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Somalia



the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and its Ethiopian backers intensified and widened. That elements of the insurgency within the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS) are backed by Eritrea while Ethiopia backs the TFG demonstrates the extent to which the conflict in Somalia is part of the wider regional conflict dynamics. AMISOM peacekeepers have struggled to operate in this environment and have been subjected to direct attacks by insurgents. Debate about a transition from AMISOM to a UN peace operation stalled as violence escalated in Mogadishu and its surrounding areas. Efforts to engage the various opposition groups and the TFG in political negotiations floundered despite a political agreement between the TFG and one faction of the ARS in June in Djibouti. The radical elements of the ARS insisted on the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops as a precondition for talks with the TFG, even as infighting among the TFG led to a further polarization of the country. The situation was further complicated by the continued efforts of the United States to hunt for Al-Qaeda operatives in the region, often through air strikes, with Somalia becoming a central locus of the “war on terror” in the Horn of Africa.

AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)

- Authorization Date 6 December 2006 (UNSC Res. 1725)
- Start Date March 2007
- Force Commander General Francis Okello (Uganda)
- Strength as of Troops: 2,650
- 30 September 2008

The year 2008 saw the continued deployment of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and deliberations over a UN force, all set against a backdrop of rising violence. The country remained volatile as a violent insurgency against

Background

In October 2004, the president of Somalia’s new Transitional Federal Institutions (TFI), Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, appealed to the international community for a multinational peacekeeping force of up to 20,000 troops to restore security in Somalia and enable the TFI’s return from exile to Mogadishu. The request was eventually supported by the African Union in early 2005 and then by the UN Security Council. The

Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) agreed to take the lead in establishing a peace support mission, which was approved by the African Union in February 2005. However, efforts to deploy the IGAD Peace Support Mission in Somalia (IGASOM) were abandoned in the face of objections to the inclusion of troops from neighboring countries in the mission.

In December 2006, the UN Security Council amended its arms embargo on Somalia, removing a major legal obstacle to any deployment. With the deployment of IGASOM not feasible, the AU's Peace and Security Council authorized instead the deployment of the AU Mission in Somalia. The AU council stressed the need to involve the United Nations from the start, since it viewed a transition to a UN-led operation as its exit strategy, and viewed the expertise and resources of the United Nations as critical to the long-term stabilization and postconflict reconstruction of Somalia.

Deployed in January 2007, AMISOM was mandated to support dialogue and reconciliation in Somalia by providing protection for the TFI and key security infrastructures in carrying out their government functions; assisting in implementation of the National Security and Stabilization Plan, in particular the effective reestablishment and training of all-inclusive Somali security forces; and contributing to the creation of security conditions necessary for humanitarian assistance.

By the end of 2008, despite initial interest by several African states to contribute troops, AMISOM's strength stood at 2,650, composed of one Burundian and two Ugandan battalions.

Key Developments

In addition to slow force generation, AMISOM was faced with a daunting set of challenges and a deteriorating security situation. The challenges included financial and logistics shortfalls, inadequate and unreliable communication equipment and hostile propaganda, as well as direct attacks on its troops. AMISOM's lack of progress in securing additional troops was attributable both to the AU's inability to guarantee financial

and logistic support for new troop contributors and to the shifting and uncertain security environment within which it was operating. Despite the deteriorating security situation, the mission continued to provide security to the TFG and strategic locations such as the national airport and the seaport, thereby ensuring the continued flow of much needed humanitarian assistance.

In May 2008, AMISOM convened a workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, involving key stakeholders, representatives of the TFG, the two troop-contributing countries, and the UN and other bilateral actors, to explore ways of enhancing strategic partnership among them. The meeting reiterated the importance of a viable political process for the success of AMISOM and as such called on the AU and other international actors to mainstream Somalia in their plans. In the meantime, the AU asked the UN to provide support to ensure the full deployment of AMISOM. In agreeing to consider the request, the Secretary-General outlined two principles that would underpin such support: first, that UN assistance would be geared toward strengthening the AU's capacities to adequately manage AMISOM, and second, that troops deployed under AMISOM met UN standards to ensure a smooth transition if and when that was approved. In the interim, the AU signed a memorandum of understanding with the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) for the establishment of AMISOM's headquarters in the capital, Mogadishu. Some members of the Security Council, most notably the United States and South Africa, pushed for a transition from AMISOM to a UN force. But the Secretary-General, the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and other members of the Security Council, including the United Kingdom, remained cautious about authorizing such a deployment in the absence of a viable peace agreement and an actual peace to keep.

At the political level, international efforts led by the UN succeeded in forging a peace deal between the TFG and the Asmara-based ARS. On 19 August 2008, the TFG and the ARS concluded a peace and reconciliation agreement in Djibouti that provided for the cessation of armed hostilities for an initial period of 90 days within

30 days of the agreement; submission of a request to the UN to authorize and deploy an international stabilization force within 120 days; the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somalia after the deployment of a sufficient number of UN forces; the disassociation of the ARS from any armed groups or individuals that did not adhere to the terms of the agreement; the commitment of parties to ensure unhindered access and assistance to affected populations; and the establishment of a joint security committee to follow up on implementation of agreed security arrangements, and a high-level committee to address challenges related to political, justice, and reconciliation issues.

