clan loyalties. So, you know, just your take on that is affecting the big winner here. And including, you know, his own dislike of IGAD, his non-participation in IGAD, and now you have the tripartite alliance, the talk of the economic integration around Eritrea with Eritrea being a significant mover. Is that what we are seeing on the international dimension?

MS. MORRISON: I would say he's the loser. Essentially, you have because of this tripartite alliance, which clearly Afwerki saw an ally in Abiy. What we see in the beginning, I think, he thought he may have had something. And particularly, vis-à-vis there is a longstanding crisis over who owns a particular island between Eritrea and Djibouti. And right now, it's still under Eritrea control. And so, you can imagine Djibouti wasn't particularly thrilled when this tripartite alliance happened.

But I believe if you look at what's happened, Eritrea certainly hasn't gained anything out of this tripartite alliance. Somalia, as I mentioned I believe is more isolated than ever because of this tripartite alliance. Eritrea doesn't have a lot in their treasury to particularly help Somalia. I was always confounded why they turned to them so much. You have because of that alliance lost and the agreement with Kenya's relationship remains very difficult. For six months, they weren't -- they cut off diplomatic relations. Qatar came in to try to solve a problem, and then five days later, Somalia said no to business cargo of cot from Kenya and then that led to Kenya off all air space.

So, you have now MPs that trying to go back to their other homes in Nairobi are businessmen. They have to go to Addis, to Uganda, to Nairobi now. And that's going to not help Farmaajo in his aspirations for his election certainly, I don't believe. Money in the pocket is being burned by businesses.

And I think, you know, Sudan is certainly not particularly pleased at Afwerki either. Given that this has -- I think that the Tigray crisis has further escalated the border crisis with Sudan and Ethiopia

that had been simmering on and off but never at the length that it is now. I mean, the Sudanese are looking at the Ethiopian peacekeeping troops in Abiy's state in Sudan they're not as comfortable with them there now.

So, I think all over really Afwerki has caused Ethiopia and Somalia to be more isolated.

Thanks.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Great, thank you. Ms. Tadesse, let me pick up the Tigray question. Just a few questions on the table and perhaps so limit your comments to about five minutes. I also want to let our audience know that what I have been doing already is bundling questions and topics that they have come in in the way I'm shaping my questions and I'll continue to do that.

So, with respect to Tigray, you know, I made the claim or argument that the Tigray insurgency is pretty entrenched. And even with the presence of Eritrean forces there, maybe their departure eventually or not, there seems really little likelihood that the Ethiopian forces are anywhere close to defeating the insurgency. Do you foresee any possibility after the elections in Ethiopia of having some sort of negotiated deal between the Tigray leadership in hiding and in prison and the next president? Particularly, the next prime minister. Particularly if the next prime minister is once again reelected, Prime Minister Abiy.

Certainly, there was one way to handle the crisis in October and November it was to try to seek to have a dialog. The prime minister chose instead to go for the military response. Do you see more of an opening and willingness after the elections to engage in any kind of negotiations with the Tigray leadership? And if so, do we have sense of any outline of what a deal might look like that would end the insurgency?

Perhaps a more immediate issue, there is, of course, also the joint investigation committee established for Tigray so that we have a sense of what kind of atrocity and human rights violations were committed during the fighting and are still taking place by the insurgency or in response to the insurgency. Do you foresee -- what's your take on the joint investigation? Does it have credibility? How can it be empowered? How can it have credibility? What kind of transparency we can expect or demand?

MS. TADESSE: Yeah, thank you for those questions. So, in terms of the insurgency, I think from the point of view of the federal government, the TPLF is still around. I mean, there are reports especially the humanitarian organizations do report that some level of violence were just in several parts of Tigray. But because there are not the scale of violence or the level of combat engagement is not over a higher scale, I don't think the federal government, for example, finds it disruptive enough for the whole nation that it would pursue negotiation.

