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## **Considerations for an Effective Strategy: AMISOM, ATMIS, and Post-ATMIS Mission(s)**

**SPECIAL POLICY REPORT**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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It had become more apparent in 2024 that a new mission should replace the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). Towards the end of July 2024, the PSC requested the African Union Commission (AUC) to submit a Concept of Operations (ConOps) for a new mission: the AU Stabilisation and Support Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). On 01 August 2024, the PSC published a Communique of its 1225th meeting. It recognises the need to assess the impact and implications of the Phase 3 drawdown of ATMIS to avoid any security vacuum during the transition phase. Getting out of Somalia credibly was always going to be a challenging proposition, which would require a sufficient understanding of how to handle several outstanding political and military priorities, followed by clear communication to avoid worsening the situation. In 2022, when AMISOM transitioned to ATMIS, the new mission inherited the same priorities and constraints as AMISOM, almost certainly the same inability to deal with it and the same uncertainty about how it would leave. Learning from the past, therefore, makes the same question a top priority.

The strategy for the new mission is premised on supporting the effective implementation of the Somalia Stabilisation and Development Plan (SSDP). It is also “predicated on the achievement by Somalia Security Forces (SSF) of a level of capability for taking over security responsibility from the AU mission, the erosion of Al-Shabaab’s capacity to a point where it no longer poses serious threats, and most notably the consolidation of national political cohesion and settlement and the expansion of state authority through enhanced legitimate local governance structures that deliver public services.”

The concerned institutions and stakeholders need to demonstrate a deeper understanding of how to adequately incorporate a sufficiently nuanced understanding of the dynamics of fragility and its variations into policies or practices. This ensures that the mission does not become a captive of problematic communication that will undermine its very essence.

Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the mission will require that Peace Support Operations (PSOs) prioritise human security considerations.

## KEY POINTS

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- There is a need for full support and long-term commitment from the international community in evidence-based support to the global threat posed by Al-Shabaab and other violent actors. The PSC issued a Communique on 01 August 2024 for a ConOps for a successor mission to AMISOM and ATMIS - the AU Stabilisation and Support Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM).
- Funding predictability and longer mandates will allow the development of broad operational objectives that can best support the political process and permit the mission to focus on the essential demands to resolve instability and conflict. ATMIS and AUSSOM could test whether UN-assessed contributions under the milestone Resolution 2719 could supplement existing peace operations.
- A conceptual and political framework can be developed, improved, and adapted to reflect and respond to Somalia's changing reality. This should include a mechanism for governments and civil society organisations to inform mandate-making and implementation proactively.
- Better support to the Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs), through regular formal and informal engagements and consultations, will help them to set targets that everyone agrees with to achieve broader national security sector objectives.
- The possible involvement of front-line states in some Post ATMIS bi-lateral agreements that leverage and build upon relationships built with the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Somali civilians during AMISOM and ATMIS missions will provide AUSSOM more options in its exit strategy.

# BACKGROUND

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) describes its mission as “an active, regional peacekeeping mission operated by the African Union (AU) with the approval of the United Nations (UN). It was created by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) on 19 January 2007 with an initial six-month mandate. Like all peace operations, AMISOM was never intended to be a permanent fixture of the Somali landscape.”<sup>1 2</sup>

In addition to achieving its mandate and functions, the list of priorities for the mission in 2007 also included concern about how and when it would leave: an exit strategy. This was an issue that was on and off the list at various degrees of urgency throughout the life of the mission without being resolved. Getting out of Somalia credibly remained a challenging proposition, and the lack of clear communication on handling several outstanding political and military priorities threatened to worsen the situation.

In 2022, AMISOM transitioned to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). One reason for the drawdown of AMISOM was the reluctance of the EU to continue supporting a mission that was increasingly perceived as struggling to achieve significant results.<sup>3</sup> By 2016, AMISOM was almost a decade old. It was the AU’s most prominent peace operation and had not been subjected to independent scrutiny then, costing about US\$900 million per year.<sup>4</sup> Questions started being raised about its financial sustainability. In January 2016, the EU cut its funding by 20 percent annually. Another concern was that AMISOM was one of the deadliest peace operations ever undertaken. Also, increasing numbers of Somalis were making known their negative views about the mission.<sup>5</sup>

ATMIS became operational on 01 April 2022, inheriting the same priorities and constraints as AMISOM. And almost certainly the same inability to deal with it. The mission supports the implementation of the Somali Transition Plan, which initially foresaw a handover of security responsibilities to the Somali security forces by 31 December 2024. However, withdrawing the troops faced several obstacles as diplomatic and political confusion widened throughout 2023.

Underlying political, operational and tactical difficulties in exit strategy is the perennial difficulty around funding for African-led Peace Support Operations (PSO). AMISOM/ATMIS relies heavily on external financial support from the European Union (EU). This finance is highly ad-hoc and provides inconsistent and unreliable funding streams. ATMIS planned a drawdown of 3,000 troops from Somalia and transferred control of eight Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) to the SNA by the end of 30 September 2023. This process was postponed, concluding by the end of December 2023.

In June 2023, after suffering “several significant setbacks” in its fight against Al-Shabaab, according to a government letter, Somalia sought a three-month technical pause in the planned reduction of AU troops. This came after continued deadly attacks by Al-Shabaab in the South-Central region. The request was addressed to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) by the national security adviser

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1 African Union Mission in Somalia. (n.d.). AMISOM Background. AMISOM; African Union Mission in Somalia. <https://amisom-au.org/amisom-background/>

2 We define an exit strategy as generating the conditions needed for a mission to leave the host country. Successful exit strategies involve a mission leaving its host having achieved all or most of its stated objectives.

3 ECFR Comms. (2023, September 20). Operational hazard: A better way to support peace and security missions in Africa. European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). <https://ecfr.eu/article/operational-hazard-a-better-way-to-support-peace-and-security-missions-in-africa/>

4 Joint AU-UN Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security. (2017). [https://unoau.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/joint\\_un-au\\_framework\\_for\\_an\\_enhanced\\_partnership\\_in\\_peace\\_and\\_security.pdf](https://unoau.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/joint_un-au_framework_for_an_enhanced_partnership_in_peace_and_security.pdf)

5 Lotze, W., & Williams, P. (2016). Surge to Stabilize: Lessons for the UN from the AU’s Experience in Somalia. New York: International Peace Institute.

on behalf of the government. The UNSC told the national security adviser to write to the PSC on ATMIS as the AU authorises the mission. According to a Somali informant, at least one AU official appeared unhappy with how the Somali government handled the matter. The unnamed official stated that the Somali government bypassed the right authority. The move raised several questions about Somalia's regard for the PSC's role in ATMIS decision-making.

In March 2022, Rosemary DiCarlo, the UN Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, cautioned that "the lack of funding for ATMIS and adequate resourcing for the security transition could reverse . . . gains." "The financial gap continues to widen, requiring urgent international attention as contributions to the UN-operated Somali security forces Trust Fund are "stubbornly low."<sup>6</sup> The USG warned that the funding issue needed to be resolved: "Our proposition is straightforward: It is urgent to ensure predictable, sustainable and multi-year funding for ATMIS and adequate resourcing for the Somali security transition. Our common objective — the full handover of security responsibilities to Somali security forces and institutions by the end of 2024 — depends on it."

Throughout 2023 and the beginning of 2024, there was increasing scepticism by Somali, AU, and ATMIS senior officials, who said that the exit would happen at the end of 2024.

An AU delegation travelled to Mogadishu at the beginning of February 2024 to assess three things:

- Drawdown priorities - the handover of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) to FGS.
- How can the humanitarian situation be handled, support the political process, and establish the Rule of Law (RoL) extended to all territories?
- Get Federal member states to enhance cooperation with the Federal government.<sup>7</sup>

The mission found that the FGS was still not considering how to incorporate regional armies into the national army.<sup>8</sup> There are indications that some member states are still interested in conflict and that the SNA lacks personnel and equipment to maintain the FoBs. The mission also found that the FGS wanted to shift the format of ATMIS to a bilateral agreement with the government of each front-line state.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, alternative options were increasingly considered and discussed by stakeholders throughout 2024.

