ISCTE IUL
REPOSITÓRIO
INSTITUTO UNIVERSITÁRIO DE LISBOA

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:
2026-04-01

Deposited version:
Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:
Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:
Ajú, M. M. (2025). African Union's quest for peace in Somalia: Contextualizing the transition from AMISOM to ATMIS 1. In Jan Záhoík, Aleksi Ylönen (Ed.), The Horn of Africa since 2018: Continuities, transformations, and prospects. (pp. 196-210). London: Rutledge .

Further information on publisher's website:
10.4324/9781003531999-14

Publisher's copyright statement:
This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Ajú, M. M. (2025). African Union's quest for peace in Somalia: Contextualizing the transition from AMISOM to ATMIS 1. In Jan Záhoík, Aleksi Ylönen (Ed.), The Horn of Africa since 2018: Continuities, transformations, and prospects. (pp. 196-210). London: Rutledge ., which has been published in final form at https://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003531999-14. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0
The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Serviços de Informação e Documentação, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL)
Av. das Forças Armadas, Edifício II, 1649-026 Lisboa Portugal
Phone: +(351) 217 903 024 | e-mail: administrador.repositorio@iscte-iul.pt
https://repositorio.iscte-iul.pt

African Union's Quest for Peace in Somalia: Contextualising the Transition from AMISOM to ATMIS

Miguel Mbiavanga Ajú *

Introduction

Whereas the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the nature and effective management of contemporary conflicts that threaten global peace and security require closer cooperation and a multifaceted approach which includes cooperation with regional organisations. In this regard, the African Union (AU) as agency in peace and security has been implementing a peace support operation through the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) since 2007. The AU's deployment of regional forces[1] was in response to Somalia's chronical conflict, violent extremism, and acts of terrorism perpetrated by the al-Qaeda affiliate group al-Shabaab resulting into general instability.

While an analysis of the conflict in Somalia is beyond a book chapter, there is broad consensus among scholars that the conflict has multiple dimensions. At local level, the conflict can be traced as far back as the crisis which erupted after the collapse of the Central Government led by Siad Barre in 1991 when powerful armed militiamen and warlords with clan-based ideologies took control of parts of the country leading to chaos, lawlessness and militarisation of politics in Somalia.[2] Indeed, Záhořík (2022) supports the view that Somalia is traditionally portrayed as a clan-based society in which major clans namely, Hawiye, Darood, and Isaaq play a central political role.[3] The statelessness and security vacuum remained until AMISOM was deployed. Nationally, the conflict takes the form of intra-regional friction between the central government in Mogadishu and its Federal Member States (FMSs) as the regions seek to exert control over territory and resources thereby undermining efforts towards building an effective Federal State system. In effect,

[1] The bulk of the AU forces are troops from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.
[2] See e.g., World Bank (2005) *Conflict in Somalia: Drivers and Dynamics*, in https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSOMALIA/Resources/conflictinsomalia.pdf.
[3] Jan Záhořík (2022). *Competing -Isms in the Horn of Africa: The Rise and Fall of Pan-Ethiopianism and Pan-Somalism, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 28:1, 74-91, DOI: 10.1080/13537113.2021.2004766

besides the al-Shabaab threat and insecurity it creates, Somalia is made vulnerable by the acrimony among politicians. Therefore, it is not surprising that the divisive strategy pursued by Somali political elite has attracted several external actors seeking to exploit the situation. On another hand, the regional and global dimension is arguably characterised by the external threat posed by al-Shabaab with its network to international terrorism (al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – ISIL also known as Da'esh).

Somalia is situated in the Horn of Africa, a region which has for decades become synonymous with crisis: that is, Horn of Africa = Crisis. In other words, the Horn of Africa is considered as one of the most volatile and conflict-ridden areas in Africa and has also been one of the most protracted conflict zones in the continent[4]. Moreover, the region's strategic importance owing to its border linkages on the vital sea lanes of the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, with the Arabian Peninsula, the Gulf region, and the highly sensitive region of the Middle East, where two factors – oil and the Arab-Israeli conflict interface[5], makes the Somalia conflict a major global concern, particularly for regional and international state actors including international organisations such as, the AU, United Nations (UN), and European Union (EU) as well as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The centrality of Somalia and its geostrategic importance makes it necessary to contextualise the transition from AMISOM to African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). In so doing, it is argued in this chapter that while the AU peace operation has remained consistent with its main objective of counterinsurgency aimed primarily at combating al-Shabaab and other terrorist groups and providing security for the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), the UN and other partners involved in the peacebuilding and stabilisation project, the task has consistently been compounded by a variety and complex realities on the ground.

Violent extremism and acts of terrorism perpetrated by al-Shabaab remain the most critical threat to peace, security, and stability in Somalia. However, this chapter considers internal Somali politics and external interventions as contributing factors that have continued to shape the situation in the country. Donelli and Dentice (2020) for example, argued that Turkey and leading Gulf states (KSA, UAE and Qatar) have used their geo-economic, humanitarian diplomacy and soft power projection strategies for cultural and political influence while simultaneously building and

[4] Hirbe, Bekele B. (2020). *Intrastate Conflicts in the Horn of Africa: Implications for Regional Security (1990–2016)*, Lexington Books, Lanham, USA.
[5]Ibid

consolidating alignments with the countries of the Horn of Africa[6]. The KSA and the UAE have sought to use financial leverage and their relative power at the regional level to pressure HOA states, such as Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia, to align with their regional policies of severing relations with Iran and opposing the spread of Muslim brotherhood-affiliated movements[7]. Ylönen (2021) equally noted that the US and China, as well as regionally powerful Gulf states including Turkey have all deepened their involvement in the sub-region[8] with Somalia caught-up in the mix. Accordingly, this chapter revisits important variables surrounding AMISOM's fifteen-year legacy with focus on the latest developments that have taken place in recent years, especially since 2018. These include the political and security dynamics in Somalia, the AU's recent policy reforms, the highlighted continuities, and their underlying implications for a durable peace and stability in Somalia, impact on regional security in the Horn and Eastern Africa region in general. The analyses made in this chapter are based on a qualitative approach, review of the extant literature and direct field-based observations and situated within the theoretical framework of peace and conflict studies as they relate to the ever-growing strategic partnership between the AU and UN in peace, security and conflict management.