But, I mean, of course, it's not just the level of violence that determines whether or not the government say, for example, a frustrated party or if Abiy wins these elections, that is not the only thing. In fact, that's not even the main thing that determines it. I think the level of sentiment in Ethiopia also needs to be understood that the political situation or differences between the federal government and the TPLF sort of in the minds of a lot of Ethiopians ended the moment TPLF attacked the National Defense Forces.

So, for a lot of people, that, for example, had lost their confidence in Abiy for one reason or another. But and we're hoping that TPLF and the federal government would bridge their differences. The moment the news came out that TPLF attacked the National Defense Forces, that was a no-no. And I feel like that right now is also what drives a lot of Ethiopians to support the prime minister and it stands on what is happening -- or and it stands on TPLF. Of course, the main problem here and I think the greatest tragedy is that, you know, eliminating TPLF or obliterating TPLF is one thing. But then what is happening and who's paying the price for that happens to be, you know, a lot of Tigrayan civilians. And their stories are not even adequately heard.

But that is, you know, part of the whole complex there. And I personally do not believe that after the elections whoever comes into power, actually, not just Abiy, I don't think there would be also popular acceptance of this idea of negotiating with TPLF. Maybe the one thing that could change that dynamic is maybe two things. One is what kind of negotiation are you having? Are you going to have a negotiation that would bring back TPLF to power? Or are you going to have a negotiation that would allow the leadership of TPLF, for example, to flee? Or to have some sort of arrangement to seize facilities, but they won't come back to power. Because I feel like in Ethiopia the sentiment around any

notions of TPLF negotiating and being, of course, a legitimate actor to govern is not acceptable in my sense.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Can I just clarify. So, TPLF not in any political role does the sentiment extend beyond TPLF's political role in Tigray? So, you know, one issue that I don't think is really on the table with Tigray at all is the return of a TPLF regime. But a separate issue is how the Tigray elite is able to play a role at least in the Tigray region is that also seen would you say by the rest of Ethiopia as unacceptable? So, the only acceptable negotiations are surrender and exile?

MS. TADESSE: I mean, so here I think you see very, very clearly sentiments within Ethiopia also are divided. Because people in Tigray, some of them were saying actually TPLF is the most organized political actor we have. And TPLF could represent us. TPLF could have several problems, but maybe they would reform. I think there was hope that they would reform and maintain the governance in Tigray.

But the rest of the nation is also saying, you know, what the TPLF has done to the National Defense Forces is completely unacceptable and the same with Tigrayan activists and Tigrayan civilians also in Tigray right now say what the federal government has done in an attempt to eliminate TPLF is unacceptable. So, right now you have a very strong non-recognition of each other's pains and non-recognition of each other's grievances from, you know, people living in Tigray and people living in the rest of the country. But I feel like in terms of the negotiation with TPLF, then the rest of the country accepting that TPLF continues to rule or to govern in Tigray would be highly, highly unlikely, I would imagine.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Great, thank you. I hope you have a chance to come back to other parts of Ethiopia in the formation of militias and non-state arm actors and very politicalized actors in those regions as well, you know, beyond Amara (phonetic) to look at other parts of the country.

But since we are on this topic of negotiations, Abdi, if I can turn to you. One of the issues that has somewhat surprisingly come back to attention in the recent weeks in Somalia is the possibility of negotiations with al-Shabab. And I say that's somewhat surprising because my own take anyway is that the country has come extremely close to civil war in April.

Civil war far more destructive, far more fundamental than simply the Shabab insurgency. And Shabab in my view, has been very comfortable over the past, you know, three, four years and taking advantage of the instability between Mogadishu and federal member states. So, you know, it's kind of curious to me to think of negotiations with Shabab at the time and I would make the argument Shabab has very little interest to negotiate.