But the period that followed the agreement was marked by the fragmentation of the main signatories to the agreement, the ARS and the TFG. The ARS split into two factions: the so-called moderates, who signed the Djibouti Agreement, and the more hard-line elements based in Asmara, who were not party to the agreement. Meanwhile, the TFG was also shaken by rifts between President Yusuf and Prime Minister Nur Adde Hussien. The differences between the two leaders widened after the prime minister fired Mogadishu's mayor for alleged mismanagement of public funds. The president and the prime minister failed to agree on a new message of political reconciliation, manifested in the prime minister's willingness to engage with Islamists, who had been labeled as terrorists by President Yusuf. This tension peaked dramatically in December 2008, when President Yusuf sacked Prime Minister Nur and replaced him with a new nominee. Yusuf's move was met with considerable Somali and international resistance eventually leading to the resignation of Yusuf himself at the close of the year, demonstrating the tremendous political challenges ahead.

With deepening rifts on both sides, implementation of the Djibouti Agreement appeared remote, removing the glimmer of hope for Somalia that it had promised. On the contrary, as the fissures among and between the ARS and the TFG deepened, the security situation deteriorated.

Critics of the agreement maintain that it was flawed from the start because it was concluded without the participation of all parties to

the conflict. The Al-Shabaab militia, who are driving the insurgency and the more hard-line elements of the ARS, were not represented in Djibouti. Moreover, it is argued that the timelines set for the implementation of the agreement were unrealistic.

In the meantime, the TFG failed to establish a government of national unity that would promote reconciliation. Instead, the government consists of a small number of clans and does not proportionally represent the Hawiye, the dominant clan in Mogadishu. The TFG's refusal to negotiate with the Union of Islamic Courts is viewed in some quarters as a manifestation of its desire to monopolize power. Thus, politically, the TFG has been unable to gain internal cohesion and popular legitimacy.

Security

Unsurprisingly, security continued to deteriorate in Somalia throughout 2008, especially in Mogadishu and the surrounding areas. Gun battles among TFG soldiers, their Ethiopian backers, and the insurgents resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians, as mortars often landed in crowded public places, most notably the Baraka market. The growing toll of civilian deaths blamed on Ethiopian troops increased public opposition to their presence and drove more people to support the insurgency. While the source of some of the mortars that killed many civilians was often contested, this nonetheless proved to be a potent weapon for the insurgents in their propaganda campaign against Ethiopian troops. It also served as a convenient recruitment tool for the insurgency.

The security situation in Somalia was further exacerbated by the return to the scene of warlords who took advantage of the TFG's weakness. The wrestling for strategic assets by warlords added to the misery of civilians caught in the fighting. The continued proliferation of arms to Somalia undermined any efforts to disarm armed individuals and groups. Initial attempts by the TFG to disarm militias in Mogadishu were resisted, since they did not include the Darod militias, which constitute the bulk of the TFG forces. The move was resisted by other clans, most notably the Hawiye.

Humanitarian

Civilians endured the brunt of the suffering, with internally displaced persons reaching an estimated 1.1 million. The surge in fighting during the last quarter of 2008 led to the forced exodus of approximately 12,000 civilians from Mogadishu per week. An estimated 60 percent of the population of Mogadishu had already fled the capital due to the spike in violence, while many of those remaining did not have the means to leave and continued to toil in abject poverty.

The untenable security situation was compounded by droughts, flooding, and the global food crisis, with the number of people in need of food aid rising to 3.25 million, 43 percent of the country's total population. To make matters worse, humanitarian access was significantly reduced as aid workers found it difficult to reach those in need of assistance. As of mid-November, forty aid workers had been killed, with a total of 111 security incidents reported, in 2008 alone. With a virtually nonexistent state security apparatus and hyperinflation causing up to a 1,000 percent increase in food prices, the targeting of aid deliveries, which serve as a source of spoils and power, became a common occurrence.

The continued attacks on humanitarian workers severely strained international aid efforts and forced some agencies to suspend operations in parts of the country, leaving hundreds of thousands of civilians stranded without any form of external support. In October, fifty-two nongovernmental organizations released a statement on the humanitarian crisis, stating that the international community had failed the people of Somalia and calling on all parties to the conflict to allow unhindered access for humanitarian workers.

During 2008 the most visible of these attacks, increased piracy off the coast of Somalia, became a matter of global concern. The menacing activities of pirates, including the hijacking of a vessel loaded with tanks and other weaponry in September, undermined the safety of maritime transport in and around the strategic Gulf of Aden. Meanwhile, pirates also targeted humanitarian cargo, forcing aid agencies to scale back their operations. The rise in piracy prompted a



A Burundian peacekeeper from AMISOM distributes food to the internally displaced in Mogadishu, Somalia, 20 June 2008.

REUTERS/Faisal Omar

number of initiatives, including the deployment of warships by Canada, Malaysia, the United States, China, India, and Russia, as well as NATO's authorization for its Operation Allied Provider, whereby member states provide naval escorts to humanitarian ships in the troubled waters. Similarly, the EU authorized its own operation for Somalia's coastline, EU NAVFOR Somalia. At the UN, the Security Council adopted a resolution in December that allows willing member states to pursue pirates on Somali territory, provided they first gain the consent of the TFG.

Conclusion

As 2008 drew a close, Somalia remained mired in conflict with little hope of an end in sight. The TFG remained weak and divided, having failed to inspire national reconciliation. The presence of Ethiopian troops continued to generate resistance, thereby both feeding the insurgency and perpetuating the proxy conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which continued its support of the ARS. In the face of these challenges, AMISOM remained deployed, struggling to attract more troop contributors, even as it confronted acute difficulties in sustaining those troops it did have

on the ground and faced increasing hostility toward its presence.

In mid-November, then President Yusuf admitted for the first time that the insurgents control

most parts of the country. Meanwhile, in December, Ethiopia began withdrawing its forces, as the UN continued to resist calls for the deployment of blue berets.