



SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT UPDATE REPORT



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ETHIOPIA / ERITREA

The Council has scheduled consultations on the situation in Ethiopia and Eritrea tomorrow, 8 February 2006. The US delegation is expected to report on the diplomatic initiative the US has undertaken to try to defuse the recent crisis in the region.

Council members expect (as foreshadowed in our February Forecast Report) that the US will seek an extension of time for the initiative until early March. By that time, the mandate of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) will be close to expiring and the Council will in any event need to have a broad discussion on the future of the mission. Troop contributing countries remain concerned about the situation and await news of the results of the initiative.

The US sent a delegation headed by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer to Ethiopia in January. The trip included a visit to the border, but the team was unable to go to Eritrea. Asmara reportedly issued a statement criticising the US initiative as a “biased attempt to derail the Boundary Commission’s delimitation decision.” It is expected that the US initiative will focus on border demarcation. Also, the US is expected to convene a meeting of the “Witnesses” to the 2000 Algiers Agreement, namely the US, the EU, the UN and the AU.

Council members are aware that if the initiative does not bear fruit UNMEE’s mandate and size may have to be modified. A popular option at this point seems to be that UNMEE’s Asmara headquarters be transferred to Addis Ababa while maintaining troops in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ).

But some of the permanent Council members are sceptical about leaving a significant UNMEE peacekeeping presence in the TSZ, because:

- this is likely to provide further incentives for Eritrea to continue to push for a solution to the border standoff by imposing more restrictions;
- the parties have so far ignored Council’s demands for lifting of those restrictions and the demarcation of the border; and
- the parties have not complied with the obligation to ensure the safety and freedom of movement of peacekeepers that they themselves had invited.

There is therefore likely to be pressure in favour of reducing UNMEE significantly or even withdrawing completely, should no progress be made by early March.