But, of course, there is another context to that and that's the broader strategic context and the arrival of the new U.S. administration of the Biden administration. Which has pulled out its military forces from Afghanistan or has reaffirmed the deal that the prior Trump administration agreed with Taliban to remove forces and with the hope that there would be some intra-Afghan negotiations. I'm not clear that they will take place or not clear how much blood and time will be spilled in Afghanistan before they take place.

But I think some of the activity around the Taliban, Afghanistan negotiation has also fed life into the notion that maybe it's time again to start thinking about negotiations with Shabab. Your take, please, on how realistic, feasible, wise, then what would be the requirements? What would any kind of movement toward such negotiations look like?

MR. AYNTÉ: Yeah, thanks, Vanda. You're right, I have seen that discourse now quite relevant and quite important in the context of Somalia. I think it's important to highlight that al-Shabab has evolved over the years, over 10 years now from a one-time very dominant insurgency group that controls large swaths of territory across the country to what it is now, which I believe is of all of the studies I have seen, indicate that they are more of a criminal network mainly focused on collecting money. Which they have been able to do quite successfully in Mogadishu and other places in Puntland and Kismayo and all the major towns in the country.

And that criminal syndicate now has in my view has no vested interest in changing the status quo. So, when we talk about dialog with al-Shabab, we are assuming, I believe wrongly, that there is another side that is willing to negotiate. I haven't really seen that. Plus, the dissemination of the leadership of al-Shabab over the years especially the killing of their former and charismatic leader, Ahmed Godane, in 2014 by the U.S., essentially changed their top leadership.

At the moment, their leadership is largely invisible. They do not communicate with the public as much as their previous leadership did communicate with the public and so on and so forth. So, I think the discussion around negotiating with al-Shabab is a little too premature. I also think that as you know in every context, you know, you negotiate with an adversary once you have created the conditions for the adversary to be wanting to come to the table. You know, at the moment the Somali government is not strong enough to create that condition, even with AMISOM.

You know, AMISOM hasn't carried out a major, you know, operation against al-Shabab for years now. The battle which is in Lower Shabelle has been struggling to recapture four bridges. Just four bridges in one small region in the country. And they have tried to do that now for nearly two years with very mixed results. You know, some success and some setbacks. So, the conditions are not set both militarily and politically for a meaningful dialog in my view.

Now, of course, there are I would say, you know, negotiations entrepreneurs countries who as we know very well, even in the case of Taliban, who are very good at really making the case for these negotiations, and have gotten so good at doing these things. But we, I believe, are not in the situation of Afghanistan. I think we have managed to, you know, keep al-Shabab at bay even though they continue to be a destructive force. So, I think it's a little too premature at this point.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. Let me come to you -- let me return a bit to the issue of the elections process in Somalia. And finding a way out of the current political crises, the negotiations that are presumably starting today between federal authorities and key political stakeholders, regional state presidents, and the regional political influencers, and clan influencers. One of the things that was good about the September 20 elections that we had in Somalia was the role that it gave the civil society actors in monitoring and executing the process of selections of the electors in the regions. There seemed to be, you know, significant recognition of the very positive role that civil society has played in Somalia and not just recognition of that role but enabling of the civil society to have a very real political impact, at least in the electoral process as it was envisioned there.

And right now, we don't know whether there is -- whether there will be consensus that the September agreement holds perhaps the federal authorities might still be interested in dividing. And it's

not clear that federal member states, President Marube, President Deni still believe in the deal. My broader question, however, is just the negotiating dialog right now, to what extent are seeing yet another iteration of inner elite brinksmanship (phonetic), politicking, deal making that really sidelines the society at large and very much minimizes voices of Somali people? Is there any way to structure the kind of negotiations that need to take place to get out of the crisis in a way to create more transparency and more importantly voices of civil society? Should we have, you know, the civil society actors in the room along with President Farmaajo, Prime Minister Roble, Presidents Deni and Marube, how could that take place?