On 04 April, the PSC, in its 1205th session, held an analytical briefing on the strategic planning for post-ATMIS and considered various possibilities. They had legitimate concerns about the emergence of a security vacuum on the departure of ATMIS at the end of December 2024. The PSC requested the AU Commission 'to undertake comprehensive and detailed planning based on the situation on the ground, including undertaking threat assessments, in consultation with the FGS, ATMIS Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs), and the UN.' The report also had to present the options for the form that the post-ATMIS mission could take, as well as the sources of funding for the mission. Options ranged from a regional mission involving regional country troops to another AU mission with a limited mandate and duration. The most realistic option at the time was another AU mission, hinted at by the

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6 United Nations (UN) Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Department. (2023). DiCarlo: "It is urgent to ensure predictable, sustainable and multi-year funding for ATMIS and adequate resourcing for the Somali security transition" | Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. <https://dppa.un.org/en/dicarlo-it-is-urgent-to-ensure-predictable-sustainable-and-multi-year-funding-atmis-and-adequate>

7 Interview with AU official, February 2024

8 Ibid

9 Interview with AU official 22 February 2024

FGS proposal for strategic planning for post-ATMIS presented to the PSC on 27 March.<sup>10</sup>

Towards the end of July 2024, the PSC requested the AU Commission, in consultation with ATMIS, the FGS, and all relevant stakeholders, to submit a Concept of Operations (ConOps). It had become clearer that a new mission should replace ATMIS, and it was envisioned that this would be the AU Stabilisation and Support Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). The ConOps was to outline the new post-ATMIS security arrangements, including its mandate, configuration, benchmarks, duration, and transition timelines from the existing mission to the new one.<sup>11</sup>

The FGS remained against a multi-dimensional mandate that attributes a political mandate to the mission. They wanted the mission role reduced to only fighting. The PSC felt that focusing only on a military component leads to fragmentation and disconnect between military and other stabilisation and political processes, which is key to the mission's success. It also exposes mission personnel to grave peril.<sup>12</sup>

The exit strategy for the post-ATMIS mission is premised on the effective implementation of the Somalia Stabilisation and Development Plan (SSDP). It is also "predicated on the achievement by Somalia Security Forces (SSF) of a level of capability for taking over security responsibility from the AU mission, the erosion of Al-Shabaab's capacity to a point where it no longer poses serious threats, and most notably the consolidation of national political cohesion and settlement and the expansion of state authority through enhanced legitimate local governance structures that deliver public services."<sup>13</sup>

On 07 August 2024, the PSC published a communique of the 1225th Meeting of the PSC. It recognised the need to assess the impact and implications of the Phase 3 drawdown of ATMIS to avoid any security vacuum during the transition phase to the AUSSOM. It encouraged the FGS and ATMIS T/PCCs to work together to ensure a smooth transition. Furthermore, the communique calls for assistance from the FGS in mobilising resources for stabilisation and state-building priorities. It recognises the need to ensure a smooth and orderly transfer of security responsibilities to Somali security forces.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of predictable, sustainable, and adequate funding for the AUSSOM is called for and underscores the need for a dedicated funding mechanism through UN-assessed contributions. This is to avoid the perennial financial challenges faced by previous missions. The AU Commission is requested to continue extensive engagements with the UN, EU and all strategic partners to ensure adequate, predictable and sustainable funding and other forms of support.

The offer made by Egypt and Djibouti to contribute to elements of the AUSSOM is acknowledged, and the PSC encourages other AU Member States in a position to do so to contribute as well.

Finally, the communique underscores the need for the AUSSOM to mainstream post-conflict reconstruction, development, and peacebuilding components. It stresses the African Union (AU) Post Conflict Reconstruction Development (PCRD) Centre's critical role in rebuilding the institutional capacities of the FGS.

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10 Amani Africa media and research services. (2024a). Updated "Insights on the PSC" on the consideration of the Concept of Operations for the post-ATMIS mission – Amani Africa. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/updated-insights-on-the-psc>

11 Amani Africa media and research services. (2024b). Updated briefing on support for Somalia after the withdrawal of ATMIS – Amani Africa. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/updated-briefing-on-support-for-somalia-after-the-withdrawal-of-atmi>

12 Ibid

13 Ibid

14 The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU). (2024). Communiqué of the 1225th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council held on 1 August 2024, on Consideration of the Concept of Operations of AU-Led Mission in Somalia post-ATMIS. <https://papsrepository.africa-union.org/handle/123456789/2143>

# THE AU INTERVENTION IN SOMALIA FROM 2006

Somalia has been the subject of at least a half dozen national reconciliation conferences since 1991, designed to produce a revived national government.<sup>15</sup> After years of protracted conflict, a significant breakthrough arrived in the form of the Nairobi Peace Talks of 2002-04. While previous efforts had proved fruitless, these negotiations paved the way for establishing the Transitional Federal Government based in Nairobi.<sup>16</sup>

The IGAD Peace Support Mission in Somalia (IGASOM) was proposed for immediate implementation in March 2005 to provide peacekeeping forces for the latest phase of the Somali Civil War. It was to be an Inter-Governmental Authority on Development Protection and Training Mission in Somalia approved by the AU in September 2006<sup>17</sup>. The UNSC also approved IGASOM. At that time, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) had not yet taken control of Mogadishu, and most hopes for national unity lay with the TFG. By May 2006, the situation was radically different, as the ICU had recently engaged the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism or ARPCT and was fighting for control of Mogadishu in the Second Battle of Mogadishu. By June, they had established control of the capital.

AMISOM replaced and subsumed this mission.<sup>18</sup> It was not intended to be an occupation force, a perception that emerged at the start of the mission amongst some Somalis and which the mission addressed throughout its presence in Somalia. "As soon as the Federal Government signals it is ready to stand on its own because it can withstand a severely degraded or defeated Al-Shabaab, AMISOM will leave."

The UNSC had imposed an arms embargo on Somalia, but the embargo was partially lifted when the mandate for IGASOM was issued in December 2006.

The UNSC mandate 1744 of 20 February 2007 stressed the need for broad-based and representative institutions reached through an all-inclusive political process in Somalia. Officially, AMISOM was a UN-mandated peace support operation. In practice, it functioned more like a war-fighting operation comprised of a loosely coordinated coalition of willing troop-contributing countries (TCCs). Each of these countries exercised considerable operational autonomy in their respective sectors.

On 18 September 2012, after establishing the FGS, Resolution 2067 emphasised the importance of protecting and promoting human rights, investigating breaches of international humanitarian law and bringing those responsible for such breaches to account. In 2012, the PSC authorised a significant expansion of troop strength to counter the threat posed by Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab escalated their attacks from 2013 to 2015. The AU PSC and UNSC responded by prioritising strengthening AMISOM's capacity to counter extremism.

No significant offensives against Al-Shabaab took place from 2016 to 2022. AMISOM, plagued by problems and unsure of its future, remained on their bases. The Somali government was preoccupied with distracting and destabilising tensions between the FGS and the Federal Member States (FMS). The SNA capacities remained very poor despite millions of dollars of international training assistance

15 African Union Mission in Somalia. (n.d.). AMISOM Background. AMISOM; African Union Mission in Somalia. <https://amisom-au.org/amisom-background/>

16 Ibid

17 The New Humanitarian. (2006, September 14). Somalia: African Union endorses regional peace plan - Somalia. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-african-union-endorses-regional-peace-plan>

18 African Union Mission in Somalia. (n.d.). AMISOM Background. AMISOM; African Union Mission in Somalia. <https://amisom-au.org/amisom-background/>

over many years.

By 2016, the UNSC also encouraged the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) to enhance its interaction with Somali civil society. In 2017, the mission was requested to remain focused on supporting peace and reconciliation, conflict resolution, the state formation process, the electoral process, and the promotion and protection of human rights.

In 2017, the AU-PSC started endorsing recommendations for the gradual reduction of AMISOM personnel and reorganisation to support the SNA.

UNSC Resolution 2525, in June 2020, underscored the commitment to supporting Somalia's state-building and stabilisation efforts. It reflected a strategic shift towards a more sustainable and Somali-led security architecture. Resolution 2605 on November 2021 effectively rounded off the evolution of AMISOM's mandate. The resolution recognised the need for a gradual transition from AMISOM to a reconfigured international support mechanism that reflects the changing dynamics and priorities in the country. It called for establishing a successor mission to AMISOM, which was mandated to support the SNA and better align it with the country's evolving security needs and changing political context.

What AMISOM's exit would be in practice remained debated throughout the mission. In principle, it would happen as soon as the FGS signalled its ability to govern independently. This included an "agreement on how to govern Somalia" and "a shared vision of the roles of the country's security forces and a roadmap for integrating the numerous armed groups that currently proliferate across Somalia."<sup>19</sup> Exit implied a severely degraded or defeated AS. It also implied that Somalia has its own capable, legitimate and inclusive security forces and a sustainable political settlement between Somalia's Federal Government, the new Interim Regional Administrations and the authorities in Puntland.<sup>20</sup>

AMISOM's mandate expanded from traditional peacekeeping to include counter-insurgency operations, increased focus on civilian protection, and more substantial support for political transition.

A successful exit strategy for AMISOM was envisioned as involving two interrelated transitions: first, a transition from operations led by foreign forces to Somali-led operations, and second, a transition from military-led operations to police-led operations.<sup>21</sup> The second transition was arguably the most difficult, especially because AMISOM had only a small police component, and the Somali police force remains very poorly organised.<sup>22</sup>

Article 1 of UNSC Resolution 2657 on 31 October 2022 "recalls the authorisation of ATMIS in resolution 2628 (2022) and commends the renewed cooperation between all stakeholders to implement its mandate in support of the Somalia Transition Plan (STP) and National Security Architecture and empower Somalia to assume progressively greater responsibility for its security." However, critical components of these goals remain some way off despite progress.

