

Conflict Prevention and Risk Analysis (CPRA) –Pretoria



CPRA Daily Briefings

Week 40

Thursday, 18 October 2012

The **CPRA Daily Briefings** are held weekday mornings in the CPRA Pretoria's Situation Room and the Briefing Notes are the minutes of this meeting during which each regional expert of the Programme reports on the latest human security developments in his/her region, followed by general discussions around the table. An intern then compiles a summary of the meeting, which is reviewed by the respective researchers, and a senior researcher edits the report and provides quality control before returning it to the intern to prepare it for dispatch to the mailing list to which you have subscribed.

CPRA-Pretoria research team

Dr David Zounmenou (W. Africa)
Mr Andrew Atta-Asamoah (E. Africa & the Horn)
Ms Dimpho Motsamai (S. Africa)
Dr Gwinyayi A. Dzinesa (S. Africa)
Ms Naomi Kok (Intern)
Ms Tarryn Warries (Intern)

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Summary of Briefings

East and Horn of Africa

Eritrea's political situation and its policy in the Horn of Africa

Remark: This briefing was compiled by Ms. Neus Ramis Segui from the Conflict Prevention and Risk Analysis division of the ISS Addis Ababa office.

This briefing considers some of the intricacies of Eritrean politics and foreign policy. It also examines Eritrea's continuous attempts to undermine the security of Ethiopia.

In April 2012, following his 30-day disappearance after Ethiopia's March 2012 retaliatory attacks, there were rumours that President Isaias Afewerki was seriously ill. There are fears that, if President Isaias – a reclusive leader who has never allowed a significant broadening of power and has no obvious successor – is incapacitated, a vacuum would open and the military (the only organised entity in the country) would take over political power in Eritrea.

There is the possibility of an extended internal struggle for power within the military, especially against the backdrop of acute economic problems. The most likely outcome will be a new authoritarian strongman, probably with a military or armed struggle background but politically weaker than President Isaias. In the short to medium term this may not result in stable policies, whether internal, regional or international. Indeed, political and economic repression could continue and dialogue with Ethiopia may not begin immediately.

Eritrea has also had to cope with high-profile defections recently. In early October 2012, Eritrean Air Force pilots Captain Yonas Woldeab and Captain Mekonnen Debesai reportedly flew in a presidential plane to Saudi Arabia and asked for political asylum. According to press reports, they had been assigned to fly President Isaias and high-ranking officials domestically and in the region on both official and secret missions.

Gold revenues currently provide badly needed hard currency revenues for Eritrea, making up for the drastic fall in remittances that had crippled its economy. Reuters reported that Nevsun Resources, a Canadian company based in Vancouver, mined between 280 000 and 300 000 ounces of gold worth nearly US\$150 million in 2012 at its flagship Bisha mine.

The Eritrean military is suspected of carrying out contraband trade activities with Sudan and Yemen in a bid to generate hard currency. Law enforcement authorities in Sudan's eastern Kassala State bordering Eritrea have uncovered a large smuggling operation involving around 80 trucks and pickups, half of which crossed into Eritrea. According to Sudanese media, 142 thousand litres of fuel – mainly kerosene – 140 sacks of flour and 12 sacks of wheat were seized and 11 individuals were arrested.

In mid-October 2012, Ethiopian security forces reportedly seized 481 pistols and 13 000 bullets that were to be smuggled into Ethiopia via Sudan. The weapons were hidden in cars and trucks, but were seized at the city of Metema. It is suspected that Eritrea has maintained its support for Ethiopian opposition elements that would like to start an Arab Spring-like popular uprising.

The 2009 United Nations (UN) Security Council sanctions have forced Eritrea to reach out diplomatically to the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU), as well as the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) member states. Despite this, the Eritrean government may try to take advantage of the post-Meles transition period in Ethiopia. The prevailing feeling in Eritrean circles seems to be that a political power and leadership vacuum has opened up in the Ethiopian ruling party. It would also like to derail the Ogaden National

Liberation Front (ONLF)–Ethiopian government negotiations. The negotiations were mediated by Kenya, but reportedly failed. Eritrea is also unhappy that Qatar appointed an ambassador to Ethiopia. Ethiopia had severed relations in April 2008 with Qatar because of its strong links with Eritrea.

Kofi Annan expresses concern over the upcoming Kenyan elections

Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General, visited Kenya in his capacity as member of the AU Panel of Eminent African Personalities. He was accompanied by Benjamin Mkapa, the former President of Tanzania. The objectives of the visit were to review progress on the implementation of the new Constitution, to assess electoral preparedness, and to give support to the Kenyan people and the country's institutions ahead of the upcoming elections in March 2013.

Annan began his visit with requests to meet Prime Minister Raila Odinga, President Emilio Mwai Kibaki, Chief Justice Willy Mutunga, the Dialogue Team and the Speaker of the National Assembly.

However, President Kibaki did not meet with Annan as scheduled. Official sources say it was due to the fact that the President was chairing a cabinet meeting that had to approve about fourteen bills.

The general feeling in the Party of National Unity (PNU) – which supports the President – was that Annan seemed to be closer to and more comfortable with Prime Minister Raila's part of the coalition. Thus the PNU side of the coalition did not regard Annan's visit in a positive light. Neither party had previously welcomed his visit during mediation after the post-electoral violence.

The PNU conference asked Annan to meet Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, who are also presidential aspirants. Annan refused, stating that in his capacity he came to meet the two 'principals', namely President Kibaki and Prime Minister Odinga.

Annan recently also spoke out about the possible serious implications that the election of Kenyatta or Ruto might hold for Kenya's foreign relations. Uhuru and Ruto have been indicted by the International Criminal Court of crimes against humanity during the post-election violence.

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