MR. AYNTÉ: Yeah, so, the September 17 agreement, which was signed in September of 2020, really was nothing more than a framework for a dialog. Essentially, it was an endorsement of indirect elections. A departure from direct elections to indirect elections, which Somalis know very well because we've done this 20 years. Now, different sides of this dialog interpret it differently. As you said the federal government sees it as essentially the only, you know, agreement and that parties should just recommit to it and then everyone should go ahead and implement the outcome of September 17th.

Now, the opposition in Puntland and Jubaland view September 17 agreement as only a framework. And that they also view it, you know, that so many other things have happened since then, including an armed conflict in Mogadishu. An attempt on the lives of two former presidents. And many other things have happened. So, they would want to reopen that dialog and key elements of it. Now, the issue of the role of civil society was mentioned in the 17 September agreement, but let's be frank. In reality, that agreement gave significant powers to the federal government and the federal member states.

You know, in the context of Somalia, for the last 20 years, electoral processes has been about elite contact. An agreement among the elite of the country. And as much as that might sound bad and terrible to the average citizen or maybe to the international community, let's also keep in mind that that is exactly what kept the stability and peace of Somalia and that's why we've had five relatively successful elections in 20 years. So, until we get into a point where we can have a one person, one vote, the role of non-elites, i.e., the civil society and others will remain relatively limited. And I think that's just a function of it.

Now, you know, in the coming days I think what you are likely to see is, I mean, the key thing to watch is how the prime minister really acts. Remember, he is now the person with the most significant political capital in the country. Farmaajo, you know, has said that he will give him the authority to run the electoral dialog. The opposition and member states have welcomed that. Almost all of the international community are now lining up behind him. The question is would he act decisively and lead this electoral process or not?

One big challenge -- maybe not a challenge -- is in the last four elections we've had in 20 years, the sitting prime minister was always a candidate for the presidency. And that created an equilibrium, a balance, within the federal government. This time around we have a prime minister who's not a presidential candidate. So, one wonders whether he would have enough incentive to be strong enough to push back against what is likely the, you know, sort of an interference by Farmaajo from behind the scenes. That remains to be seen in the coming few days.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you very much. Bronwen, let me come to you. You brought the issue of the great Ethiopian renaissance day in GERD, which Ethiopia has invested a tremendous amount of build in which it believes will radically solve its energy needs and energy challenges, and also something that potentially promises the issue of mass deforestation in Ethiopia and beyond, and production of charcoal. But it's also something that's of enormous worry to downstream countries that depend on an isle like Egypt where some 70% or more of the population is concentrated along the Nile Valley.

Now, Ethiopia has made the decision to start filling the dam despite either opposition or uncertainty from other countries like Egypt. What do you see right now are the current issues at stake? I mean, I personally find it very difficult to image that Ethiopia would hold its decision to fill, but there might be ways to think about how the filling is take place? What kind of monetary mechanisms are put in place to monitor the amount of water that is going to downstream countries? There are also examples from other parts of the world including the United States, U.S. water agreements with Mexico. Some of them particularly allow the Colorado River exemplars are some of the most successful and effective water agreements.

And one reason why they are so effective is because they recognize that the treaty is a living treaty that's being updated on a regular basis. So, in the case of the U.S.-Mexico water issues, the Colorado River is every three years where a joint committee meets and they have some significant changes in allocations, solutions, recognitions of problems. So, in a complex environment of real water scarcity, both in the U.S. and Mexico, a rather quite effective handling of a difficult issue.

And the other element why the U.S. here can be an important model is because the latest updates or some of the recent updates through to the Colorado River Treaty have recognized for the first time the natural environment as a stakeholder. And the natural environment itself is allocated water. But what in your view are the most important pitfalls, challenges, or greatest opportunities in where we are with the GERD and filling of the stream -- filling of the dam and the impact on the Nile River stream?

Bronwen, over to you. I don't know if your mike is muted.