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19 Lotze, W., & Williams, P. (2016). *Surge to Stabilize: Lessons for the UN from the AU's Experience in Somalia*. New York: International Peace Institute.

20 Ibid

21 Ibid

22 Ibid

EXIT STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS IN MANDATE	DATE	MANDATE DURATION
<p>S/RES/1744</p> <p>Article 9 Requests the Secretary-General to send a Technical Assessment Mission to the African Union headquarters and Somalia as soon as possible to report on the political and security situation and the possibility of a UN Peacekeeping Operation</p>	20 February 2007	For six months
<p>S/RES/1863</p> <p>Article 4 Expresses its intent to establish a United Nations Peacekeeping Operation . . . subject to a further decision of the Security Council by 01 June 2009</p> <p>Article 5 Requests the Secretary-General to submit a report for a United Nations Peacekeeping Operation by 15 April 2009 to include developments in the situation in Somalia</p>	16 January 2009	For up to six months
<p>S/RES/2010</p> <p>Notes the recommendations on Somalia by the African Union Peace and Security Council of 13 September 2011 and underlines its intention to keep the situation on the ground under review and to consider in its future decisions on AMISOM, progress by the Transitional Federal Institutions in completing the key tasks as set out</p>	30 September 2011	until 31 October 2012
<p>S/RES/2372</p> <p>Article 2 Agrees with the Secretary-General that conditions in Somalia are not appropriate for the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping mission and requests the Secretary-General to keep the benchmarks for deployment under continuous review;</p>	30 August 2017	until 31 May 2018
<p>S/RES/2431</p> <p>Article 2 Agrees with the Secretary-General that conditions in Somalia are not appropriate for the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping mission and requests the Secretary-General to keep the benchmarks for deployment under continuous review;</p>	30 July 2018	until 31 May 2019
<p>S/RES/2657</p> <p>Article 1 Recalls its authorisation of ATMIS in resolution 2628 (2022) and commends the renewed cooperation between all stakeholders to implement its mandate in support of the Somalia Transition Plan (STP) and National Security Architecture and empower Somalia to assume progressively greater responsibility for its security.</p> <p>Article 3 Welcomes the cooperation between UNSOM, UNSOS, the United Nations Country Team and ATMIS, underlines the importance of collaborative working between the United Nations, African Union, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), other multilateral and bilateral partners and Somalia and encourages all entities to continue to strengthen the relationship further at all levels</p>	31 October 2022	extended the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) until 31 October 2023

<p>S/RES/2687 (ATMIS)</p> <p>The UNSC called on the Government of Somalia to continue working with the African Union, United Nations, European Union and bilateral partners to expedite the development of its sovereign capabilities necessary to take over security responsibilities from ATMIS gradually and to enable greater Somali ownership and responsibility in preparation for the exit of ATMIS and scaling-back of the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS).</p>	<p>27 JUNE 2023</p>	<p>31 December 2023</p>
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## TREND NOTES: ACTIONS AND REACTIONS, BULLETS AND EXPLOSIONS

The transition from AMISOM to ATMIS almost immediately resulted in an intensifying or escalated waging of bloody insurgency by Al-Shabaab, apparently to try and overthrow the government in Mogadishu. Meanwhile, Al-Shabaab’s unwillingness to establish tax collection practices more closely aligned with fluctuating economic conditions and its indifference to the difficulties people faced after years of drought were critical to losing formal control over Mogadishu and other parts of Somalia in 2011.<sup>23</sup>

In 2022, under similar circumstances, clan militias instead rebelled. Al-Shabaab retaliated by poisoning and destroying water wells. The clans did not give up, and uprisings spread. Clan militias took over most of Hiraan, Hirshabelle, and Galmudug from Al-Shabaab. From August 2022, these uprisings were supported by the new government of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud.<sup>24</sup>

The SNA started Phase 1 of an offensive, which was planned to last a few weeks. Despite slow progress, it showed promise up too early in 2023.

Events took a turn for the worse for the offensive with a significant “human wave” style attack on 26 May 2023, for which Al-Shabaab eventually took responsibility, on the Ugandan contingents Forward Operating Base (FOB) at Buula Mareer in Lower Shabelle. A large number of Ugandan troops were reported killed and an unknown number captured.

This turn of events stretched the SNA and ATMIS troops thin, exposing vulnerabilities in their military readiness and front lines and requiring a thorough reorganisation to maintain their momentum in countering the Al-Shabaab threat. Al-Shabaab destroyed substantial military equipment and seized caches of weapons. Additionally, throughout the country, there were assassinations and targeted killings of more than 300 people of army servicemen, intelligence agents and heads, as well as government officials, throughout 2023, according to an informant from the Somali security sector.

The last few months of 2023 saw the SNA adopting a primarily defensive posture, having withdrawn from their positions in Galgaduud. This shift inadvertently gave Al-Shabaab operational space to regain momentum and launch a counter-offensive.

On 03 December 2023, Al-Shabaab launched a series of coordinated bombings in Mogadishu,

<sup>23</sup> Felbab-Brown, V. (2023, January 27). Somalia’s challenges in 2023. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/somalias-challenges-in-2023/>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

targeting military and commercial areas, striking the TurkSom military base and Labo Dhagax and Bakaro market. This did not only signify the group's indiscriminate violence but also their intent to instil fear in everyday life.

This came as ATMIS was to initiate their Phase 2 reduction of 3,000 troops.

Al-Shabaab, as part of their typical rhetoric, threatened "revenge" on ATMIS for its "crimes" against Somalis and occupation of Somalia, "a fortress of Islam". Al-Shabaab frames the Ethiopian military involvement in Somalia with a supposedly "ancient" policy of "Crusader Christian" (Abyssinian) hostility to Somali and Horn Muslims. They frame "the primary objective of the AU and its foot soldiers has been and continues to be one of sheer financial gain similar to the mercenaries who kill for hire. "ATMIS has made it clear that [the mission] is not a humanitarian or peacekeeping organisation but rather a band of marauding bandits [that] solicit funds through extortion, violence, occupation and who's foremost priority is to make a living through the suffering of the Somali population."

Well-placed sources within the Somali security sector, the military and the government provide a more detailed series of accounts indicating an increase in violence in 2024.

On 11 March 2024, Al-Shabaab militants briefly seized Buloburde district, Hiran region, following heavy fighting. They destroyed SNA bases and captured weapons. The Djibouti contingent base in Buloburde was shelled with mortar rounds.

Al-Shabaab took control of all territories they lost in 2022/2023, and government forces withdrew, apparently due to a lack of salaries for the soldiers and "so many other reasons." Al-Shabaab fighters regained control of most of the cities they had previously lost. Within two weeks, Al-Shabaab recaptured Caad, Camaara, and Bacadweyn towns in Galmudug state, demonstrating high offensive strength while government troops retreated.

On 15 March, a vehicle loaded with explosives detonated at the entrance of the SYL Hotel, very close to the main entry of Somalia's state house, reportedly killing several Haramcad officers, four lawmakers, officials, journalists and an Office of the Prime Minister Spokesperson. Alpha Group special forces then engaged with militants. The hotel, known for housing federal lawmakers and serving as a hub for political and social gatherings, was a recurrent target. Despite heightened security measures in Mogadishu, especially with the advent of the holy month of Ramadan, this attack broke a period of relative calm in the city.

On the same day, multiple attacks were reported targeting both the SNA and ATMIS troops. One town in Southern Mudug, Xinlabi, was able to defend itself from Al-Shabaab using militia. Fighting also started in Lama-Galay military barracks, manned by the Djiboutian contingent. The barracks have facilities that house civilian officials. Al-Shabaab was reported to have made small gains outside Baladweyne, taking over the Tarajante mountains. On 19 March, at least eighteen civilians, including seven children and six women, were killed in a drone strike carried out by the Turkish Air Force in a village near the town of Afgoye, 30km west of Mogadishu. The strike came after Al-Shabaab gunmen ambushed members of the national intelligence and security agency conducting an operation outside Afgoye. They claimed killing thirteen soldiers and released images showing their bodies, and others captured alive.

On 26 March, Al-Shabaab, on a Ramadan attacking spree, launched a massive assault on Daaru Nimca village in the Middle Shabelle region, claiming to have seized control of the town and captured numerous armed vehicles. SNA forces and locals reportedly retreated to Adan Yabal, a town in the

Middle Shabelle region. They again were ambushed by Al-Shabaab, who claimed to have captured several soldiers and killed twenty-one.