The AU mission in Somalia is an unfolding contemporary social phenomenon. Therefore, this chapter also falls within the international relations theoretical field of constructivism in its analysis of issues surrounding the AU's peace operation in Somalia and its transition from AMISOM to ATMIS in partnership with the UN, EU, and other international partners. After all, the academic path of studying social phenomena appears to be consistent with new constructivist contributions in which cooperation and international relations are regulated by interests (*in their various forms*) and the balance between the (*3D's*), namely diplomacy, defense (*security*) and development as reflection of the complexity of the current world system, where political and strategic ideas reflect the geopolitical interests of the main actors[9].

---

[6] Federico Donelli & Giuseppe Dentice (2020). *Fluctuating Saudi and Emirati Alignment Behaviours in the Horn of Africa*, The International Spectator, 55:1, 126-142, DOI: 10.1080/03932729.2019.1706389.
[7] Federico Donelli (2020) Determinants of Middle East states involvement in the Horn of Africa, Elliott School of International Affairs, Project on Middle East Political Science, Vol 40, pp. 50-54, in: https://pomeps.org/determinants-of-middle-east-states-involvement-in-the-horn-of-africa
[8] Ylönen, A. (2021). *External power competition in the Horn of Africa: Somaliland's quest for international recognition and development*, RUSI Journal, 166(6-7), 74–82.
[9] Bernardino, Luís M. (2012). *Cooperation for Security in the Context of International Relations: From Realism to Constructivism*. Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa, 1-35.

Historical Context of the Mission

The complexity of contemporary conflicts requires a good understanding of the context in which peace operations are implemented. This facilitates, not only to determine the strategic and operational priorities of the mission but also allowing a multistakeholder engagement at various levels. Preceded by the failed deployment of the IGAD's Peace Support Mission to Somalia (IGASOM) in 2005[10], AMISOM was authorised in January 2007 as a peace support operation by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) with the endorsement of the UNSC through resolution 1744 (2007). Another UNSC resolution 1863 (2009) established the United Nations Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA) later renamed as United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS), a stand-alone entity that has since been providing critical logistical support to the AU's forces in Somalia.

Historically, the situation in Somalia had deteriorated further by the early 2000s and from the chaos emerged the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a fundamentalist organisation that gained traction while fighting Somalia's warlords and promising to bring justice and peace to the country. The ICU's Mujahideen Youth Movement, or al-Shabaab emerged as a radical military wing that later started an insurrection campaign against the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG)[11]. Threatened by what it perceived as the ICU's expansionist agenda, in 2006 Ethiopia sent its army across the Somalia border to dislodge the militants who had seized the capital Mogadishu and other parts of south-central Somalia. Ethiopia's surprise move proved deeply unpopular and fueled the rise of al-Shabaab. To establish the new order and provide an exit strategy for Ethiopian troops, the AU and UN created AMISOM in 2007 and mandated it to support the fragile transitional government trying to fend off a powerful Islamist challenger in Somalia[12].

From the onset, the AU's mission in Somalia has been part of a wider constellation of international actors trying to stabilise the country. This constellation not only exemplifies the opportunities and challenges of partnerships in contemporary peace operations but also puts a premium on ensuring effective coordination between these actors, most notably the Somali authorities, the AU, UN and,

---

[10] See for exemple, Fejerskov et al. (2017) *Regional Interests in African peace operations*, DIIS Report, No. 2017:11, ISBN 978-87-7605-894-4, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen.
[11] Hathaway, O. A., & Hartig, L. (2022, March 31). *Still at War: The United States in Somalia*. New York, NY, USA.
[12] International Crisis Group. (2021). *Reforming the AU Mission in Somalia* - Crisis Group Africa Briefing No. 176. Nairobi/Brussels: International Crisis Group, p.3.

European Union, and some key bilateral partners, including the USA and UK. This explains why to a certain extent, AMISOM has been in the unviable position of not being fully in control of its own destiny. Instead, it has been relying on and finding the right division of labour between these other actors[13]. Confronted with many challenges, it took a decade and a half for the AU to recalibrate its policy in Somalia. It did so by reconfiguring and transitioning its mission from AMISOM to ATMIS in April 2022. This time there is a heightened sense of purpose with ambitious and clearly defined targets for its mission, tight deadlines for the transition consistent with the Somali Transition Plan (STP), and a well-defined exit strategy[14].

To put this in perspective, the STP is a strategic document of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) that sets out a process, rooted in the principles of mutual accountability framework and security pact (2017) agreed at the Somali Partnership Forum in 2019. It is a broad based and inclusive approach to security, which aims to foster the resilience of Somali institutions, restoring the Somali people's trust in the state and its ability to protect and serve their basic needs for security, inclusive politics, justice, human rights, governance, and a vibrant economy. The plan is the result of a Somali-owned and led process to determine the security transition priorities of Somalia through to the end of 2024 with joint endeavours of the FGS, Federal Member States (FMS), the AU and international partners[15].