MS. MORRISON: Got it. Thank you for that question. I have to be very up front, I am not as well versed in the intricacies of the GERD. But I know that, of course, this has been a longstanding conflict over the issue of the GERD. And I'm not as well informed on what kind of mediation efforts there may have been from other players besides the United States. I'm sure the United States is working through the new special envoy for Horn of Africa, Ambassador Feltman, who recently returned from the region. But what struck me is thinking of, you know, is there a regional player that may have good relationships with both sides? And what struck me was the role of the UAE who has good relationships with Ethiopia and obviously solid relationships with Egypt. As well as good relationships with Sudan.

And so, I guess, my only contribution would be to posit is there a way to engage with them as well? Thanks.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Okay, thank you. There have been rumors, allegations floated that countries like Egypt or Sudan might benefit from challenges in Tigray as a mechanism to prevent the filling of the dam. I mean, my own view is that even if such allegations had reality to them, that this would not be an effective way of preventing the filling of the dam. I just don't see how that's going to be stopped.

The real issue is how to have a productive international forum that recognizes the needs of all the stakeholders. And my big pitch here would be to move beyond defining stakeholders as merely countries but allowing a participation of other actors. Those who can represent the natural environment. Representatives of farmers, but also industry and have a negotiated setting where there is a broad stakeholder participation that's equitable in which Ethiopia recognizes its obligations toward our countries and they recognize Ethiopia's needs but that moves beyond the platform of simply pitched government relations to a platform that is about why the set of stakeholders and their needs and hefty technical support and expertise in that setting.

Bronwen, let me start with you here for a question and then I want to go to Lidet and Abdi as well. And that's, of course, COVID. COVID has impacted every part of the world in extraordinarily dramatic ways. Globally, some 150, 200 million people have been pushed into extreme poverty. And has had devastating impact on the countries economically in like Somalia, like Ethiopia that even without the plight of COVID, suffer chronic and repeated food insecurity, chronic food insecurity and repeated famines.

And at the same time, of course, are particularly Somalia have very limited medical capacity to respond to COVID, any kind of treatment, oxygen provision. So, the economics of the first wave has been very significant, but now the region is experiencing a second wave after having kind of often discounted and been dismissive of the first wave. And the second wave seems to be far more dramatic in terms of impacts on health.

But (inaudible) where very few people are complying with even something like masks. So, I can start with all of you and then go to Lidet and to Abdi, your thoughts on COVID, how can the responses be better? It seems that in Somalia all of the political oxygen is sucked up by the politics and very little of any kind of attention is being devoted to governance including governance in COVID. But Lidet, I also want to hear how that's playing out in Ethiopia. So, Bronwen, please, let's start with you.

MS. MORRISON: One thing that stands out is, of course, the economic devastation toward Somalia in particular was because of the slowdown of the remittances that came from the U.S. or other countries where COVID affected the employment of families that, of course, support the Somali's

community. One of the things that I so appreciate about Somali's, of course, is their humor and their resilience. And I know during the first wave I think there was this recognition that it doesn't affect us Somalis. But the second wave, of course, is starting to show more and some unfortunately a number of high-profile former leaders have succumbed to the disease.

And I do know that there's been an uptick of support, but and I think you're starting to see now in these higher-level meetings at least some wearing of masks by principals. But I do agree with you. I think that the political crisis that is facing the country is limiting the ability to effect beyond Mogadishu any kind of true widespread assistance. Because you're talking about getting oxygen, even just to Mogadishu is tough. Particularly now with this Kenya airspace problem. Thanks.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: And, of course, that also brings the issue of vaccine, getting vaccines into Somalia and for the (inaudible) of Tigray, you know, in a setting where outside of United States, Canada, Europe, a very small portion of the world's population has been vaccinated and has any access including countries terribly hit like South African, have tiny access to vaccines. And so, the issue of equity, humanitarian access and, of course, complicated in Somalia even more by access to Shabab controlled territory which perhaps is something, Abdi, that you can explore with us.