Al-Shabaab also ramped up attacks on Somalia military bases during Ramadan. At least four SNA camps - Busley, Xinlabi, Baar Sanguuni and Daarunicma - were targeted in the middle of March, resulting in massive loss of lives and captured prisoners. Heavy fighting between Türkiye-trained Gorgor forces and Al-Shabaab were reported near the coastal town of Harardhere on 27 March.

A suicide car bombing on 27 March in DarulMicma meant that Al-Shabaab used at least six suicide bombings during Ramadan and at least ten since January 2024.

An SNA officer spoken to on 28 March said: "The continuous dismantling and destruction that the SNA is facing is alarming and demands a national emergency."

On 04 April, two Turkish citizens, reportedly engaged in humanitarian relief work, and three Somali soldiers, who were their escorts, were killed in an IED blast that targeted their vehicle in the Garabaaley district of Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab fighters also claimed responsibility for assassinating a senior police officer in Mogadishu's heavily guarded Xamar Jajab district. The incident raised concerns about the group's ability to penetrate fortified areas and target high-ranking officials. It was a stark reminder of the ongoing security challenges faced by the government and its security forces in Mogadishu. Despite years of efforts to stabilise the capital and root out al-Shabaab, the city remained plagued by violence and instability, with attacks on government officials and civilians occurring regularly.

Somalia remained at a critical juncture, facing internal governance challenges, a precarious security situation, and significant military vulnerabilities.

On 16 July, Reuters reported at least five people were killed when militiamen from a local clan attacked and ambushed a convoy in central Somalia and seized heavy weapons. The militiamen overpowered the security forces.<sup>25</sup>

ACLED recorded 395 political violence events and 1,082 reported fatalities from 01 June to 26 July 2024. Al-Shabaab attacks targeting security forces remained at high levels, with most violence in the Lower Shabelle region. "The most common event type was battles, with over 265 events, followed by 78 explosions/remote violence events."<sup>26</sup>

Inter-clan fighting also continued to affect stability. The number of armed clashes between clans has been trending upward since February 2024. June 2024 was the month with the highest number of recorded clashes.<sup>27</sup>

Since May 2024, the Islamic State (IS) in Somalia has been increasingly active in the semi-autonomous region of Puntland. The Somalia branch of IS has waged several attacks on security forces and business centres. The group also struggles with Al-Shabaab to control strategic mountain ranges in Puntland.<sup>28</sup>

On 02 August 2024, there was a suicide bombing on a crowded beach in the Lido area of Mogadishu, killing thirty-seven people and wounding seventy.

25 Sheikh, A., & Ross, A. (2024, July 16). Somali militiamen seize heavy weapons after looting convoy. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somali-militiamen-seize-heavy-weapons-after-looting-convoy-2024-07-16/>

26 Communications ACLED. (2024, July 31). The looming threat: A resurgence of Islamic State and inter-clan fighting in Somalia - July 2024. ACLED. <https://acleddata.com/2024/07/31/the-looming-threat-a-resurgence-of-islamic-state-and-inter-clan-fighting-in-somalia-july-2024/>

27 Ibid

28 Ibid

# SOMALI POLITICS AFTER 2022

Several events after the establishment of ATMIS, especially in 2023, conspired to generate a high degree of optimism, locally and globally, that Somalia is finally in the best position to overcome the bottlenecks concerning progress to stability.

Due to reaching the benchmarks on implementing the security transition, the Somalia Transition Plan and the National Security Architecture, the UNSC unanimously adopted a resolution lifting the arms embargo on the Federal Government of Somalia on 01 December 2023. The UNSC, recognising the progress made against the benchmarks endorsed in resolution 2662 (2022), also called on the Federal Government to implement the national weapons-and-ammunition-management strategy and promote further professionalisation, training and capacity-building for all Somali security and police institutions to prevent arms from falling into the hands of criminals and other violent groups. The international community consistently demonstrated concern about arms proliferation and misuse, for which the UNSC demanded the establishment of safe and secure weapons storage facilities.

Several other events at about the same time also increased the possibility for Somalia to deal better with several social challenges (such as persistent poverty and lack of economic opportunities) and political constraints:

1. The Executive Boards of the IMF and the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) on 13 December 2023 approved the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative Completion Point for Somalia. It provides debt service savings for the country of US\$4.5 billion. Somalia's external debt has fallen from 64 percent of GDP in 2018 to less than 6 percent by the end of 2023. This debt relief will facilitate access to critical additional financial resources to help Somalia strengthen its economy, reduce poverty, and promote job creation.<sup>29</sup>
2. Somalia was also formally admitted on 15 December 2023 as the eighth member state of the East African Community (EAC), three weeks after being approved at a leaders' summit in Arusha, Tanzania. This provides additional legitimacy for the Somali government and a seat at the table to contribute to regional security debates.
3. In June 2024, Somalia won a non-permanent seat in the UNSC, serving for two years from January 2025. It is considered a significant step and an opportunity to contribute to the debate on peace and security.<sup>30</sup>

There is a risk of a prioritisation, driven by unrealistic optimism, of foreign policy considerations and a focus on legal and administrative reforms over security concerns, both operationally and strategically, which might affect stability and undermine progress within the country even as Somalia assumes a more prominent posture regionally and internationally.

In May 2024, the PSC expressed concern over the tension surrounding constitutional amendments made by the FGS.

Significant constitutional changes were made on 30 March 2024 after intense debates within the federal assembly in Mogadishu, which granted the President the authority to appoint and dismiss the Prime Minister. This aims to address long-standing disputes in Somali politics, particularly power

<sup>29</sup> United Nations (UN) Security Council. (2023). S/RES/2714 (2023) | Security Council. [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2714\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2714(2023))

<sup>30</sup> Muia, W. (2024, June 6). Somalia wins UN Security Council seat - and why it matters. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgee4j71ypqo>

struggles between Presidents and Prime Ministers, often fuelled by constitutional ambiguities. The amended constitution also introduces a five-year term for government bodies, refers to regional state leaders as Presidents, and promotes a multi-party system.<sup>31</sup>

This heightened tensions among various clan members, playing into the hands of Al-Shabaab and undermining counter-insurgency coordination. The most severe fallout between the FGS and FMS was Puntland renouncing its ties with the FGS and announcing its independence.

Somali clan politics have provided Al-Shabaab with several growth opportunities, as the group can exploit clan grievances and conflicts. Al-Shabaab has about 7,000 to 12,000 members and an annual income — including taxing or extorting civilians and financial support of affiliated businesspeople — of about U\$D120 million, making it the world's most significant and wealthiest Qaeda affiliate.

It is an organisation that must also attempt to survive in an environment plagued by the fragmented forces of Somali clan politics. Al-Shabaab takes advantage of clans at times. They have sub-commanders from a diverse pool of clans that operate in territories controlled by other clans, seemingly illustrating the group's ability to transcend clan dynamics. Al-Shabaab may have been able to transcend clan politics more than other Somali organisations.

Local clans have also taken advantage of Al-Shabaab. Clans have often offered recruits to the movement, intending to infiltrate the organisation by moving its clan members into leadership positions. This allows them to influence Al-Shabaab, gain access to resources, or enlist Al-Shabaab's support in their clan conflicts. Some clans pursue a "hedging" strategy, where traditional clan leaders attempt to insert prominent clan members in high positions in the government and al-Shabaab, thus gaining influence within both organisations.

The threat posed by Al-Shabaab is not limited to Somalia. Al-Shabaab's revenues are disbursed to other al-Qa'ida-supported groups worldwide and help fund al-Qa'ida's global ambitions to sow discord and undermine good governance.

Apart from al-Shabaab, the Daesh faction of the Islamic State, ASWJ (Ahlu Sunnah Wal-Jaamaca), and the Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaica also have a presence in the country.

The government strongly refuted a report released on 17 June 2024 by VOA, which they dismissed as erroneous, that purportedly undermines the hard-won achievements of the Armed Forces and the local populace in conflict zones.

"Significant strides have been achieved, with over 70 towns liberated . . . which were once strongholds of terrorists but are now under government control . . . government forces have successfully restored the movement of people within an approximately 800 km radius from Mogadishu, allowing for unrestricted travel. Active and effective military campaigns with the support of the international allies . . . are also ongoing . . . government forces have successfully stabilised the capital and eradicated the threats of terrorist activities in Mogadishu. This achievement is attributed to the collective efforts of national security agencies and residents who have actively supported stability measures in the capital."

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31 Africa News. (n.d.). Somalia parliament passes bill allowing President appoints PM. Africa News. <https://www.africanews.com/2024/03/31/somalia-parliament-passes-bill-allowing-president-appoint-pm>

## MISSION DYNAMICS FROM 2022

Conversations with military commanders from the TCCs indicate that coordination and trust between them are not always optimal. However, there is recognition of their mutual commitment to the mission and an understanding that unilateral withdrawal by any one TCC is likely to affect the remaining TCCs negatively. In March 2023, TCCs for ATMIS backed the FGS request to delay a three-month drawdown programme, indicating there could be security lapses in the war on terror.<sup>32</sup> The five TCCs told the UNSC they were in “strong support of a technical pause” of the drawdown because they agreed with Somalia that the country needs time to address specific security gaps, including pooling enough personnel to take over security responsibilities.

