

DJIBOUTI/ERITREA : Observations on the Qatari mediation

- Since several months, Qatar has been discretely mediating in the border dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti over the issue of controlling the Ras Doumeira territory. This crisis, whose origins go back to the mid 90s, has reached an impasse after the last surge in tension in May/June 2008 (series of armed clashes).
- The real surprise is the speed with which the Qatari mediators have succeeded in concluding step number 1 of the process - the deployment of a small force of observers in the disputed area, only after making the Eritrean forces withdraw from this territory.
- Qatar obtained concessions from both parties (mutual agreement to withdraw support to opponents, payment of compensation by Eritrea), wishing to pacify the situation and find an honourable way out.
- A first contingent of Qatari troops is already deployed on the field, but their strength, eventually, would not exceed a few dozen men (and not few hundreds as mentioned earlier in the article).
- But the real feat will be in completing step number 2, the summit of the Heads of the State, scheduled at Doha, which should facilitate concluding an actual agreement and devising a definitive resolution of the crisis. No date seems to have been fixed for now.
- At this moment, France and the United States of America do not seem to play any role in the conflict resolution process.
- This initiative by Doha's diplomacy shows once again the political ambitions of this small emirate on the international scene, be it in the Middle-East, in Afghanistan or in Africa. In the recent months, the Qatari diplomats have thus sought to end the impasse in Darfur (negotiations between Khartoum and some rebels) and Comoros.