But Lidet, what are you seeing with respect to Ethiopia and the second wave, economic impact, health impact?

MS. TADESSE: Yeah, I mean, the issue I think vaccines is a very good question, a global one. And that really very much reflects on, you know, question around morality and equity and things like that. In Ethiopia around 2.2 million vaccines have been distributed. And also, I mean, you have to recognize that part of the population is not convinced that COVID is real and that it exists because the scale of the problem at least COVID as a health crisis, the scale of it has not been as bad as initially projected, so, back in March, back in April. And so, as a result, not everyone is willing to be vaccinated. But in any case, the vaccines are not going to get to everyone who would have liked to be vaccinated either.

That said, the economy of COVID I think has been severe. Particularly people who were already in lower economic trench. And for them, the government and also people, I mean, in Ethiopia

when you say civil society, it's also neighbors and uncles and cousins. There has been a lot of sharing, particularly at around the first round to respond to the economic aspect of COVID. But the problem in countries like Ethiopia is also you can't because of the health risk, you can really lock down the economy because there are so many people who live on the day through daily activities.

Overall, at the macroeconomic level, the impact is significant, but perhaps, again, less significant or it's not as bad as initially expected. But the economy has shrunk quite a lot and inflation is also rising in Ethiopia. And this could further also put a strain on the political situation, you know, the more the inflation grows, the more the grievances or popular grievances could also grow.

So, those kinds of impacts are already manifesting. But I think the real impact of COVID, the economic impact, I think we're only going to feel it maybe next year or the year after when we know actually, you know, how many people are not able to get the money they need. They are not able to also collect their harvest because of initially it was locusts, now it's also insecurity and then also COVID-related issues. So, I think the COVID situation even if vaccines were to be distributed, the impact is going to last for the next few years to come.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Abdi, over to you. Thank you, Lidet.

MR. AYNTÉ: Yeah, no, I think like everyone mentioned, certainly COVID has had a devastating impact on Somalia economically in humanitarian terms. On the human toll, really as Bronwen alluded to, we've lost three former prime ministers to COVID in the last, you know, year or so. And the impact has been quite devastating because, in part because the overall capacity to respond to a crisis of that magnitude is significantly limited both at the federal level, but also at the member state level. The lack of oxygen, for example, in big cities like Mogadishu has been severe over the past few weeks even. You know, and it was great to see private sector really stepping in, you know. Hormuud, the largest company in Somalia, just purchased an entire factory from Turkey and has transported it to Mogadishu so that they can produce oxygen in Mogadishu and they are locally made, and so on and so forth.

And through the COVAX mechanism, I think we have received about 400,000 or so doses of Astra Zeneca. My understanding, like Lidet said, that many people really didn't even want to

take that because of various beliefs that, you know, either COVID was not as deadly or it wasn't true or something like that. It was my understanding that the 400,000 doses were not even exhausted yet even though they should have been exhausted a long time ago.

So, we have a number of challenges. One of which was also the public awareness about a truly devastating global pandemic like COVID. It wasn't as big as it was supposed to be because the energy as you said is entirely focused on the political crises. But also on the other humanitarian crisis, I mean, right now we're having huge floods in Middle Shabelle in north of the capital. Other, you know, humanitarian crises are springing all across the country. And then on top of that, you have Shabab, as you say, Vanda, which is telling the people that, you know, COVID is either not true or if it's true, sometimes they say they have their own medicine. They've been selling their own medicine in the areas they control. So, really, you have, you know, a mix of problems across the country in relations to COVID.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you very much. Your last comment about Shabab and telling people they have their own medicine is fascinating. It shows the evolution of Shabab that a year ago as the awareness about COVID was emerging, at least seemed to indicate that unlike in the 2011 time, it would allow access of humanitarian workers to Shabab territories going through its own change. But now a fascinating turn again in claiming that they can -- they don't have to rely on external support and they can handle the situation themselves.