The relationship of Somalia with the TCCs is also not without challenges. From senior Ethiopian officers, the only TCC with whom in-depth discussions were possible, there is a sense that the population works well with their forces because they see them positively. They built good military relations with the population, offering military training and training to civilians (health, water, education), mixing with the locals, and living in their villages rather than being confined to bases. These officers also thought the FGS would fail if the Ethiopian contingent left. They perceive their challenge to be to give service to the community properly in this type of situation.<sup>33</sup>

By the end of 2023, ATMIS was actively handing over security responsibilities to Somali institutions. On 17 December 2023, Special Police Forces & Presidential guards from the SNA took over security responsibility of the Presidential Palace in Mogadishu from ATMIS.

Uganda’s UPDF contingency, now part of ATMIS, protected the Presidency, Office of the PM and Parliament House for sixteen years.

The presidential complex in Mogadishu, where the President, Prime Minister and Parliament Speaker work and live with their families, has been under the protection of the African Union troops since 2007. The 77th Brigade of the SNA took over the security responsibility of the country’s leadership.

On the political front, the situation is somewhat different. On 01 January 2024, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed signed an MoU with Musa Biihi, the President of Somaliland, to grant Ethiopia access to the Red Sea. In exchange for a 20km stretch of sea around the Berbera port, Ethiopia promises to consider recognising Somaliland. For Somalia, some Somaliland citizens, and to various degrees, the front-line states, the MoU heightens the already tense relations in the Horn of Africa. Senior Somali government officials considered, “These actions threaten the harmonious relations between the two countries, potentially resulting in regional instability.” Al-Shabaab also weighed in through a spokesman and senior official, Ali Rage (Ali Dheere), who rejected the MOU, saying that it is a violation of Somali maritime territory & sovereignty and threatened violence to oppose it.

On 11 March, speaking on the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, Ethiopian Armed Forces Commander Burhanu Jula claimed that Ethiopia protects 60% of the land of Somalia and that if the Ethiopian army withdraws, the Mogadishu government will fall apart.

The AU’s Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD) deployed a team to Somalia from 04 to 20 April

<sup>32</sup> Aggrey Mutambo. (2023, September 28). ATMIS troop contributors endorse Somalia’s request to delay drawdown. The East African. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/atmis-troop-contributors-endorse-somalia-s-request-to-delay-drawdown-4383436>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

2024 to conduct a strategic assessment. Including a possible post-ATMIS AU peace support operation.

Their report highlighted the threat that Al-Shabaab poses. Analysis pointed out that while the significant FGS offensive undertaken on a wave of clan-based resistance to Al-Shabaab in the Hiraan and Galmudug regions succeeded in recovering over 200 settlements, the war stalemated again following the setback that the FGS faced in the second phase of the campaign. The UN Monitoring Group's January 2024 report estimated that the strength of Al-Shabaab is between 7,000 and 12,000. The report noted that the force strength of Al-Shabaab shows the group's ability to withstand significant casualties and recruit new fighters, including children. The report claims that between March and April, Al-Shabaab orchestrated 26 attacks and six explosions targeting the SNA.<sup>34</sup>

The surge in attacks throughout Ramadan in March 2023 against commercial targets in Mogadishu demonstrated adaptability and sophistication in Al-Shabaab operations, exploiting vulnerabilities and capitalising on the Somali government's limited resources.

The choice of Bakara Market reveals Al-Shabaab's strategic calculus. As the largest open market in Somalia, the market is not only an economic hub but also a symbol of the nation's resilience and social fabric. Al-Shabaab seeks to destabilise the nation's economic recovery and leverage despair and insecurity to bolster its recruitment and propaganda efforts.

The much-touted Phase 1 Operation against Al-Shabaab, initiated by the government in August 2022, was promised by the Somali President to rid the Galmudug and Hirshabelle Regions of the insurgency swiftly. The campaign stagnated after heavy losses of well-trained soldiers, significant equipment, and vital resources.

By May 2024, the exit of ATMIS and the expiry of the force's mandate at the end of 2024 triggered unease among some TCCs - Uganda and Kenya - who raised the alarm for a need to revisit the pull-out plan to avert a security vacuum. They were concerned about the threat of terrorism and insecurity "in our region and affirmed commitment to strengthen regional peace and security approaches and programmes" and ". . . urged that the timelines for the drawdown align with the security conditions on the ground in Somalia."<sup>35</sup>

"This is a cautionary position but one that is popular among Somali civic leaders, whose communities bear the brunt of Al-Shabaab attacks regularly, and who also support a review of the drawdown plan given the security situation in parts of Somalia that are currently prone to attacks."<sup>36</sup>

## **EXTERNAL POLITICS AND CONCERNS ABOUT "PAYING THE BILLS"**

According to a Somali analyst closely connected to the FGS: "How Somalis handle security in post-ATMIS Somalia is key to continued progress." He explained that the SNA should develop tenacity and capability to maintain the key areas and should be developed to maintain and hold positions (of critical and strategic infrastructure - Villa Somalia, parliament, airport, ports, etc). This will require

34 Amani Africa media and research services. (2024b). Updated briefing on support for Somalia after the withdrawal of ATMIS – Amani Africa. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/updated-briefing-on-support-for-somalia-after-the-withdrawal-of-atmi>

35 Aggrey Mutambo. (2023, September 28). ATMIS troop contributors endorse Somalia's request to delay drawdown. The East African; The East African. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/atmis-troop-contributors-endorse-somalia-s-request-to-delay-drawdown-4383436>

36 Ibid

discipline after the withdrawal of international troops.

Expectations were initially that the PSC should support this whilst also fulfilling their commitment to maintain the exit strategy at the end of 2024.

On 20 June, the PSC considered the situation in Somalia and ATMIS, the fourth engagement on ATMIS since the start of 2024. Of particular significance during this session was to get feedback on the lessons from the previous drawdowns and the state of preparedness for proceeding with the Phase III drawdown initially planned for this month. Growing concerns from neighbouring countries on the drawdown also steered the discussion. Developments over the year indicated the need for support for the Somali Police Force to follow up on two meetings held in May around the need to further capacitate the police force by both the FGS and Police Contributing Countries (PCC).<sup>37</sup>

The PSC also supported withdrawal delays through technical pauses in the drawdown. Funding challenges for ATMIS might also have caused tensions between the PSC and the AU Commission (AUC). The AUC was expected to mobilise resources for peace support operations, including for extensions, despite continental and international funding shortfalls. UNSC approval for extensions is on the understanding that the delays are being agreed to on a no-cost basis. The UN is not financially responsible to TCCs for the extension period. And there is no clarity on who is responsible.

UK Ambassador James Kariuki, penholder for Somalia at the UN Security Council, told a UNSC meeting at the end of October 2023 that Somalia is at a crunch point in the security transition. He said, “2024 will see the transition from ATMIS to Somali-led security continue. It comes as Somalia continues its ongoing offensive operations against Al-Shabaab. This Council and the UN should continue to work closely with Somalia and the African Union to ensure both objectives are balanced and successful. Member States need to support ATMIS and Somalia financially.”<sup>38</sup> He then further observed that progress with state-building and peacebuilding is essential. Military gains in the fight against Al-Shabaab need to be consolidated through support to the government to take forward state-building and political reform objectives.

The one issue still of pressing concern in May 2024 was the funding source for any post-ATMIS mission or scenario. ATMIS faced funding shortfalls that created gaps in its operational capacity, including payment of troops.<sup>39</sup> ATMIS and its replacement mission, the AU Stabilisation and Support Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), could be a test case on whether the funds, under the milestone Resolution 2719, could supplement existing peace operations.

From a security and political progress perspective, an additional factor is that Middle Eastern states, such as Türkiye and Saudi Arabia, have been playing an increasingly assertive role in the Horn of Africa for over a decade.

For example, Somalia and Türkiye announced a defence agreement in February 2024, expanded at the end of that month to include the maritime sector. This may have been in response to tensions between Somalia and landlocked Ethiopia, but despite failing to root out Al-Shabaab,<sup>40</sup>

37 Amani Africa media and research services. (2024a). Updated “Insights on the PSC” on the consideration of the Concept of Operations for the post-ATMIS mission – Amani Africa. <https://amani africa-et.org/updated-insights-on-the-psc>

38 Foreign and Development Office. (2023, October 18). Member States need to scale up financial support for ATMIS and Somalia: UK statement at the UN Security Council. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/member-states-need-to-scale-up-financial-support-for-atmis-and-somalia-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

39 Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Africa. (2024). UN funds for AU peace operations: Somalia as a test case. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/un-funds-for-au>

40 Donelli, F. (2024, February 28). Red Sea politics: why Turkey is helping Somalia defend its waters. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/red-sea-politics-why-turkey-is-helping-somalia-defend-its-waters-224377>

Türkiye set up a military base in Mogadishu to train one-third of the Somali military and also took responsibility for teaching the elite the Gorgor Brigades of the SNA (who also receive training from other stakeholders, including the European Union and the United States). This serves as a Turkish military outpost in the region. Turkish-supplied drones operate against Al-Shabaab.