Since its deployment in March 2007, the AU mission in Somalia has been subjected to several periodic reviews either independently by the regional body or jointly with the UN and other partners. This was always going to be the case as AMISOM was initially authorised by the AU and UNSC for six months to build the necessary security foundations that would eventually enable the mission to be transformed into a full-blown UN-led peacekeeping operation[16]. Nonetheless, the commitment by six African states, namely Uganda (2007), Burundi (2007), Djibouti (2011), Kenya (2012), Sierra Leone (2013) and Ethiopia (2014) helped alleviated some regional security concerns and brought tangible benefits at home to both troops contributing country (TCC)

[13] Williams, Paul D. et al. (2018). *Assessing the Effectiveness of the African Union Mission in Somalia/AMISOM*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, p.11.
[14] Ajú, Miguel M. (2022). Reshaping the African Union Mission in Somalia: From AMISOM to ATMIS. The Horn Bulletin, Vol. 5, Issue No. 3., p. 1-2.
[15] Federal Government of Somalia (2022) *The Somalia Transition Plan*. Mogadishu, Somalia.
[16] See United Nations (2007) *Security Council Resolution*, S/RES/1744 (2007), in: http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1744.

governments and their militaries[17]. In 2020, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) called for a thorough, impartial evaluation on options for the AU, UN, and international partners in Somalia post-2021. The UNSC made a similar request. Both entities conducted their independent assessments and provided similar recommendations for AMISOM's future. Despite differences in the approach, reconfiguring AMISOM was the most preferred option by the UN and listed in second place by the AU with the caveat that, this option included a strong political component to improve long-term stability and security[18].

In essence, all series of assessments requested by the UNSC led to the same conclusion that no adequate conditions have been created for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation in Somalia[19]. While a UN peacekeeping operation remains a theoretical option for the Council, its prospects have diminished. Against this background, the focus of Somali and international efforts was shifted to planning for AMISOM to transition directly to Somali Security Forces (SSF) without an interim UN mission. Somali ownership of security goes beyond the handover of military forces from AMISOM. If fully implemented, the transition could lay the foundations for the future of the Somali State[20]. However, it will necessitate a common sense of purpose and concerted effort by the FGS in partnership with the regional and international actors involved in the peace and stabilisation project in Somalia.

The Transition and its Four Stages

AMISOM's transition was considered as far back as 2017 by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) when it requested the reduction of troops from 22.126 to 21.626 until 31 December 2017 as a measure aimed at handing over all security responsibilities to SSF. Another reduction to 20,626 uniformed personnel was expected to follow by 30 October 2018, unless the Council decided to accelerate that pace, taking into consideration the capabilities of SSF[21]. Eager to exert

---

[17] Williams, Paul D. (2018) Joining AMISOM: why six African states contributed troops to the African Union Mission in Somalia, Journal of Eastern African Studies, 12:1, 172-192, DOI: 10.1080/17531055.2018.1418159

[18] Dessu, Meressa K. (2021) *Somalia needs AMISOM, but the jury is still out*. Institute of Security Studies, in: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/somalia-needs-amisom-but-the-jury-is-still-out.

[19] See United Nations (2018) *Security Council Resolution*, S/RES/2431 (2018), in: https://unsom.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsc_res2431_2018_amisom_mandate.pdf

[20] Blyth, Fiona (2019). Transitioning to National Security Forces in Somalia: More Than an Exit for AMISOM. Issue Brief, International Peace Institute, New York, USA.

[21] United Nations (2017) *Security Council Resolution*, S/RES/2372 (2017), in: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N17/272/97/PDF/N1727297.pdf?OpenElement

its authority and assume security responsibilities, transition efforts were also being pursued by the Somali government itself which published its first iteration of the STP in March 2018. The plan which was endorsed by the FGS and FMSs leadership and welcomed by the UNSC through resolution 2408 of March 2018 and subsequently endorsed by the AU PSC in its 769th meeting held in 2018[22] laid the foundations for the future transition of the AU peace support mission from AMISOM to ATMIS.

The end of 2021 was the deadline for the departure of AU peacekeeping forces from Somalia but with increased violence and the country's uncertain political future, it became evident that the withdrawal of AMISOM would leave the SSF struggling to restore security. Despite the challenges, Somalia's political elites were eager to assume a central role in any future presence of the AU forces in the country. Thus, the AU mission was reconfigured in accordance with the STP, thereby ensuring that political considerations were included in AMISOM's plans and activities[23]. Broadly speaking, the transition comes at a time when the political and security shifts that have taken place in the Horn of Africa region since 2018 have once again heightened the stakes in the quest for peace and stability in Somalia. Particularly, owing to the security interconnectedness and the enduring potential of the spillover of the conflict with the resultant insecurity in the neighbouring countries, the region and beyond. Echoing the concern, the UNSC resolution 2628 of March 2022 stated that al-Shabaab continues to pose a serious threat to the peace, security and stability of Somalia and the region including the continued presence in Somalia of affiliates linked to ISIL. Hence the need to adapt accordingly to consolidate the security gains achieved to date and ensure continued progress towards a more stable, secure, and peaceful Somalia. The same resolution also urged an enhanced partnership and coordination between all stakeholders in support of stabilisation and state-building processes in Somalia[24].