We are essentially at the close of the hour. But I would like to give all of us an opportunity or all of you an opportunity before I thank all of us to give 30 seconds to a minute concluding remark if you would like. You don't have to. Let me start perhaps, Bronwen, with you and just go in the reverse order. You know, any kind of concluding thoughts before we wrap up.

MS. MORRISON: Thank you so much. Yes, I suppose what I'd like to stress is that I do believe that while I appreciate that this panel has been discussing Somalia and Ethiopia because I do think as Abdi mentioned they're inextricably linked. And I think it's important for these conversations to happen and for Somalia to be seen as the strategic country that it is. And how it is also tied, as mentioned earlier, in the regional geopolitics. And I appreciate this panel highlighting the importance of Somalia. Thank you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Lidet, perhaps over to you right now.

MS. TADESSE: Well, yeah, it was a pleasure to discuss with all of you. I mean, as Bronwen said, Ethiopia and Somalia are interlinked. But not only Ethiopia and Somalia, the whole of the Horn is a complex system. That sort of, you know, has a domino effect. You touch one thing and then something pops up in the other part of the region. So, I believe it's also a region that needs to be understood with a lot of nuance and in-depth investigation. I have very much benefitted from Abdi's analysis as well. So, thank you. And as well, Bronwen's analysis as well. So, thank you so much for having me.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: And, Abdi, over to you, please for any concluding words.

MR. AYNTÉ: No, thanks for having us. I mean, the only thing I would say really is that a few years ago this region, the Horn of Africa region, was really going through a very optimistic period where you had the election of President Farmaajo was extremely welcomed across the country, across the region, and even across the world, really, seen as a new beginning. And then you had the dramatic events of Ethiopia, the rise of Prime Minister Abiy, the Nobel prize and so on. The (inaudible) between Ethiopia and Eritrea and you know and all of that.

And then a few years later, we find ourselves in this very pessimistic period and I think what went wrong are a couple of things. One is that, you know, the Trump administration really ignored Africa in general, but particularly the Horn of Africa. And I think that gave rise to people like Afwerki. And really who came out of his isolation and essentially tried to remake an entire region.

And the second thing is, of course, Afwerki's own ambition to try and dismantle the Horn of Africa's sort of prevailing order. You know, think about the Horn of Africa, especially IGAD countries are ruled by either dynastic leaders like Uhuru or longstanding leaders like president of Uganda, president of Djibouti, you know, and so on and so forth. And even Sudan before Al Bashir was removed.

Afwerki wanted to essentially remake this by putting under his arm the two newest leaders in the region, Ethiopia and Somalia. And through them, really reimaged a region that he dominates. I think it's important for the U.S. and other countries to really put Afwerki back to where he belongs, which is the isolation he belongs because the sort of devastation that he brought to the region is

incalculable whether it's the conflict in Tigray or the crisis we have in Somalia or even the ongoing unresolved border disputes with Djibouti and other crises. And even making GERD and Sudan and Ethiopia water situation, you know, complicated.

I think that's the central problem and it needs to be addressed and I was pleased to see Ambassador Feltman visiting Afwerki and hopefully delivering that message. I think it's a key message here. Then we can deal with the other issues, I think, in Somalia we have enough internal systems to deal with a crisis now that was created by Farmaajo. I think hopefully the negotiations that started today will lead to an acceptable electoral process among the stakeholders. Thank you very much, again.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, Mr. Aynte, thank you so much for your contributions and your insights, Ms. Tadesse, also very much to you and, of course, Ms. Morrison, you all brought in incredible insights. Many rich thoughts. Thoughts that require further exploration. Unfortunately, this is all the time that we have for today. But at Brookings Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors and the Africa Security Initiative we are interested and will closely follow the Horn of Africa and will be engaged in all of you in exploring those issues.

And my tremendous thanks to all of you and also to our audience, the very many rich questions that came in. And we look forward to having you in another of our events in the future.

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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