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Over sixteen anarchic years, the people of Somalia have endured more than their fair share of strife. But conditions have taken a pronounced turn for the worse in the last six months, with the capital city Mogadishu witnessing some of the heaviest fighting in a decade as local militias resist the presence of Ethiopian forces. Hundreds of thousands of Somalis have fled the violence, seeking refuge in the countryside and neighboring states only to find themselves without such basic necessities as food or shelter. Visiting UN High Commissioner for Refugees John Holmes said, Somalia is a worse displacement crisis (al-Jazeera) than Darfur or Chad or anywhere else this year. The country sits at the heart of a region so volatile that Western observers worry the strife could have global security implications.

Streams of refugees and lack of security are contributing factors to broader insecurity. As a new interactive map shows, discord in the Horn of Africa extends across national borders. Ethiopia, which dispatched its troops at the behest of the weak Somali government, now wants to withdraw its forces. After protests from the United States which supported Ethiopia's intervention and the African Union, Addis Ababa said it will wait for the arrival of more AU troops (Reuters) before pulling out. David Bosco, a human rights law expert, suggests the responsibility to protect doctrine applies to Ethiopian forces in Somalia.

()Curing the regions ills remains a Sisyphean task. Somalias weak government has repeatedly postponed a reconciliation process intended to restore some semblance of order. Idd Beddel Mohammed, the countrys deputy UN representative, says in this podcast that a lack of international support caused the delays. But the EU says it wants an inclusive, transparent dialogue (IRIN) to begin as soon as possible.

The United States realizes its stake in Africas Horn; Washingtons newly appointed special envoy to Somalia said recent attacks on UN peacekeepers bore striking similarity to al-Qaedas tactics (Reuters). But determining the proper level of U.S. involvement, the subject of a new Online Debate, remains a thorny issue. Presently the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa represents U.S. interests, carrying out counterterrorism and security operations in the region. A new African Command will soon take over this responsibility. A recent CSIS report suggests a comprehensive diplomatic and military approach to Somalia could make a significant impact at a critical juncture. A Congressional Research Service report paints a less optimistic picture of the challenges facing the region.

Full text available at:

http://www.cfr.org/publication/13387/somalia_slipping_away.html?breadcrumb=%2F