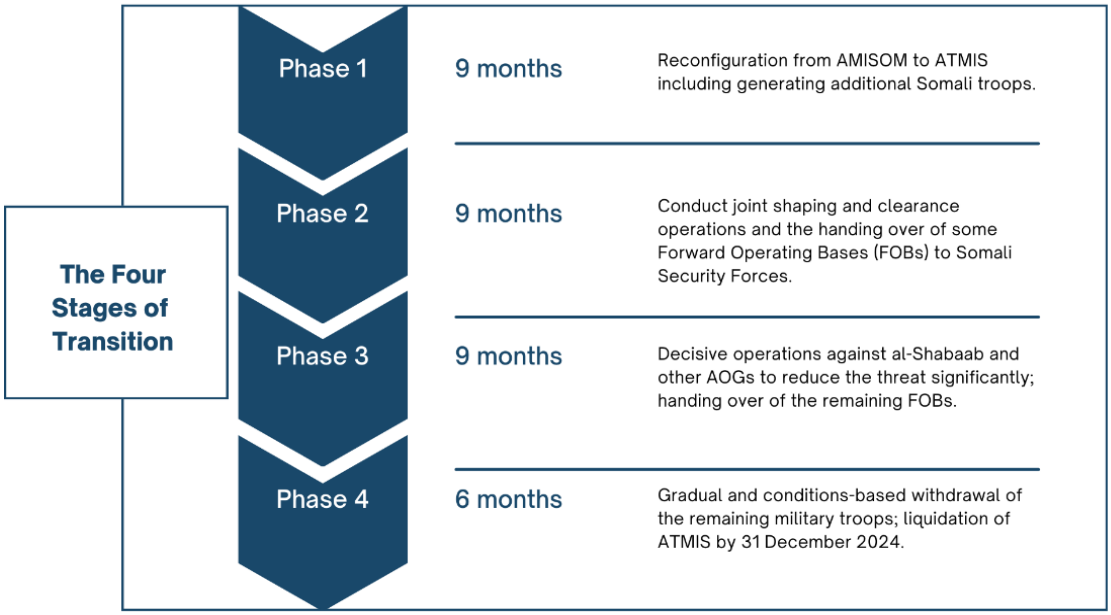
Meanwhile, debates persist on the prospects for success within the timeline set by the AU, FGS and the UN for the transition which includes transferring all security responsibilities to the SSF, gradual reduction of ATMIS uniformed personnel and eventual withdrawal of the AU forces from

---

[22] See Federal Government of Somalia (2022) *The Somalia Transition Plan*. Mogadishu, Somalia.
[23] Dessu, Meressa K. (2021) Somalia needs AMISOM, but the jury is still out. Institute of Security Studies, in: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/somalia-needs-amisom-but-the-jury-is-still-out.
[24] United Nations (2022) *Security Council Resolution*, S/RES/2628 (2022), in: https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14847.doc.htm.

Somalia. The transition is expected to take place in four stages (see Table 1) with the key tasks to be accomplished and the timelines. Even though the transition appears to have brought a new impetus and demonstrates a clear commitment by those involved in the peace building project in Somalia, the challenges surrounding its implementation and the reality of al-Shabaab's continued threat to derail, yet again the entire effort cannot be underrated.

Table 1. Four States of the Transition



Source: Author, adapted from https://atmis-au.org/the-transition-process/

AMISOM's transition into ATMIS and its stages are based on the STP. Specifically, the decision of the AU PSC during its 1068th meeting held on 8 March 2022 mandated ATMIS to support the FGS in the implementation of the STP and to transfer security responsibilities to the SSF and institutions[25]. However, several problems surround the plan. First, it lays out broad contours but lacks operational details. Second, it is based on the so-called clear-hold-build concept, with Somali forces assuming greater security responsibility while the role of ATMIS forces reduces gradually over time. Not only does this approach seem disconnected from the reality of Somali forces' current capability, but it is also one the United States (US) has applied in counter-insurgency missions elsewhere with mixed results. Third, the plan does not represent a consensus Somali view and lacks broad ownership amid continued political competition between the FGS and its FMSs.

[25] African Union (2022) *African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) Transitions into African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)*. Press Release dated 1 April. Addis Ababa: African Union.

Finally, troop numbers and training are another concern for the effective implementation of the transition. The national army is struggling to generate troops which complicates government efforts to build security capacity and assert control over territory seized from al-Shabaab[26]. In contrasts with AMISOM's 22,126 uniformed personnel at its peak since 2014[27], intelligence officials estimate that al-Shabaab has about 5,000 to 10,000 members[28]. Even after the delayed drawdown of the first 2,000 troops takes place in June 2023[29], ATMIS's military component will have 18,586 troops[30] with further drawdowns expected until the final exit in December 2024. The gradual troops reduction suggests that ATMIS will continue to maintain a comparative advantage over al-Shabaab. However, this might not be the case for SSF when they eventually take-over all security responsibilities for their country.

Somalia's Political Environment and the Impact on Peacebuilding

As far as the political environment is concerned, the latest revised STP which was approved in March 2022 acknowledges that Somalia's challenges are complex and differ according to security, political, social, and regional contexts. The strategy to address these challenges and effectively lead Somalia on a path of transition and sustainable peace must include focused, committed leadership and cross government engagement at the FGS and FMS levels that enable the delivery of basic services to the population[31]. The reality is that in recent times, Somalia has persistently experienced internal divisions and political wrangling for power and influence over resources in a complex clan-based political landscape which became evident with the delayed parliamentary and presidential elections respectively.