Ankara has invested heavily in Somalia since 2011, extending more than \$1bn humanitarian aid and establishing the country's largest overseas embassy. Turkish firms run Mogadishu airport and port.

The Somali cabinet approved a military cooperation deal with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in February 2023, causing some uproar in Mogadishu. Some parliamentarians believed the agreement was contrary to Somali sovereignty. The agreement mandates the UAE to “carry out military and security operations, including land, sea and air operations, which it deems appropriate, to eliminate terrorist elements”. It also authorises Abu Dhabi to “use the territory of” Somalia.

The UAE “shall have the right to use the land ports, seaports and airports of the territory of the Federal Republic of Somalia” and establish military and training bases to further its operations. However, the most controversial part of the agreement was that it gave the UAE military total immunity.

Immediately after cabinet approval, the UAE redeployed some of the Somali forces it trained in Uganda back to Somalia, paying their salaries and expenses. In March, the Emirati military began constructing a new base owned and operated by the UAE in the southern Jubaland region.<sup>41</sup>

## **PRE-EXISTING POLICIES (WHAT AMISOM DID) AND EARLY ATMIS POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

AMISOM made significant sacrifices in its almost two-decade fight against al-Shabaab. It is probably the deadliest peace operation undertaken in the twenty-first century. Although the mission did not publicly release details of all its fatalities, hundreds of AMISOM peacekeepers lost their lives or sustained severe injuries.

AMISOM lacked critical enablers and resources, including military helicopters, engineering, transportation, and logistics capabilities authorised by the UNSC, and payment and food supply within a regular time frame. These missions operate in a challenging, time-sensitive environment demanding swift and decisive action. Despite the TCC's role and commitment to deploying soldiers, the mission regularly faced funding challenges.

Senior officers from the TCCs complain that “the slow bureaucratic processes hamper the timely delivery of the assistance. This exposed the mission's dependency on foreign funding. While some troop-contributing countries can self-fund their peacekeeping mission, not all are. The disparity in TCCs' self-sufficiency within a mission leads to stark discrepancies in their responses and effectiveness. This can potentially compromise the overall success of a mission. The

“The original strategy for AMISOM was based on a recommendation of the AU Technical Assessment Mission in 2007.<sup>42</sup> It stated that “AMISOM shall be deployed for six months”, focussing on the initial stabilisation phase, “with a clear understanding that the mission will evolve into a United Nations

41 Felbab-Brown, V. (2023, January 27). Somalia's challenges in 2023. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/somalias-challenges-in-2023/>

42 United Nations (UN) Security Council. (2024). Security Council Resolution 1744 - UNSCR. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1744>

operation that will support the long-term stabilisation and post-conflict reconstruction of Somalia.” The concept failed to attract potential TCCs and gain traction from the UN to deploy UN Blue Helmets. The idea of UN deployment was de-prioritised in 2009 and replaced with the UN providing logistical support to AMISOM. The EU supported and mainly financed this arrangement.

From this point forward, AMISOM’s strategy has remained vague and essentially unchanged. In 2013, the UN and AU listed benchmarks for assessing whether the UN should take over and concluded that there was no prospect of the UN taking over as these benchmarks were not met. A 2015 benchmarking exercise concluded that AMISOM’s exit strategy has evolved at a tactical level but remained largely the same at a strategic level. Also, over its over fifteen years of deployment, AMISOM evolved with little prospect of a UN successor mission.<sup>43</sup> Increasing priority was given to creating effective Somalia security institutions. The 2017 Report on the Ten-Year AMISOM Lessons Learned Conference noted that establishing an effective Somali security sector was the primary condition in AMISOM’s exit strategy.

The drawdown of ATMIS was expected to occur over four phases, with troop levels decreasing from 18,586 to just more than 9,500 at the end of the transition period in late 2024 before finally handing over security responsibilities to the SNA. The complete handover to the Somali security forces presupposed a functioning and effective SNA. Two extensions in less than two years threatened this timeline, especially in the light of an unpredictable security situation and a Somali army unable to respond to a more assertive Al-Shabaab. During the first phase, the FGS requested a review of the ATMIS operational timelines and a technical pause for the drawdown directed at the UNSC.

Although the move raised questions about Somalia’s regard for the role of the PSC in ATMIS decision-making, only a few PSC members raised this when Communiqué 1177 strongly supported Somalia’s request. This may demonstrate a “lack of coordination and cohesion on the drawdown among PSC members, especially as some TCCs that are also members had already supported Somalia without recourse to the Council.”<sup>44</sup>

Exiting Somalia for a time looked like it may be a cut-and-run affair, terminating ATMIS before the mission, just like its predecessors, has achieved any or most of its strategic objectives.

By the beginning of 2024, the PSC stepped in with a more proactive discussion of ATMIS and post-ATMIS options.

The AU Commissioner for Peace and Security met with all stakeholders (US, UK, UNSOS, SRCC, Force Commander, TCCs) on 16 February 2024 and reiterated that everybody wants to respect the sovereignty of the host country but wants guarantees that the state of affairs will not go back to 20 years before. The AU had invested a lot of resources and did not want to lose that legacy.

The balanced position was to extend ATMIS (or another type of mission under a new name) for one year to close the gap between what is observed regarding capability and what is required.

The Somali government agreed to this but wanted to run the operation.

The AU wanted to review the political mandate to inform the UNSC to decide on the future before the end of March 2024. All TCCs started to have bilateral meetings amongst themselves to decide on cooperation.

43 Swinkels, J. (2019). How AMISOM’s Exit Strategy Should Look Like. In Horn Bulletin Vol II Issue I. <https://horninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/HORN-Bulletin-Vol-II-Issue-I-Jan-Feb-2019-4.pdf>

44 ISS (2023). Inconsistencies costing the AU Mission in Somalia. ISS Africa PSC Report. <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/inconsistencies-costing-the-au-mission-in-somalia>

# POST-ATMIS POLICY OPTIONS

## **Mandate**

The UNSC should follow guidance from the AUC and PSC and respond to reality, offering mandates that allow enough time to plan things properly and work towards a coherent strategy.

Mandates should rely on, or insist on, funding predictability that will allow considering financing tranches of two (or ideally three) years within an agreed strategic vision leading to a coherent exit strategy. Even though a UN mission continues to be ruled out as an option, mandates should authorise closer integration with the UN infrastructure as a foundation for stronger political support within the medium term, focused on greater civilian security provision, more dynamic political engagement and continued support for Somalia to avoid backsliding.

## **Political**

A national security architecture with benchmarks on a Roadmap that provides achievable pathways for the development of the Somali Security Sector, together with a political process overcoming internal political and clan struggles, are some steps the international community and the Somali political elite could take more seriously to facilitate progress.

Addressing Al-Shabaab's threat requires a multifaceted approach beyond military and security measures. The highest priority is to improve public safety, prevent further attacks, and eventually reduce or eliminate the threat the group poses (or draw them into the political process).

Negotiation with Al-Shabaab is still unresolved. The International Crisis Group called for it in 2022, but the FGS seems to have half-heartedly considered it, and the United States is adamantly opposed.<sup>45</sup>

A sustainable response must also resolve the underlying socio-economic and political issues that fuel instability and justify the insurgency. With the support of international partners, the FGS must intensify efforts to improve intelligence capabilities, enhance public trust in security institutions, and implement community policing initiatives that can effectively deter and respond to threats and allow civilian security management to take hold.

This requires efforts to strengthen governance, promote economic development and inclusion, and reduce the appeal of extremist narratives.

Persistent, unpredictable and strategically timed attacks carry profound implications for Somalia's security landscape and its struggle against Al-Shabaab. They oppose the government's attempts to improve public safety through technology. The targeting of businesses complying with government directives not only creates fear in the population. It also erodes trust in the government's ability to protect its citizens and their livelihoods.

Also, Ethiopia, the largest country by population and economy in the region, is managing national security and its developmental projects in ways that are inextricably interlinked with regional repercussions and externalities. It is not a linear process without setbacks and possibilities as both a source of conflict and a driver of stability. The growth of an integrated regional political market,

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<sup>45</sup> Felbab-Brown, V. (2023, January 27). Somalia's challenges in 2023. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/somalias-challenges-in-2023/>

as shown through recent actions by the Ethiopian government, provides both opportunities and threats. It is probably the ultimate solution to regional security challenges in the medium to long term. Regional political, security, infrastructural and trade integration are vitally important as an alternative, but not yet thoroughly investigated and understood, set of dynamics to drive regional stability.

