

Summary

The political and security situation in Somalia has recently deteriorated as the country has threatened to expel Ethiopian troops from the country by December. The countries are engaged in a political dispute after Ethiopia expressed its willingness to recognize the Somalian province of Somaliland as an independent state. The withdrawal of Ethiopian troops will likely result in a security vacuum that Al-Shahaab could exploit, thereby destabilizing the country further and eroding any progress made over the years in combating Al-Shabaab.

Recent events and developments

The tense security situation in Somalia might deteriorate further in the near future due to the status of Ethiopian soldiers being questioned in a political dispute between the two neighbours. Around 10.000 Ethiopian soldiers have been stationed in the provinces of Bay and Bakool as part of the UN-mandated African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and bilaterally to combat the influence and reach of Al-Shabaab. The dispute arises from the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia over Somaliland, which seeks international recognition despite being part of Somalia while Ethiopia aims to gain access to the Red Sea. Consequently, in early January, Ethiopia and Somaliland signed a memorandum of understanding where Ethiopia would recognize Somaliland's sovereignty in return for a 50-year lease allowing Ethiopia access to Somaliland's coast. This deal has met with strong opposition from Somalia. In the latest response, the Somalian government demanded the expulsion of all Ethiopian troops by December if the deal is not scrapped. The situation is evolving against a backdrop of increasing Al-Shabaab attacks throughout the country. In the capital, the terrorist group has made incursions into the General Gordon military base in February, resulting in the deaths of 18 soldiers. Furthermore, smaller attacks and assassinations have been also occurring. The shooting of a senior police officer on May 3 serves as an example. The government has therefore announced a third round of counter-insurgency operations in the Galmudug and Hirshabelle provinces.

Impact assessment

The potential expulsion of Ethiopian troops is likely to escalate the situation and deteriorate the state of the country. Somalia is reliant on foreign military assistance in its fight against Al-Shabaab and Ethiopian troops are considered a crucial partner in this endeavour. Somalia has not presented a clear plan for replacing the withdrawing Ethiopian troops or how this replacement would be coordinated with international partners and members of the ATMIS mission. It is also unlikely that the Somalian armed forces will have enough firepower to replace and hold the provinces of Bay and Bakool themselves, especially with the planned counter-insurgency operations in other parts of the country. Therefore, the withdrawal of troops is likely to undermine the progress achieved over the years by destabilizing Somalia, due to the security vacuum left by the departing forces. The UN Security Council warned in February that any security vacuum in Somalia will likely be exploited by Al-Shabaab. By gaining more control over the Bay and Bakool provinces and stretching governmental forces out, Al-Shabaab might be emboldened to commit more attacks on Mogadishu. Larger attacks, such as the attack on the SYL Hotel near the presidential palace earlier in March, which resulted in the death of 3 hotel security officers and 2 members of the security services, might occur again. Governmental and civilian buildings may be targeted, along with national and international military bases. Currently, Somalia will only retract its demand to expel Ethiopian troops if the Ethiopian government agrees to cancel its agreement with Somaliland.

Advice from Forth Global

- Ensure that all employees travelling to Somalia receive a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Ensure that contingency and security plans are up-to-date and that staff are aware of them.
- Employees should refrain from traveling outside of Mogadishu.
- Closely monitor the local and international media for updates on the political situation and potential attacks, especially in Mogadishu.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

+31 (0) 35 543 04 37

christiaan@forthglobal.com

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