---

[26] International Crisis Group. (2021). *Reforming the AU Mission in Somalia* - Crisis Group Africa Briefing No. 176. Nairobi/Brussels: International Crisis Group.
[27] United Nations (2013). *Security Council Extends Mandate of African Union Mission in Somalia, Requests Increase in Troop Strength*, United Nations, in: https://press.un.org/en/2013/sc11172.doc.htm.
[28] Savage, Charlie and Schmitt, Eric (2022). *Biden Approves Plan to Redeploy Several Hundred Ground Forces Into Somalia*, The New York Times, in: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/16/us/politics/biden-military-somalia.html.
[29] United Nations (2022). *Security Council Extends Drawdown of African Union Transition Mission in Somalia by Six Months, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2670 (2022)*, United Nations, in: https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15160.doc.htm.
[30] ATMIS (2023). *Military Component, African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), in: https://atmis-au.org/military-component/.*
[31] See Federal Government of Somalia (2022). *The Somalia Transition Plan*. Mogadishu, Somalia.

The electoral impasse that was resolved on 9 January 2022 was preceded by what one analyst described as a prolonged electioneering period that worsened any gains made due to toxic elite politics since 2020/2021 which resulted in the fragmentation and politicisation of the SSF[32]. More specifically, Somalia's Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire was ousted through a parliamentary vote on 25 July 2020 accusing him of failing to turn the tide against insecurity and failing to provide a plan for universal suffrage[33]. Tension also erupted in December 2021 between President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, known as Farmajo and the new Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble, and the conflict between Mogadishu and the FMSs contributed to the delayed elections, diverted attention, resources, and political capital from the provision of services. Farmajo's suspension of the Prime Minister over corruption allegations and the latter's refusal to resign, widened the rift between the federal governments of Jubaland and Puntland, inflamed the country's already fragile political and security situation, led to street protests in Mogadishu between their supporters, with security agencies and clan militias taking sides[34].

In their seminal work on assessing the effectiveness of the AU mission in Somalia, Williams *et al.* have pointed out that as the country remains a fractured state, the political project of state-building in Somalia also continues to be a contested work in progress, and hence the political contours of the AU mission's operating environment are characterised by uncertainty, fragmentation and instability. They identify power struggles, identity politics and the political economy of organised violence as the main dynamics that have marked recent developments at the macro-level. All of this has unfortunately, prevented Somali elites to take full advantage of the political space that the AU mission has helped facilitate[35] during its fifteen years presence in Somalia. It is unlikely that the issues surrounding political reconciliation in Somalia will be fully resolved by the deadline of 31 December 2024 but there are positive indications with the return of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud

---

[32] Details of Sunday Nation interview with Joel Okwemba, a 2022 Africa Policy Accelerator Fellow at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a US think-tank. For more details, see Mutambo, Aggrey (2022) *Somalia's new President: Expectations of better regional ties after change in leadership*, in: https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/somalia-new-president-regional-ties-3833192.

[33] Abdi Sheikh (2020) *Somalia's parliament ousts prime minister in no-confidence vote*, Reuters. in: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-politics/somalias-parliament-ousts-prime-minister-in-no-confidence-vote-idUSKCN24Q0EW

[34] Halakhe, Abdullahi B. (2022, June 11). *A Lesson for ATMIS from AMISOM*, Elephant, in: https://www.theelephant.info/op-eds/2022/06/11/a-lesson-for-atmis-from-amisom/. Nairobi.

[35] Williams, P. D et al. (2018). *Assessing the Effectiveness of the African Union Mission in Somalia/AMISOM*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

to power in May 2022[36] following the long-delayed elections. The new President is considered by many as a consensus-builder and enjoys a degree of popularity among Somalis. While the delay further undermined the peacebuilding efforts, the new momentum has raised expectations for a better engagement between the FGS and its FMSs as well as creating space for inclusive politics.

On the other hand, if politics and security in Somalia are to be considered within the context of cooperation and international relations, it is imperative to reconcile the interests of all those involved in the peacebuilding project considering diplomatic, defense and development efforts that are expected to contribute towards building a robust and capable SSF. Unfortunately, partners involved in security planning often overlook the politics behind the Somali National Army (SNA)'s weakness. Its personnel shortage partly stems from tensions between the federal government and various FMSs, which under previous agreements were expected to contribute troops to the national army. Without some form of reconciliation, member states are reluctant to place their troops under central army command. Mogadishu has not provided any alternative plans for bolstering recruitment. Nor is it clear that the soldiers who are enlisted have the skills they need[37]. These intra-Somali arguments left international partners without a settled framework into which to plug their security assistance. The result was numerous partner projects trying to build an army in separate pieces, including most notably the United States, the European Union, Turkey, the UAE, and Ethiopia[38]. This is perhaps one of the most critical challenges that undermines stability and the overall peacebuilding project in Somalia. Without reconciling the different military training doctrines and the lack of use of some of the trainees, there is a risk of security threat due to unemployment. In the final analysis, the divisive politics amongst federal officials, have also emboldened al-Shabaab to continue attacking government targets, murder civilians and

[36] Mohamud was the first President of the Federal Republic of Somalia, and the first leader to have implemented the Provisional Constitution passed in 2012. He was president between 2012 and 2017. For more details, see Mutambo, Aggrey (2022). *Somalia's new President: Expectations of better regional ties after change in leadership*, in: https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/somalia-new-president-regional-ties-3833192.

[37] International Crisis Group. (2021). *Reforming the AU Mission in Somalia* - Crisis Group Africa Briefing No. 176. Nairobi/Brussels: International Crisis Group.

