

Ethiopia and Eritrea

Continued imposition of operational restrictions on the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) drove the Security Council, for the second consecutive year, to reduce the mission's size and scope. In late 2006, the lack of progress toward demarcation of the disputed border between the parties compelled the Ethiopia-Eritrea Border Commission (EEBC), the neutral body created to rule on the disputed boundaries in 2000, to give the parties a November 2007 ultimatum for reaching an amenable solution to their dispute, or face having one imposed. The tense and potentially unstable situation along the temporary security zone that persisted throughout 2007 clearly tested the international community's ability to assist in resolving the conflict, leading observers to warn of the high potential for renewed conflict between the two countries.

Ethiopia and Eritrea went to war in 1998 over disputed border territory around the

town of Badme. The Algiers Agreement of 2000 provided for the withdrawal and separation of forces by a temporary security zone along the Eritrean side of the border. UNMEE was mandated under Chapter VI of the UN Charter to monitor the withdrawal of forces from the zone, chair a joint military commission, and coordinate mine clearance. In 2003 the EEBC clarified that its 2002 ruling that would cede Badme to Eritrea—a decision that Eritrea sees as final, and one that Ethiopia regards as illegal and has refused to implement. As a result, tensions along the temporary security zone have steadily escalated, and the border demarcation process has stalled.

Since 2003, both Ethiopia and Eritrea have regularly acted in opposition to the Algiers Agreement, amassing military elements in and around the temporary security zone. A steady curtailment of UNMEE's freedom to observe has been imposed since 2005, resulting in what the Secretary-General has called a "serious gap in the Mission's information on the current situation." These restrictions, while most glaringly associated with Eritrea's 2005 ban on UNMEE helicopter observation, also include restrictions on land patrols in both Ethiopian territory and the temporary security zone. Where UNMEE staff members are allowed to work, they have reportedly been confronted with nonrecognition on the part of Eritrean military officers in the zone and by Ethiopian restrictions on demining operations.

In May 2006, citing what then-Secretary-General Annan called a "pattern of hostility" toward the mission, the Security Council authorized the reduction of UNMEE's military component to approximately 2,300 troops. By January 2007, and in the face of continued belligerence on the part of both parties, the Security Council further downgraded the mis-

UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE)

• Authorization and Start Date	31 July 2000 (UNSC Res. 1312)
• Acting SRSG	Azouz Ennifar (Tunisia)
• Force Commander	Major-General Mohammad Taisir Masadeh (Jordan)
• Budget	\$126.6 million (1 July 2007–30 June 2008)
• Strength as of 31 October 2007	Troops: 1,464 Military Observers: 212 International Civilian Staff: 147 Local Civilian Staff: 202 UN Volunteers: 63

For detailed mission information see p. 279.

sion's strength to 1,700 peacekeepers, including 230 military observers, a process that was completed by April 2007.

Despite its diminished size and range of activity, UNMEE continues to conduct land patrols, humanitarian activities, and demining over the accessible portion of the temporary security zone. UNMEE military contingents and observers conduct approximately eighty patrols per day, and in May 2007 served to defuse a potentially destabilizing situation in which Ethiopian soldiers threatened to open fire on Eritrean troops conducting reconnaissance.

A September 2007 meeting of the EEBC convened the parties in The Hague for a last-

ditch effort to demarcate the border. There, Eritrea promised to fulfill all requirements demanded by the boundary commission, including lifting restrictions on UN peacekeepers and withdrawing its troops from the temporary security zone on the condition that Ethiopia accept the 2002 EEBC ruling, which the latter has long opposed. The meetings ended without progress, and without commitment to future meetings. However, there were concerns that an EEBC-imposed resolution to the boundary demarcation could spark renewed violence between the two protagonists, but the situation remained calm at the end of the year in review.