

## **Djibouti–Eritrea**

### **Background:**

A crisis occurred between Djibouti and Eritrea over the disputed border region of Ras Doumeira from 7 April to the end of June 2008. Djibouti and Eritrea share a border of 110 km which was initially drawn by Italy and France in 1900, following a dispute in 1898. Although Djibouti and Eritrea had a skirmish and a two-month standoff in 1996, the relations between the two had improved after 2000. More than 1,200 US troops and 2,850 French troops are stationed in Djibouti. Eritrea also has an unresolved border conflict with Ethiopia that has resulted in three crises (cases #424, #446, and #456) since 1998.

### **PRE-CRISIS:**

According to a Djiboutian report, Eritrea started to deploy military equipment in their common border region in early 2008, in the name of road construction.

### **Summary:**

The crisis began on 7 April 2008 when Eritrean armed forces penetrated into Djiboutian territory, dug trenches on both sides of the border, and occupied Ras-Doumeira. This triggered a crisis for Djibouti. Eritrea denied the charge. The Djiboutian army made a request to probe the situation, which Eritrea also denied.

From 7 to 22 April, the two sides pursued negotiations. This also constituted Djibouti's major response to the crisis trigger. Several rounds of futile negotiations followed. Presidents Isaias Afwerki of Ethiopia and Ismaïl Omar Guelleh of Djibouti were involved in these efforts. On 22 April, Djibouti sent its troops to the border area, and negotiations between the two sides ceased. On 5 May, Djibouti took the case to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the African Union (AU), and the Arab League, all of which urged Djibouti and Eritrea to exercise restraint. Despite the various diplomatic activities and mediation attempts by regional organizations such as the AU and Arab League and friendly countries such as Yemen, Eritrea refused further dialogue with Djibouti. Eritrea also rejected fact finding missions dispatched by both the AU and the Arab League.

The military standoff in Ras Doumeira eventually led to clashes between the two sides on 10 June, which triggered a crisis for Eritrea. Eritrea's major response occurred that same day and consisted of violence. The fighting lasted four days until 13 June, at which point the crisis faded for Eritrea. At least nine Djiboutian soldiers were killed and more than fifty were wounded. Eritrea denied the existence of the armed conflict and refused to reveal the death toll.

Despite Eritrea's denial of the conflict, the UNSC issued a presidential statement (S/PRST/2008/20) on 12 June condemning Eritrea's military action against Djibouti in Ras Doumeira and Doumeira Island. Also, both the AU and the Arab League urged the two countries to remain calm and resolve the dispute peacefully.

On 16 June, France sent three ships, including a frigate and a helicopter carrier to assist Djibouti with medical care, logistics, and intelligence. France did not participate directly in fighting between the two sides.

By the end of June, tensions subsided and the crisis faded for Djibouti. Djibouti withdrew its forces, which the UNSC had earlier called upon both sides to do.

**References:**

Agence France Presse; Al Jazeera; BBC News; Institute for Security Studies Situation Report; Pan-African News Agency; SomalilandPress; UN Security Council Press Statements and Report.