[38] Williams, P. D. (2019). *What went Wrong with the Somali National Army?* War on the Rocks, Texas National Security Review, in: https://warontherocks.com/2019/05/what-went-wrong-with-the-somali-national-army/

organise themselves to take advantage of the drought and conflict-fueled humanitarian crisis in the country that has left millions at risk of acute food insecurity[39].

The Role of External Actors and Regional Geopolitics in Relation to AMISOM/ATMIS

Situated in the turbulent and strategic region of the Horn of Africa, the conflict in Somalia has for long attracted the attention of outsiders both regional and internationally regardless of whether motivated by altruist or geopolitical interests. In this regard, Michelle Gavin (2022) reminds about the complicated relationship between Somalia's need for international partnerships – necessary to address urgent security and humanitarian challenges – and the frustration that many Somalis feel due to international actors using their country to pursue agendas that have little to do with developing a capable, accountable Somali state.

Paradoxically, foreign partners are both essential and often toxic to Somalia's stabilisation. In a country plagued by persistent insecurity and where government weakness, and elite fragmentation coexist with a politically powerful strain of Somali nationalism, the conditions perversely empower self-interested elites, who can play different external parties off each other to retain political power that has no real connection to the will of the citizens.[40] As Somalia's divisive politics continue to undermine the peacebuilding project and hamper efforts by the AU forces fighting against al-Shabaab militants, external interventions with dubious and incoherent agendas, add a new set of challenges in an already complex situation (see Figure 1).

[39] Gavin, Michelle (2022) *Somalia's Political Paradoxes Forestall Progress and Stability*, Council on Foreign Relations, in: https://www.cfr.org/blog/somalias-political-paradoxes-forestall-progress-and-stability.

[40] Gavin, Michelle (2022) *Somalia's Political Paradoxes Forestall Progress and Stability*, Council on Foreign Relations, in: https://www.cfr.org/blog/somalias-political-paradoxes-forestall-progress-and-stability.

Figure 1. External Actors in Somalia (2018-2022)



Source: Author

As Fejerskov *et al.*[41] explained, to understand AMISOM's operational effectiveness, it is crucial to grasp the regional geopolitical interests and security dynamics that have shaped the mission's operating environment. The sectoral division among troop contributing countries (TCCs) is a clear reflection of that with Ethiopian AMISOM forces been positioned earlier along the Ethiopian border and in the port town of Kismayo as well as its unilateral deployment of troops outside the AMISOM framework across south-central Somalia. Also, Kenya has its forces stationed along the Kenyan border due to security concerns and Djibouti in the north, while Burundian and Ugandan forces are stationed in Mogadishu. Both Ethiopia and Kenya share similar border concerns with their longstanding troubled relationships with Somalia and the al-Shabaab threat emanating from its territory which also triggered Uganda to intervene militarily in a changed East African security context following the 1998 US Embassy bombings in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, and post-September 11, 2001, war on terrorism[42].

Besides regional interventions, other actors have entered the picture in recent years. Although some have been present for a long time like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, others such as Qatar and

[41] Fejerskov et al. (2017) *Regional Interests in African peace operations*, DIIS Report, No. 2017:11, ISBN 978-87-7605-894-4, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen.
[42] Bradley, Curtis A. and Goldsmith, Jack L. (2005). Congressional Authorisation and the War on Terrorism, Harvard Law Review, Vol. 118, No. 7, p. 2116.

the United Arab Emirates (UAE) stepped in more recently. As point of interest, whereas western governments saw a war-torn and terror-ravaged land, these Gulf States besides security concerns, saw investment opportunities and strategic positions they could fill. As a result, Somalia fully entered the Arab world's broader geopolitical situation with major implications for the Horn of Africa nation's state building process. The Gulf crisis of 2017[43] is a clear example which had significant impact for Somalia. While the FGS under Farmajo was aligned with Doha which contributed to Somalia's budget with USD 20 million in 2019 alone, the UAE instead fostered its relations with opposition politicians in Mogadishu, some FMSs, and the self-declared independent republic of Somaliland by offering investments and aid. In effect, the Gulf divide increased the most challenging cleavage in Somali politics and exacerbated the feud between the FGS and the FMSs with the polarisation deepening as external sponsors disincentivise any compromise[44] to protect their vested interests in the detriment of political reconciliation.

On another hand, as shown in Figure 1, Western actors, Turkey and China remain actively involved in Somalia. Perhaps, one of the most consequential interventions with deep-rooted security and geostrategic interests by the US since the early 1990s and in the post-9/11 period deserves special attention. Specifically, until the US President Donald Trump ordered the withdrawal of American troops from Somalia in December 2020, the US under different Administrations (George W. Bush, Barrack Obama, and Donald Trump) has continuously intervened militarily, shaped geopolitics and regional security across the Horn of Africa region in general. The withdrawal took place following years of strained relations with Farmajo who the US considered to be both as a failure in terms of governance and the campaign against Islamist militant groups al-Shabaab and the much smaller Somali branch of the Islamic State (IS) group[45]

Again, since taking office in January 2021 Joe Biden has continued with the same policy. However, Mary Harper (2022) paints a nuanced picture with serious concerns being raised about the