## **Implementation**

There is a need for enhanced coordination between the leadership of the AUC, the PSC, ATMIS (and its replacement), the FGS and the Somalia Security Forces. Somalia could approach Gulf countries to help finance military operations. Qatar and the UAE are exerting growing influence in the country. They are already training funding and some equipment for the SNA. The US and Türkiye are also training special forces.<sup>46</sup>

In December 2023, Amentum, a leading defence contractor, was granted a massive US\$165 million contract to establish six key military bases for the SNA's unit, Danab. Danab benefits not only from US training and finance but also from having embedded US special operations forces.

However, the FGS must demonstrate a severe political commitment and a cohesive Somali-owned strategy to fight and defeat Al-Shabaab. Outsourcing the fight to the US military and their proxies, a collection of other friendly countries, as well as ad-hoc efforts by the TCCs brings with it all manner of unpredictable externalities, a proliferation of military training philosophies and doctrines hampering the cohesion of the SNA and bypassing the recognition that Somalia's political and security challenges stem from the failure of Somali political leaders.

The consequences of US counter-terrorism military solutions to complex political crises may be more disastrous than simply addressing the political problems. Civilian harm and death due to US drones and attacks by US special forces will act as a driver for Somalis to join Al-Shabaab.

## **Civil Society**

Feedback from informants and a social media review indicate that the Somali community did not always fully trust the AMISOM forces in the country, even if they recognised the increased security that these forces bring. However, new missions can create constructive relationships with Somalis through closer consultation with civil society to establish CONOPS and formulate mandates.

Notably, a senior Somali official observed that AMISOM had become "the 911 of Somalis and that an entire generation had known no other entity that is responsible for security."

Civil society has demonstrated that citizens can be more than victims of armed violence, passive bystanders to human atrocities or spoilers to peace processes. Civil society efforts, explicitly aimed at supporting AMISOM in more comprehensive political processes, were poorly reported, resulting in a lack of documented experience from which to draw lessons. Civil society is not a panacea for community engagement, as their mere existence cannot be equated with active and inclusive public participation in conflict prevention, reconciliation and broader political processes. It is a process that must be established and nurtured.

AMISOM supported more comprehensive political processes only insofar as a military necessity. It did not have the mandate, according to the UNSC resolutions. There was little support regarding

<sup>46</sup> Hochet-Bodin, N. (2023, October 26). In Somalia, plans to withdraw African Union troops raise fears of a security vacuum. Le Monde.fr. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/26/in-somalia-plans-to-withdraw-african-union-troops-raise-fears-of-a-security-vacuum\\_6205591\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/26/in-somalia-plans-to-withdraw-african-union-troops-raise-fears-of-a-security-vacuum_6205591_4.html)

budget, personnel and institutional frameworks, whether within the mission or as part of the broader international presence.

How PSOs engage with civil society and peace activists - also applicable to the missions in Somalia - is highly ad hoc, mainly reported promotionally and from which progress, results and outcomes are unrecorded in a systematic, actionable way. For example, On 01 December 2023, ATMIS reported that it "is actively supporting peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in Galmudug State. In a significant step, over 50 peace activists, women, youth representatives, and traditional elders from five Galmudug districts participated in a three-day workshop in Dhusamareb, focusing on reconciliation and conflict resolution."

Follow-up, outcomes or lessons learned from which to expand best practices are unavailable. The broader significance of examples such as these cannot be determined.

Information on a pro-active, rather than reactive, comprehensive programme to cooperate with civil society and work towards a solution is unavailable. The expansion of civil society engagement should be a high priority in initiating and supporting political processes, facilitating state-building emerging from communities, resolving disputes without resorting to violence, and closing the space for violent actors to find justification and sanctuary.

More thought and planning must be put into preventing misgovernance and corruption by militias, clan elders, politicians at all levels, and civil servants in liberated areas.

It is possible that the TCCs can develop a more positive relationship with civilians, and a less aggressive military posture can be developed. That is likely to decrease polarisation. This could facilitate a more conducive environment for political processes and reconciliation to take root.<sup>47</sup>

## ***Advantages and Disadvantages Of The Policy Options***

The dominant view among AMISOM and its international partners was consistently that conditions do not permit a handover to a UN mission. Practitioners and policymakers recognised that it would be irresponsible of AMISOM to withdraw without leaving behind "a capable, legitimate and inclusive" set of Somali security forces. ATMIS seems to face a similar range of challenges that AMISOM had faced and that prevented it from fully achieving its mandated tasks:

- Al-Shabaab's ability to adapt to its environment,
- Internal problems such as the prevalence of warlords, organised crime, corruption, and persistent unemployment amongst the youth.
- Obstacles to building an effective set of Somali national security forces,
- Lack of a sustainable political settlement clarifying the nature of federalism in Somalia and
- The rise of negative local perceptions about AMISOM.

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47 Kukkuk, L., Debebe, Y., & Arkiso, H. (2024). A Human Security Approach for AU PSOs Lessons from Amisom Volume II. IPSS. <https://ipss-addis.org/download/a-human-security-approach-for-au-psos-lessons-from-amisom/>

## ATMIS: FAILING TO SOLVE THE SAME PROBLEMS BY DIFFERENT MEANS

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Protracted wrangling among Somalia's politicians has made building capable, inclusive, professional national security forces impossible. The SNA was never, and still is, in no position to take the leading role in the fight against Al-Shabaab. Rather than taking full command and control of the mission, AMISOM and probably ATMIS now, too, force headquarters generally played a coordinating role but struggled to ensure effective coordination between TCCs and PCCs across the mission's different sectors. The loosely coordinated coalition of TCCs lacked unified command and control.

The TCCs failed to cooperate as an integrated and coordinated military force. Military officers have even mentioned competition over credit for operational successes. For such a complex mission to function effectively, there should have been consistent coordination and cooperation between the contingents at all levels. Interviews with TCC military officers highlighted several challenges of SNA that they feel have left it unable to take over from AMISOM. They mention, amongst many problems: 1. the challenge of auditing. The number of soldiers registered and the actual number do not match, and 2. integration problems due to clan differences. Thus, the Somali National Army cannot take the leading role in the fight against al-Shabaab.

"The mission should draw down only if the SNA can generate force in numbers and capacity to sustain troops to degrade Al-Shabaab". According to a senior Somali official, the failure (of ATMIS) will encourage the very soul of Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab escalated their war after the change to ATMIS. "It is an important part of Al-Shabaab's justification for their violent campaign and their narrative that Somalia is occupied. They want AMISOM (or something like it) to stay." O" concern to this official is that there is a perception (amongst some Somalis) that complete withdrawal will: 1. Reverse the impact of AMISOM and ATMIS, and 2. that the SNA are not disciplined. "They do not have resources and do not have power."

Military officers consistently recognise that external forces cannot defeat Al-Shabaab without the local population's support. Also, the protracted wrangling among Somalia's politicians hampers the establishment of an effective SNA. Regular but unpredictable Al-Shabaab attacks against the SNA, the police, and ATMIS forces resulted in their retreat from areas they had captured at high cost—these exposed vulnerabilities in the capabilities of both ATMIS and SNA. ATMIS forces are overstretched strategically and hindered by limited equipment, such as helicopters. However, areas recovered are perhaps the wrong metric by which to measure progress. Even when Al-Shabaab loses territory, it maintains military, religious, and political influence. Based on these metrics, Al-Shabaab will likely be part of the Somali landscape in the foreseeable future. It also highlights the importance of finding a solution to the political impasse. Given insufficient funding, lack of political progress and Al-Shabaab's aggression, decisive operations on the part of SNA and ATMIS seem unlikely.

ATMIS provides capacity-building initiatives to the SNA to support them in assuming full responsibility for security. However, repeated extensions of their mandate and periodic revision of the timeline for the drawdown of ATMIS put the effectiveness of SNA capacity into question.

Several factors contribute to the difficulty in creating a competent, professional military. Rapid turnover of key officers in government, pervasive, corrosive corruption, limited infrastructure, and a poor, war-

focused, unregulated economy all impact the quality of the security sector. With a large influx of foreign fighters and arms, the penetration of extremist groups into the political scene is difficult to manage by the FGS alone. It requires the assistance of the international community.

SNA was initially formed as a clan-based army and then evolved into a fighting force serving the ruling elite's interests, ensuring regime protection and maintaining the leadership's self-interest, clandestine business, and political connections.<sup>48</sup>

The variety and type of security threats and the flexibility with which armed actors can adapt requires a military capable of the highest level of force-extension with control of captured land and management of liberated communities to be handed over to civilian governance.

