

Ethiopia and Eritrea

UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE)

• Authorization and Start Date	31 July 2000 (UNSC Res. 1312)
• End Date	31 July 2008
• Acting SRSG	Azouz Ennifar (Tunisia)
• Force Commander	Brigadier Patrick Davidson-Houston (United Kingdom)
• Budget	\$100.4 million (1 July 2008–30 June 2009)
• Strength as of 31 July 2008	Troops: 237 Military Observers: 71 International Civilian Staff: 141 Local Civilian Staff: 196 UN Volunteers: 56

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In the face of continued obstruction from Eritrea and a failure to reach an amenable solution to the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, in 2008 the Security Council unanimously decided to close the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) after eight years of operation. Tensions and recriminations between the two countries are still high, however, and the removal of UNMEE could increase the prospect of renewed conflict.

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 (TSZ) along the Eritrean side of the border. UNMEE was mandated under Chapter VI of the UN Charter to monitor the withdrawal of troops from the TSZ, chair a joint military commission, and coordinate mine clearance. In 2003, the Eritrea-Ethiopia

Boundary Commission (EEBC) clarified that its 2002 ruling that cedes Badme to Eritrea—a decision that Eritrea sees as final, and one that Ethiopia regards as illegal and has refused to implement—is final and binding on the parties. This was followed by an escalation of tensions along the TSZ that reduced the chances of an amicable settlement of the dispute.

Since 2003, both Ethiopia and Eritrea have acted contrary to the Algiers Agreement by amassing and developing military elements in and adjacent to the TSZ. A steady and incremental curtailment of UNMEE's freedom to observe started in 2005, resulting in 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 flights, also included restrictions on land patrols in both Ethiopian territory and the TSZ. Reflecting these limitations, between 2006 and 2007 the Security Council reduced UNMEE's authorized force strength. Originally authorized with 4,000 troops, by the end of 2007 UNMEE comprised 1,700 peacekeepers, including 230 military observers.

In the last quarter of 2007, the EEBC convened the parties at The Hague for a last-ditch effort to demarcate the border, but no progress was made. Subsequent to this, the EEBC upheld its 2003 decision in favor of Eritrea and terminated its operation on 30 November 2007, leaving future deliberations regarding the border to Ethiopia and Eritrea.

With the EEBC disbanded, in late 2007 Eritrea increased its hostility toward UNMEE, as the country saw the mission as an occupying force, since the border issue had been legally resolved, albeit unrecognized by Ethiopia. In a dramatic move, in December 2007, Eritrea cut

off all fuel deliveries and refused to allow the importation of fuel for UNMEE troops stationed on the Eritrean side of the TSZ. Despite requests from the UN, including the Security Council, fuel delivery was never resumed, thereby paralyzing UNMEE's operations. Consequently, daily patrols dropped from sixty to twenty, and during the first months of 2008 the safety of mission personnel became a growing concern. In the face of dwindling fuel reserves, UNMEE evacuated Eritrea on 15 February, temporarily relocating the military observers and associated civilian staff and equipment to Ethiopia.

Given the lack of cooperation and UNMEE's reduced role in implementing the Algiers Agreement, the Security Council initiated discussion of UNMEE's eventual drawdown. On 30 July the Security Council voted unanimously to shut down the operation, and by 15 October the last UNMEE peacekeepers had left Ethiopia. As the year drew to a close, the conflict between the two countries remained far from resolved as they engaged in a proxy war in neighboring Somalia. With the interpositional force removed, international attention focused elsewhere in the region as both sides hardened their positions, increasing the prospects for renewed hostilities.