[43] In mid-2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the UAE imposed a blockade on Qatar and invited their allies, partners, and friend nations to severe ties with Doha. For more details see Cok, Corrado (2020). *Geopolitics of Somalia's fault lines*. Ifimes, Doha, Qatar, in: https://www.ifimes.org/en/researches/geopolitics-of-somalias-fault-lines/4660#.
[44] Cok, Corrado (2020). *Geopolitics of Somalia's fault lines*. Ifimes, Doha, Qatar, in: https://www.ifimes.org/en/researches/geopolitics-of-somalias-fault-lines/4660#.
[45] Harper, Mary (2022). *US Troops back in Somalia to fight al-Shabaab*. BBC, in: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61631439

deployment this time. She noted that despite Biden's decision to redeploy 500 troops to Somalia to help in the fight against militant Islamist groups being regarded as a clear sign of support for the new President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, rumour is rife in Somaliland that America is planning to build a military base in Berbera and there are plenty of reasons for the US to be interested in Somaliland. The territory is in a highly strategic location. Its 800km (500-mile) long coastline stretches along one of the world's busiest shipping routes and with its tiny next door neighbour Djibouti chocked-a-block with foreign military bases, including Chinese and American ones, makes Berbera a viable alternative[46]. Encouraged by Hargeisa's foreign policy manoeuvres, Washington has geared up for competition against Beijing in the Horn of Africa with a possibility of setting up a representative office and a US military facility in Somaliland[47]. Finally, in the context of the transition it is undeniable that the US military intervention will be a major enabler in the battle against al-Shabaab. For starters, by authorising the US military to launch a dozen strikes in July and August 2021 and late February 2022 against al-Shabaab militants[48], the Biden Administration has demonstrated its commitment in support of the FGS and the AU forces which could prove to be a game changer for ATMIS's success and their eventual exit from Somalia.

Conclusions

This chapter aimed to contextualise the transition of the AU mission in Somalia from AMISOM into ATMIS. It has highlighted the nuances, challenges, prospects for a durable peace and security implications in the sub-region of the Horn of Africa. A main argument made is that the internal and external factors discussed will remain critical throughout the transition with major impact on ATMIS's successful withdrawal. In other words, as far as the analyses of this chapter are concerned, besides the headache in the battle against al-Shabaab and other militant groups, there are major underlying and interrelated security and political challenges that will define the transition's success and determine the conditions for the full handover of security responsibilities to the SSF. On the other hand, while it is evident that the AU mission will maintain comparative advantage in terms of troops strengths during the transition vis-à-vis al-Shabaab, any security

[46] Harper, Mary (2022). *US Troops back in Somalia to fight al-Shabaab*. BBC, in: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61631439

[47] Ylönen, Aleksi (2022). *External power competition in the Horn of Africa: Somaliland's quest for international recognition and development*, RUSI Journal, 166(6-7), 74–82.

[48] Hathaway, O. A., & Hartig, L. (2022). *Still at War: The United States in Somalia*. New York, NY, USA, in: https://www.justsecurity.org/80921/still-at-war-the-united-states-in-somalia/

guarantees in a post-ATMIS scenario will ultimately depend on the cohesiveness, readiness, and operational capacity of the SSF. Therefore, it is not absurd to argue that ATMIS's success and its envisaged withdrawal from Somalia in December 2024 will be defined by the same highlighted variables that surrounded AMISOM's legacy of fifteen years and the extent to which they can be confronted critically. Finally, the analyses made in this chapter have demonstrated that the transition from AMISOM to ATMIS may not alone bring the much-desired peace and stability in Somalia. Instead, the country may continue to be plagued by general insecurity, violent extremism and acts of terrorism perpetrated by al-Shabaab and other militant groups. More importantly, the divisions, political wrangling and slow progress towards national reconciliation that have marked Somalia's recent past will be a defining factor for a successful transition.

References:

Abdi Sheikh (2020). Somalia's parliament ousts prime minister in no-confidence vote, Reuters. in: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-politics/somalias-parliament-ousts-prime-minister-in-no-confidence-vote-idUSKCN24Q0EW

Albrecht, Peter (2015). Regional Interests Define the African Union Mission in Somalia, Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Policy Brief, November, in: http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep13237.

African Union (2022). African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) Transitions into African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). *Press Release* dated 1 April. Addis Ababa: African Union.

Ajú, Miguel M. (2022). Reshaping the African Union Mission in Somalia: From AMISOM to ATMIS. The Horn Bulletin, Vol. 5, Issue No. 3.

Alexandre, A. M. (2020). A Geopolitical Analysis of the Horn of Africa. In I. U. (IUM), *R*evista de Ciencias Militares, Centro de Investigacao e Desevolvimento (pp. 11- 41). Lisbon: Military University Institute - Instituto Universitario Militar (IUM).

Aljazeera (2021, March 14). Kenya-Somalia maritime boundary dispute explained, in: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/14/somalia-kenya-maritime-dispute-explained. Doha, Qatar.

ATMIS (2022). The Transition Process, African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), in: https://atmis-au.org/the-transition-process/.

ATMIS (2023). Military Component, African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), in: https://atmis-au.org/military-component/.

Bashir, A. A. (2022). Opinion: Somalia should shape Horn of Africa's geopolitics. Ankara: Anadolu Agency.

Bernardino, Luís M. (2012). Cooperation for Security in the Context of International Relations: From Realism to Constructivism. Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa, pp. 1-35.

Blyth, Fiona (2019). Transitioning to National Security Forces in Somalia: More Than an Exit for AMISOM. Issue Brief, International Peace Institute, New York, USA.

Bradley, Curtis A. and Goldsmith, Jack L. (2005). Congressional Authorisation and the War on Terrorism, Harvard Law Review, Vol. 118, No. 7, p. 2116.

Cok, Corrado (2020). Geopolitics of Somalia's fault lines. Ifimes, Doha, Qatar, in: https://www.ifimes.org/en/researches/geopolitics-of-somalias-fault-lines/4660#.

