

Premier Quits Amid Turmoil In Somalia

Pressure by U.S., Ethiopia Is Seen Behind Resignation

By Stephanie McCrummen
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NAIROBI, Oct. 29 -- [Somalia's](#) prime minister resigned Monday amid pressure from neighboring powerhouse [Ethiopia](#), faltering support from the United States and a power struggle with the Somali president who had appointed him.

[Ali Mohamed Gedi](#), widely viewed as a divisive figure in a government that tolerates little opposition, told the Somali parliament: "I wasn't forced to resign. It comes from me." Then he jetted to [Kenya](#), land of exiled African politicians.

It was not immediately clear who might replace Gedi, a significant issue in a country of finely calibrated clan politics and plentiful weapons. On Monday, Somalis in the war-battered capital of [Mogadishu](#) speculated with some nervousness on Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf's potential choice.

At present, the short list includes a former warlord as well as a cabinet minister closely allied with Yusuf, according to analysts in Mogadishu. By some accounts, Yusuf might pick someone outside Gedi's subclan, which could alienate Gedi's supporters.

"People are now worried about what will happen next, that maybe things will get worse rather than better," said Ahmed Ali, a Mogadishu businessman who recently joined the estimated one-third of the capital's residents who have fled the violence there.

For months, the Somali government and the Ethiopian troops who installed it not only have been battling brutal insurgents but have also clamped down on journalists, clan leaders and other people who express even vague opposition to the government.

With mortar attacks, grenade explosions, roadside bombings, kidnappings and political assassinations occurring almost daily, Mogadishu has descended into what civilians describe as the worst period since the last central government fell in 1991.

In that context, Yusuf's Ethiopian and American backers considered Gedi a problematic figure in an increasingly problematic and unpopular government.

Yusuf and Gedi, who hail from rival clans, clashed over each other's powers in battles that involved oil exploration contracts, foreign aid money and other spoils. And Gedi, a veterinarian by training, was never able to deliver a strong constituency from his own clan, the Hawiye, which is dominant in Mogadishu.

In recent weeks, Gedi had come under mounting internal and external pressure to resign. Some of it came from the United States, which backed Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia to oust a nascent Islamic movement and install a government friendly to the U.S. policy of fighting suspected terrorists in the [Horn of Africa](#).

Gedi flew to the Ethiopian capital of [Addis Ababa](#) twice for meetings with government figures there before finally offering his resignation to Yusuf, who told parliament he welcomed it.

The [U.S. State Department](#) issued a statement relatively quickly, saying that Gedi's resignation was "made in the spirit of continued dialogue and national reconciliation" and calling on Yusuf's government to "use this opportunity to engage with key Somali stakeholders, particularly those in Mogadishu."

Mohamed Uluso, a political leader of an influential Hawiye subclan, said he was not so sure Yusuf had the spirit of reconciliation in him. The president, he pointed out, has failed, along with Gedi, to reach out to opposition groups -- not only insurgents but also intellectuals, businessmen and religious leaders.

"Really, we see this as a victory for [Abdullahi Yusuf](#)," Uluso said, adding that he believes Gedi is to some extent being made a scapegoat for Yusuf's failures. "It's the beginning of an authoritarian system in Somalia. There is an abuse of power-sharing, and I think what's coming will be worse than what we have seen before."