## **TRY AND FAIL SOLUTIONS OR FOLLOW TINY STEPS ON A ROADMAP?**

There was a divergence in understanding the principle of security implications for the region and the concepts that have emerged as possible solutions. This created a gap between the security goal of AMISOM and ideas that emerged towards a political solution. Donor-oriented interests created a significant challenge to the effectiveness of military approaches to security, highlighting the delicate balance between seeking and keeping funding and maintaining the integrity of the mission.

Rather than being complementary and coherent, there was sometimes inconsistency between international support for state-building and military intervention, on the one hand, and human rights and protection. There was little discussion to clarify the nature of fragility and to examine implications for state-building as a framework for international engagement.

Consideration for bottom-up strategies that could have allowed some sort of state, even a minimalist state, focussed primarily on providing security, to emerge organically seems to have been neglected.

## **POSSIBLE ROADMAP**

The lack of a workable and universally agreed upon Strategic Objective and a Roadmap that integrates military and political benchmarks to work towards key objectives almost certainly results in the strategic priorities of the TCCs playing a more dominant role than if they were required to achieve goals as broadly agreed by the mission, the AU, the UN and accepted by the host country (both government and civil society).

Benchmarking is an option to devise a withdrawal plan based on indicators of progress towards mission and political objectives. Benchmarks should be meaningful, measurable, and clear. In the Somali context, the standard UN and AU categories of go-to benchmarks for progress - free and fair elections, a reformed and improved security sector, and a measurably improved security situation - may have contributed to a few steps forward at times but have persistently failed to contribute to a long-lasting, fundamental change in conflict dynamics. And none of these benchmarks were

48 Menkhaus, K. (2011). Background Case Study: Somalia and the Horn of Africa. World Development Report 2011. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/494981468303085454/pdf/632040WP00WDR0009B0Somalia00PUBLIC0.pdf>

immune from being undone by unpredictable setbacks. There may be a need to identify alternative benchmarks that are less ambitious, more relevant (especially to citizens), achievable in short (-ish) time-frames and are better indicators of progress in the Somali context, building on small gains that have been achieved at inflexion points in the past.

Unless this impasse can be overcome, all the factors at play may create a state of almost permanent instability. A rapid collapse of state institutions may await Somalia if creative solutions that make consistent, concrete, measurable, even if small, improvements are not systematically explored and implemented.

## TRY-AND-FAIL SOLUTIONS

The literature produced in Somalia focuses mainly on security. Although depicting the situation as virtually pathological, most recognise that the security problem is political, not operational.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, all approaches to Somalia's peace and development process must be as flexible as possible, as insurgents and spoilers are agile and adaptive and can simply wait out the external forces before they continue their struggle. Establishing a monitoring and verification component (consisting of representatives of donors, TCCs and Somali civil society) to ensure greater accountability of the mission to Somalis in general, giving them a greater voice, can be more responsive to the political and security dynamics and foster a sense of ownership of what is being done in their name and reducing the influence of elite-driven politics.

Even defeating Al-Shabaab may have negative consequences. The FGS and the international community should anticipate and seriously consider the possibility of and need to look at possible post-Al-Shabaab scenarios. Their defeat will not automatically grant peace. Risks that should be considered include:

1. Return of warlordism and peace spoilers such as organised crime and war profiteers.
2. Civil war, clan conflicts, organised clan militias against each other and the government.
3. Internal government disputes can turn into violent conflicts.
4. Increasing conflict complexity renders peacemakers and civil society unable to define the enemy.

## CONCLUSION

The proliferation of violent groups, all with different tactics, objectives and various levels of penetration into local societies and diverse political and cultural dynamics, demand a range of other security and political responses. This places a heavy burden on the Somali security sector, both military and police, and a very complex environment for external intervention, both military and political.

Establishing minimally competent governance and relieving local tensions and conflicts must be a priority. It will require bargaining with clan elders, communities, and state politicians. Not an easy task.<sup>50</sup>

49 Hagmann, T., & Hoehne, M. V. (2009). Failures of the state failure debate: Evidence from the Somali territories. *Journal of International Development*, 21(1), 42–57. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1482>

50 BTI Transformation Index. (n.d.). BTI 2022 Somalia Country Report. BTI 2022. <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/SOM>

However, throughout 2023 and 2024, the government continued to struggle to pay the salaries of the military and civil servants. Thousands of temporary civil servants and soldiers on the front line are going unpaid.

The SNA cannot hold territory, much less manage territory, to the point of being handed over to civilian administration and security. The Gorgor and Danab brigades are operationally effective but are not geared to hold territory.<sup>51</sup>

It would be naive to believe that a combination of clan uprisings and SNA operations will bring an end to Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab can and will simply wait for the uprisings to fizzle out or fall victim to the pervasive Somali contests over political power and influence and then leverage renewed clan rivalries to provide them with re-entry points.<sup>52</sup>

The SNA needs to be a stabilising force when clan clashes erupt and be able to respond to all possible scenarios.

TCCs need to be better supported through regular formal and informal engagements and consultations to understand better the foreign policy objectives of the countries in the region, including the host country.

Conflicts between the FGS and the FMS stalled or hampered long overdue reviews and reforms of the provisional constitution and security sector. No progress was made in clarifying the status of the FMS, their main tasks and responsibilities, and especially the modus of power and resource sharing between the federal and central institutions. The FGS continues to struggle to exert control over territory in the country and even in Mogadishu.

The repeated requests by the Somali government regarding the timeline for ATMIS drawdown likely demonstrate a lack of confidence that the SNA can provide the security, stabilisation and adaptability required. Also, buying time in three or six-month increments through requests to pause the drawdowns is almost certainly counter-productive.

Significant armed conflicts persist in Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen, and a fragile security situation persists in Ethiopia. The Horn of Africa is increasingly becoming part of the Red Sea security complex. The Israel-Palestinian conflict since October 2023 also has diplomatic and security implications for the region. It is a turbulent region with fuzzy facts, requiring constant political and conflict dynamics re-evaluation. The growth of an integrated regional political market provides both opportunities and threats. These dynamics are still inadequately analysed and not fully considered when assessing the justification, funding, structure, and options for intervention missions.

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51 Felbab-Brown, V. (2023, January 27). Somalia's challenges in 2023. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/somalias-challenges-in-2023/>

52 Ibid

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## A. Governments and Civil Society Organizations (Local Stakeholders)

- Communicate a deeper understanding of the discontinuities (inability of the international community to adequately incorporate a sufficiently nuanced understanding of the dynamics of fragility and its variations into policies or practice) to improve the justification for intervention and priority tasks outlined in the mandates developed by the UNSC and the AU-PSC.
- Support a mechanism to develop, improve and adapt a conceptual and political framework that is reflective and responsive to the changing reality in Somalia.
- Encourage a mechanism for governments and civil society organisations to proactively inform mandate-making developed and emerging from implementing the mandate.
- There is an urgency to highlight the need for full support and long-term commitment from the international community in evidence-based support to the global threat posed by Al-Shabaab and other violent actors.
- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the mission may require that human security considerations are adequately prioritised in mandates.
- Mission implementation effectiveness resulting in an ordered exit will benefit from funding in three-year tranches for better planning.
- Funding predictability and longer mandates will allow the development of broad operational objectives that can best support the political process and permit the mission to focus on the essentials. It can then better anticipate setbacks and take action to maintain the trajectory towards the goals set in the time frame.
- All relevant activities and engagements require a scale-up of political and technical support for the AU's peacebuilding, reconstruction, and development efforts.
- Develop more pro-active communication and knowledge exchange mechanisms and more representation of the PAPS, ATMIS and UNSOM representatives in the meeting, planning and analysis phases of establishing UNSC mandates.
- The mission should strengthen the institutional framework for human security threat early warning signals, escalation, response preparedness, and capabilities by utilising the full capacities of the UN and international framework.
- Recognise, in mandates, human security priorities that reflect the priorities of the relevant citizens of the intervention; the mandates shall be adaptive to the circumstances of the citizens where the intervention takes place.

## **B. To Support the African Union Peace and Security Council and United Nations Department of Peace Operations (Institutions Responsible for Mandate Implementation)**

- The mission should draw down only if the SNA meets its requirement to generate force in numbers and capacity to sustain troops to degrade al-Shabaab. The AU should also facilitate the role of the front-line state in supporting this struggle.
- A specific institutional structure of effective threat intelligence, data gathering, and analysis is needed for robust operational, policy and strategic decision-making.
- Avoid securitising too many things and then wanting to solve them with force. This is very dominant in the Somali context, and TCCs, the UN, and significant donors tend to adopt such a mode of thinking.
- Set targets that everyone agrees with, linked to commitments of the Somali government to achieve broader national security sector objectives within the Rule of Law
- Establish an intervention logic that everyone agrees with. Consider the possible involvement of front-line states in some Post ATMIS bi-lateral agreements that leverage and build upon relationships built with FGS and Somali civilians during AMISOM and ATMIS missions.
- Develop a clearer division between military and civilian security, determining who is responsible for civilian security and the procedure for moving from one to the other.

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