Dessu, Meressa K. (2021). Somalia needs AMISOM, but the jury is still out. Institute of Security Studies, in: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/somalia-needs-amisom-but-the-jury-is-still-out.

Elias, M. (2021, October 15). UN Court Decision a Fresh Test for Kenya-Somalia Ties, in: https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/kenya/un-court-decision-fresh-test-kenya-somalia-ties. Nairobi, Kenya.

Donelli, Federico & Giuseppe D. (2020). Fluctuating Saudi and Emirati Alignment Behaviours in the Horn of Africa, The International Spectator, 55:1, 126-142, DOI:10.1080/03932729.2019.1706389.

Donelli, Federico (2020). Determinants of Middle East states involvement in the Horn of Africa, Elliott School of International Affairs, Project on Middle East Political Science, Vol 40, pp. 50-54, in: https://pomeps.org/determinants-of-middle-east-states-involvement-in-the-horn-of-africa.

Federal Government of Somalia (2022). The Somalia Transition Plan. Mogadishu, Somalia.

Fejerskov et al. (2017). Regional Interests in African peace operations, DIIS Report, No. 2017:11, ISBN 978-87-7605-894-4, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen.

Gavin, Michelle (2022, April 13). Somalia's Political Paradoxes Forestall Progress and Stability, in: https://www.cfr.org/blog/somalias-political-paradoxes-forestall-progress-and-stability. New York, NY, USA.

Halakhe, Abdullahi B. (2022, June 11). A Lesson for ATMIS from AMISOM, Elephant, in: https://www.theelephant.info/op-eds/2022/06/11/a-lesson-for-atmis-from-amisom/. Nairobi.

Harper, Mary (2022, June 1). US Troops back in Somalia to fight al-Shabaab. *BBC*, in: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61631439.

Hathaway, O. A., & Hartig, L. (2022, March 31). Still at War: The United States in Somalia. New York, NY, USA, in: https://www.justsecurity.org/80921/still-at-war-the-united-states-in-somalia/.

Hirbe, Bekele B. (2020). Intrastate Conflicts in the Horn of Africa: Implications for Regional Security (1990–2016), Lexington Books, Lanham, USA.

International Crisis Group. (2021). Reforming the AU Mission in Somalia - Crisis Group Africa Briefing No. 176. Nairobi/Brussels: International Crisis Group.

Maruf, Harun (2022). Somalia Military Rebuilding Shows Signs of Improvement*, i*n: https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-military-rebuilding-shows-signs-of-improvement/6856894.html. Mogadishu: Voice of America.

Mutambo, A. (2022, May 31). Somalia's New President: Expectations of better regional ties after change in Leadership, in: https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/somalia-new-president-regional-ties-3833192. Nairobi, Kenya.

Savage, Charlie and Schmitt, Eric (2022). Biden Approves Plan to Redeploy Several Hundred Ground Forces Into Somalia, The New York Times, in: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/16/us/politics/biden-military-somalia.html.

United Nations (2007). Security Council Resolution, S/RES/1744 (2007), in: http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1744.

United Nations (2013). Security Council Extends Mandate of African Union Mission in Somalia, Requests Increase in Troop Strength, United Nations, in: https://press.un.org/en/2013/sc11172.doc.htm.

United Nations (2017). Security Council Resolution, S/RES/2372 (2017), in: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N17/272/97/PDF/N1727297.pdf? OpenElement.

United Nations Security Council (2022). Report of the Panel of Experts on Somalia for the period 16 December 2021 to 7 September 2022 . New York: United Nations .

United Nations (2022). Security Council Resolution, S/RES/2628 (2022), in: https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14847.doc.htm.

United Nations (2022). Security Council Extends Drawdown of African Union Transition Mission in Somalia by Six Months, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2670 (2022), United Nations, in: https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15160.doc.htm.

World Bank (2005). Conflict in Somalia: Drivers and Dynamics, in: https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSOMALIA/Resources/conflictinsomalia.pdf.

Williams, Paul D. (2018). Joining AMISOM: why six African states contributed troops to the African Union Mission in Somalia, Journal of Eastern African Studies, 12:1, 172-192, DOI: 10.1080/17531055.2018.1418159

Williams, Paul D. et al. (2018). Assessing the Effectiveness of the African Union Mission in Somalia/AMISOM. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

Williams, Paul D. (2019). The Positive Impacts and Challenges Facing the African Union Mission in Somalia, in: https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/positive-impacts-and-challenges-facing-african-union-mission-somalia. Washington: IPI Global Observatory.

Ylönen, Aleksi (2021). External power competition in the Horn of Africa: Somaliland's quest for international recognition and development, RUSI Journal, 166(6-7), 74–82.

Záhořík, Jan (2022). Competing -Isms in the Horn of Africa: The Rise and Fall of Pan-Ethiopianism and Pan-Somalism, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 28:1, 74-91, DOI:10.1080/13537113.2021.2004766.

About the Author:

* **Miguel Mbiavanga Ajú** is a Researcher at the Centre for International Studies (CEI), University Institute of Lisbon (IUL-ISCTE), Portugal. His research interest includes geopolitics, conflicts and security dynamics in the Horn of Africa, regional peacekeeping operations and international politics. He obtained his Advanced Post-Graduate Diploma and a PhD in Political Science and International Relations from the University Institute of Lisbon (IUL-ISCTE), Portugal. He is originally from Angola and works for the United Nations with extensive experience in conflict and post-conflict settings.

[ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1021-8727], Email: mmaua@iscte-iul.pt

Disclaimer: While he works for the United Nations, the views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.