



SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT UPDATE REPORT



31 July 2008 No. 5

Ethiopia/Eritrea

Recent Developments

On 30 July, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1827 terminating, without a follow-on mission, the mandate of the UN Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) with effect from 31 July.

Background

On 3 July, the Council asked the Secretary-General to engage the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments on the options available for a follow-on UN presence after the expiration of the mandate of UNMEE. Ethiopia had earlier indicated that it would be ready to host such a mission provided its mandate did not include references to the Algiers Agreements. (The Algiers Agreements comprise two pacts—the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities of 18 June 2000 and the Peace Agreement of 12 December 2000—which were to form the basis of the normalisation of relations between Ethiopian and Eritrea.)

Following consultations by the Secretary-General with both countries, he informed the Council on 29 July that the UN had consulted the parties about three possible options:

- a small military observer mission in Ethiopia;
- a small political and military liaison office in Ethiopia; and
- a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General based in New York.

The Secretary-General indicated that both Ethiopia and Eritrea responded that they would not accept any of the options. In effect, there had been a hardening of both countries' positions and in particular a fundamental change in the Ethiopian government's earlier position of relative amenability to hosting a UN presence on its territory. To further complicate matters, Ethiopia expected the Council to act to require Eritrea to withdraw from the Temporary Security Zone, while Eritrea called for the Council to require withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from its territory (S/2008/487).

In response to these developments, on 29 July Belgium—the lead country on this issue—circulated the draft resolution proposing termination of the mandate of UNMEE. The key elements of the resolution draft were:

- to terminate UNMEE's mandate without prejudice to the obligations of Ethiopia and Eritrea under the Algiers Agreements;
- to remain seized of the issue and request a report from the Secretary-General on the situation between the two countries on a regular basis, with appropriate recommendations; and
- to urge the parties to explore further options to find a closure to the situation.

In a practical sense the termination had only a limited impact as far as the troop contributing countries were concerned. Most contingents had been relocated from Eritrea on a temporary basis in February and March pending a decision on the future of the mission. (An exchange of letters between the Secretary-General —S/2008/368 of 5 June 2008—and the president of the Council—S/2008/427 of 30 June 2008—had confirmed that the troops of UNMEE who were temporarily relocated from Eritrea to their home countries should be considered as repatriated.)

Key issues

The underlying issue—the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea over the border delimitations—remains. UNMEE had been seen as a moderating effect on the two former belligerents. (The Secretary-General's April report had indicated that complete withdrawal of UNMEE “could result in an escalation of tensions in the border area, with the risk of a resumption of open hostilities, despite declarations by the two parties that they have no intention of restarting the war”.) The complete removal of UNMEE may therefore increase the overall risks in the region, which is complicated by recent fighting on the Eritrea/Djibouti border and the involvement of both Ethiopia and Eritrea in the conflict in Somalia.

Options

The options for the Council have been steadily eroding since the opportunity in April 2002 to hold Ethiopia in strict compliance with international law following the binding decision of the Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission. The only real option now is a wait-and-see approach and responding to the updates from the Secretary-General on the situation.

Council Dynamics

Despite past differences of views, Council members were in no doubt about the decision to terminate UNMEE in light of the refusal of both Ethiopia and Eritrea to agree on any of the proposed options for the UN's continued engagement. Indeed some members (i.e. Costa Rica, Panama and the US) had advocated closing down of the mission earlier in the year. Others called for exploring further means of engaging the parties. Having failed to realise any of the three options for some form of UN residual presence on the ground, the Council moved forward with closing down UNMEE and adopting a wait-and-see posture.

Looking ahead, many Council members seem to remain amenable to constructive international engagement in the matter, but accept that the parties' entrenched opposition to

any UN presence in the area means that possibility is not viable for now. Eritrea clings to the legitimacy of its position - backed by international law. Ethiopia clings to the leverage it has by virtue of the de facto situation on the ground.

UN Documents

Selected Security Council Resolutions

- S/RES/1827 (30 July 2008) terminated the mandate of UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea.
- S/RES/1798 (30 January 2008) extended UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE)'s mandate until 31 July 2008.
- S/RES/1767 (30 July 2007) extended UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE)'s mandate until 31 January 2008.
- S/RES/1741 (30 January 2007) extended the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) until 31 July 2007 and approved the drawdown.
- S/RES/1710 (29 September 2006) extended the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea until 31 January 2007.
- S/RES/1681 (31 May 2006) extended the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea until 30 September 2006 and downsized the mission to 2,300 troops.
- S/RES/1640 (23 November 2005) demanded border demarcation and the lifting of restrictions on the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea.
- S/RES/1320 (15 September 2000) increased the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea and authorised it to monitor the Temporary Security Zone.
- S/RES/1312 (31 July 2000) established the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE).
- S/RES/1298 (17 May 2000) established an arms embargo against both parties.

Selected Security Council Presidential Statements

- S/PRST/2008/20 (12 June 2008) condemned Eritrea's military action against Djibouti.
- S/PRST/2008/12 (30 April 2008) condemned Eritrea's obstructions of UNMEE and urged both countries not to threaten to use force against each other.
- S/PRST/2008/7 (15 February 2008) condemned Eritrea's lack of cooperation with UNMEE.
- S/PRST/2005/62 (14 December 2005) agreed with the relocation of part of UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea's staff in Eritrea to Ethiopia.

Selected Letters

- S/2008/496 (28 July 2008) was the letter from the Secretary-General to the president of the Security Council informing him of the decision of Ethiopia and Eritrea not accede to any of the options for future UN engagement in the region.
- S/2008/487 (24 July 2008) was the letter from Eritrea rejecting the options proposed by the UN Secretariat to support the implementation of the Algiers Agreements.
- S/2008/427 (30 June 2008) was the letter from the president of the Security Council to conveying the Council's agreement with the Secretary-General's proposal that the troops of UNMEE temporarily relocated from Eritrea to their home

countries should be considered as repatriated.

- S/2008/368 (5 June 2008) was a letter from the Secretary General to the president of the Security Council proposing that the troops of the UNMEE temporarily relocated from Eritrea to their home countries now be considered as repatriated.
- S/2008/294 (5 May 2008) was Djibouti's complaint against Eritrea on border crisis.
- S/2008/287 (30 April 2008) was Eritrea's response to 30 April Council statement.
- S/2008/172 (10 March 2008) contained Eritrea's response to the Secretary-General's report on the relocation of UNMEE.
- S/2008/156 (4 March 2008) was the letter conveying Eritrea's response to the UN Secretariat's reports on Eritrea's conduct.
- S/2008/66 (1 February 2008) was the letter from the Secretary-General informing of Eritrea's continued restrictions of supply of fuel to UNMEE and his intention to send a technical assessment mission to the region.

Selected Secretary-General's Reports

- S/2008/226 (7 April 2008) was a special report on proposals for UNMEE.
- S/2008/145 (3 March 2008) was a special report on the relocation of UNMEE from Eritrea.
- S/2008/40 (23 January 2008) and S/2008/40/Corr. 1 (24 January 2008) was the latest regular UNMEE report.
- S/2007/645 (1 November 2007) was the Secretary-General's UNMEE report on obstructions to peacekeepers.
- S/2007/440 (18 July 2007) was the Secretary-General's report which called for efforts to break the peace process stalemate.
- S/2007/33 (22 January 2007) included a strong response from the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission to criticisms made by Ethiopia in its November 2006 letter.
- S/2006/992 (15 December 2006) contained options for the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea and the November Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission decision.
- S/2005/142 (7 March 2005) contained the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission's appraisal of the stalling of the demarcation, a historical summary of the process, and the 2002 Demarcation Directions.
- S/2003/1186 (19 December 2003) detailed Ethiopia's refusal to allow demarcation and responses from Eritrea and the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission.
- S/2003/257 (6 March 2003) and Add.1 (31 March 2003) detailed the Ethiopian and the Commission's views on the border.
- S/2000/785 (9 August 2000) reported on the size and mandate for UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea.