



POLICY BRIEF

Deadline or deadlock? AMISOM's future in Somalia

Jide Martyns Okeke

The African Union Mission in Somalia's (AMISOM) planned transition of primary security responsibilities to Somalia's security forces is under way. However its 2021 deadline is unrealistic. Somalia doesn't have an enabling security environment and its army has limited capacity to sustain the transition due to Somalia's political crisis, logistical constraints and operational gaps. Somalia's security must be improved by both enhancing AMISOM and supporting Somalia's political process.

Key findings

- ▶ Somalia's envisaged transition plan, which provides for a phased, condition-based transfer of security responsibility from AMISOM to the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) by 2021, is unrealistic and may not be fully realised.
- ▶ The slow development of capacity in Somalia's national security forces is a major impediment to implementing the transition plan.
- ▶ Lack of political consensus between the FGS and federal member states remains a key setback to the effective implementation of a national security architecture.
- ▶ Al-Shabaab remains a threat in Somalia, and threats from other armed opposition groups are increasing.
- ▶ AMISOM is the most consistent provider of primary security in Somalia, but it is an interim force. Its political and operational reconfiguration is more likely to accelerate the conditions for an effective transition in Somalia than the focus on its withdrawal that preoccupies donor countries.

Recommendations

- ▶ The establishment of a coordinated regional leadership is critical to support a Somali-led political process. The African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) must initiate the appointment of a high representative for Somalia to enhance joint political support for the country.
- ▶ AMISOM's operational effectiveness should be prioritised by: revising current deployment locations in accordance with political boundaries of the federal member states; enhanced intelligence capability; expediting the establishment of a mission-wide quick response force; and the deployment of additional enablers.
- ▶ AMISOM's command and control architecture should be agreed on by troop-contributing countries, documented in a standard operating procedure with appropriate enforcement mechanisms and a sanction regime, and should be put in place within the framework of the AU Military Operations Coordination Committee.
- ▶ In Somalia, there should be increased cooperation among the regional states and in relation to the central government. Without a collective vision, progress will not be made on crucial issues like dialogue.
- ▶ Additional AMISOM Individual Police Officers will be required to be deployed to the federal member states to support the establishment of effective community-led policing.

Introduction

By 2021 the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is expected to transfer primary security responsibilities to the Somali National Security Forces (SNSF). This transition is in line with the Somalia Transition Plan (STP) adopted by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in 2017.¹ The plan provides for a phased, condition-based transfer of security responsibility from AMISOM to the FGS commencing from 2018 and with an expected completion time frame set for 2021.²

This policy brief explains why it is unhelpful to impose such a deadline on the envisaged transition of AMISOM. Al-Shabaab's threat has not been substantially degraded. Rather the terror group has adapted its tactics to harm AMISOM personnel, government officials and civilians.

A growing number of other armed opposition groups have also gained momentum as credible threats in Somalia. At the same time, the SNSF remains weak and unable to independently launch, sustain and defend its positions against the threats posed by terror groups and armed opposition groups.

A recent Operational Readiness Assessment conducted by the FGS and federal member states with the support of AMISOM and the United Nations (UN) reported that there were 20 158 biometrically registered forces in Puntland, Galmudug, South West State and Jubbaland. These numbers have not been verified though, and the forces continue to suffer from severe logistical and capacity gaps. An overriding concern is that the National Security

Architecture, the political framework for the establishment of a consensual and inclusive security apparatus in Somalia, remains inconclusive. Tensions between the FGS and the newly constituted federal member states have delayed and could undermine a Somali-led security infrastructure.

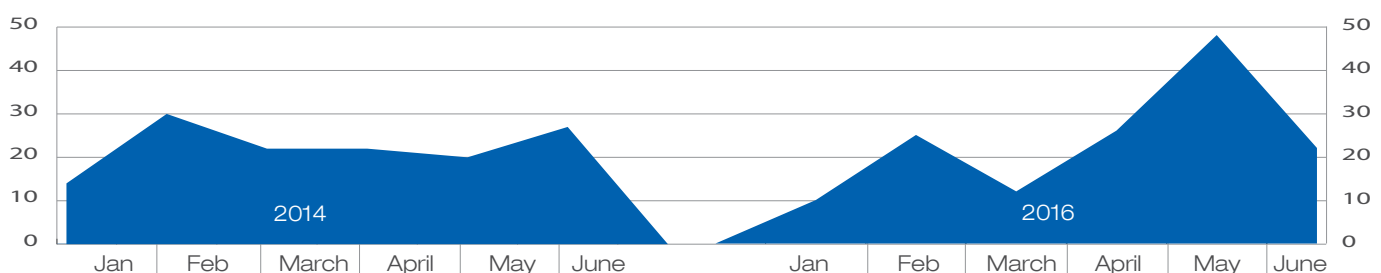
This policy brief argues that an interim option to sustain and improve security in Somalia is through the enhancement of AMISOM and the support of Somalia's political process. Such dual aspirations are mutually reinforcing. Enhancing AMISOM will require renewed regional stewardship through political leadership led by the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD). It will also require operational enhancement of AMISOM through the reconfiguration of the mission.

This brief provides some reflection on the operational modalities that could improve AMISOM's effectiveness. The current narrative on transition seems to mask the underlying international quest for a progressive reduction and eventual withdrawal of AMISOM by 2021, which could reverse the security achievements made by the mission over the past 13 years.

Discourse on transition and al-Shabaab's consistent threat

Attacks by al-Shabaab against AMISOM, the civilian population and other primary targets have remained fairly constant. Based on a randomised sample of attacks by al-Shabaab against AMISOM troops in the first six months of 2014 and 2016,³ the graph below illustrates how the terror group has maintained a relatively stable pattern and scale of attacks.

Figure 1: Al-Shabaab attacks against AMISOM in the first halves of 2014 and 2016



Source: AMISOM data on al-Shabaab attacks (2014 to 2016)⁴

While the terror group has lost significant territorial control due to AMISOM's operations, the level of the terror threat has not diminished. More recent attacks recorded in Mogadishu, Kismayo and elsewhere are manifestations of the ability of the terrorists to adapt and reinvent their asymmetrical tactics against AMISOM personnel, government officials and civilians.

Al-Shabaab's pattern of unconventional warfare and frontal assaults against AMISOM's forward-operating bases represents a trend of the terror group's potency despite its declining ability to maintain territorial control.

In Somalia, AMISOM and national security forces have recovered over 70% of areas from al-Shabaab.⁵ However territorial recovery has not diminished the terror threats, as the evidence from terrorist-related civilian deaths suggest.

In the past decade it has been reported that al-Shabaab has been responsible for more than 22 000 casualties.⁶ Increasingly the emergence of clan militias, other terrorist groups like Islamic State and armed opposition groups are making the security situation in Somalia even more complex than the unitary focus on al-Shabaab. It is within this shifting security complex that AMISOM has continued its deployment and is expected to succeed.⁷

AMISOM's essential but untimely transition

For Somalia and donor states, AMISOM's transition has become a preoccupation, with pressure from international actors and the FGS to meet the transition plan deadlines. At an international conference in London in May 2017, ambitious plans were set out to accelerate progress on security sector reform in Somalia.

Evidence suggests that the Somali National Army lacks proper training, is ill equipped and poorly motivated

The realisation of security sector reform in Somalia will ultimately lead to the transition of security responsibility from AMISOM to the SNSF. It is on the basis of this aspiration that the FGS adopted the STP. The STP provides for a phased, condition-based transfer of security responsibility from AMISOM to the FGS commencing from 2018 and with an expected completion time frame set for 2021.

This coincides with the completion of the next electoral process in Somalia, which is likely to achieve the first ever universal suffrage in the country. As such, the AU Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) during its 769th meeting held on 30 April 2018 adopted the STP as a blueprint for AMISOM's transition. Following 13 years of deployment, and with some of the achievements and challenges confronting AMISOM, there are considerable political and financial justifications for a transition.

Unfortunately the 'ingredients' for a successful transition plan in Somalia are still absent, or at best a work in progress. First, the Somali National Army

22 000

SOMALI SOLDIERS NEED
INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT
TO TAKE OVER FROM
AMISOM

(SNA) is not able to assume full security responsibility over the prevailing threat confronting Somalia. The FGS reports that there are 22 000 SNA personnel who require support from the international community to take over from AMISOM.

Recent reports to the AU PSC also indicate increasing joint operations between the SNA and AMISOM. This is despite claims that neither AMISOM nor the SNA have sufficiently developed mutual trust for effective joint operations.

In addition to al-Shabaab, clan militias, other terrorist groups and armed opposition groups make the security situation even more complex

Yet the SNA hasn't been verified, and evidence from periodic joint AU-UN assessments suggest that it lacks proper training, remains ill equipped and is poorly motivated.⁸ The junior and middle command structure of the force, critical for discipline, and effective command and control remain at a formative stage. Co-locating AMISOM and the SNA to address this challenge of mutual mistrust has been discussed periodically, but has not fully materialised.

Since the adoption of the National Security Architecture, attempts have been made by national stakeholders to develop appropriate ways to implement it. The necessary political agreement on an inclusive National Security Framework, while having been extensively discussed, is lacking among Somali stakeholders.

In July 2017, the Somali National Security Council (NSC) met to finalise work for the development of a National Security Framework.⁹ The NSC is the highest executive body responsible for the implementation of the National Security Architecture, and is led by the president of Somalia with representation from the federal member states and appropriate ministries.

The National Security Framework sets out the structure of security agencies and the agreement of how they operate, but no agreement has been reached as the members of the council have needed further consultation with their constituencies and clans.

This deadlock is typical of various political dialogues in Somalia, with varied results. For Somalia's security architecture however, the failure to transcend this stalemate means a failure to obtain a successful, viable and inclusive Somali-led security infrastructure.

Other constraints keeping AMISOM central to Somalia's security is the nature of the international support given to the SNA. UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2124 (2013) authorised the UN Support Office for AMISOM to provide non-lethal support to 10 900 SNA personnel.¹⁰ This includes utility vehicles, tents, fuel, rations, water and medical support.

2021

AMISOM DEADLINE
TO HAND SECURITY
RESPONSIBILITIES TO
SOMALI SECURITY FORCES

Support delivery has been challenging due to the lack of consistency in the location, disposition and limited joint operations and collocation of AMISOM and the SNA. The latter would provide an opportunity for optimal delivery and efficiency in providing support.

Furthermore, training and other capacity building initiatives from multiple stakeholders to the SNA and directly to allied regional forces remain uncoordinated. The lack of transparency around these forms of aid by bilateral donors has negatively impacted on the development of a coherent and effective security apparatus that can tackle the threat of terrorism in Somalia.

Such bilateral aid (including lethal support) to regional forces in Somalia is in breach of, and as stated by a senior official federal member state, a consequence of, the prevailing UNSC arms and ammunition embargo against Somalia.

As noted in a report by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 2244 (2015), a 'lack of compliance on the part of the Federal Government with reporting obligations, a lack of compliance by Member States when supporting the Somali security sector institutions other than the Federal Government's forces'¹¹ are some of the identified challenges.

At present, the political, operational and logistical challenges of Somalia's security institutions do not allow for AMISOM's substitution as the primary provider of security in Somalia.

Enhance AMISOM, accelerate transition

AMISOM's ongoing long-term interventions in the country to reduce the capabilities of al-Shabaab and other opposition armed groups in Somalia will accelerate the prospects of a responsible, condition-based, and Somali-led transition in security.

Since 2015, AMISOM has supported the government in accelerating its security efforts. This included facilitating an electoral process in 2016/17 and creating security conditions for the establishment of federal member states in accordance with the Vision 2016 agenda developed by the FGS. These political achievements would not have been possible without the necessary security conditions created by AMISOM.

With what appears to be a recent spike in al-Shabaab attacks, limited offensive operations and perennial allegations made against AMISOM on violations of human rights, it is tempting to see its imminent exit as a legitimate policy choice.

In its communiqué following its 782nd meeting on 27 June 2018, the AU PSC called for downgrading AMISOM's military strength by 1 000 personnel by February 2019.¹² This proposal is in line with the 2018 report of the AU-UN Joint Review of AMISOM and was further adopted by the UN Security Council Resolution 2431 (2018).

There are claims that AMISOM's continued reduction will put pressure on Somali authorities to assume greater security responsibility within the country. Future AU-UN Joint Reviews could recommend further reduction in the overall strength of AMISOM, even though the security conditions and benchmarks are currently not being met.

There is a growing reticence among donors to continue to fund AMISOM's long-term peace enforcement mission due to financial costs. This suggests that the current discourse on transition in Somalia is not largely determined by an improvement in security conditions, but rather by the politics of resourcing.

Irrespective of its rationale, AMISOM's gradual transition has commenced. AMISOM has transferred Mogadishu Stadium and the Jaalle Siyaad Military Academy to the Somali authorities. AMISOM also withdrew 400 military personnel from one of its sectors to allow for the takeover of security responsibilities by the SNA.

Further transitions are planned, but have also been delayed due to heightened security concerns in some of these areas. For example AMISOM has had to respond to the need for security in Leego, a key town in the South West State, amid recent tension over the region's presidential elections, as well as securing the main supply route along Mogadishu and Baidoa.

Given that AMISOM possesses the minimum viable requirements for security, enhancing its effectiveness is key to accelerating a successful transition. Enhancing AMISOM through a coordinated regional AU-IGAD political engagement with Somalia's authorities must be prioritised.

Somalia's security challenges are based on an endemic and multifaceted political crisis. The crisis is

characterised by disagreements on how Somalia's envisaged federalisation project should be implemented.

This will be based on (a) the implementation of a clearly delineated structure of governance especially in the interaction between the FGS and the federal member states, (b) promoting clan reconciliation and (c) a consensus formula on resource allocation between the centre (the FGS) and the periphery (the federal states).

Addressing these political issues will also influence how to achieve consensus on the National Security Architecture, especially regarding the integration of regional militias within the SNSF.

An Africa-led political leadership in support of a Somalia-led political process is necessary. With at least 13 years of engagement, and AMISOM's deployed uniformed and civilian personnel from neighbouring and other African countries (notably Burundi, Ghana and Nigeria), the AU and IGAD member states have the largest security presence. This has allowed for a deep understanding of the politics of Somalia.

There have been significant interactions with local stakeholders that could facilitate effective support to Somalia's political process. Indeed, there have been critical views expressed about the alleged negative role of some regional actors in the conflict dynamics in Somalia.¹³

The current discourse on transition isn't shaped by security considerations, but by the politics of resourcing

However the collective and coordinated institutional leadership of both the AU and IGAD, through an experienced high-level representative, will mitigate the risk of bilateral and potentially unhelpful regional engagements.

Besides, with the proliferation of bilateral actors such as the Gulf states and Turkey in Somalia, with sometimes mutually opposing interests, the AU and the region must support Somalia in guarding the security gains that have been made over the past decade.

AMISOM's operational reconfiguration

AMISOM's operational reconfiguration is necessary for its effectiveness. The reconfiguration of the mission should be based on the revision of current deployment locations, enhanced intelligence capability, establishment of a mission-wide quick reaction force and the deployment of additional enablers.

Accordingly, AMISOM sector boundaries should be aligned with the newly established regional administrative capitals and the completion of the formal establishment of federal member states. This would reduce AMISOM's sector of operations from six to four.

While it may also mean that some sectors would be geographically larger than others, the size of the new sectors would facilitate the deployment

> 70%

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AND SOMALI SECURITY
FORCES

of more than one troop-contributing country in each sector. This could serve as an incentive to coordinate, as failure to do so may lead to negative consequences, including safety and security concerns.

AMISOM requires an independent and dedicated information fusion unit for gathering relevant data that could inform effective responses to prevailing threats in Somalia. Even though some in-mission capability exists to generate actionable intelligence, this has remained limited.

Most intelligence gathered by AMISOM is derived from bilateral sources and is often ad hoc in nature. The full operationalisation of the Mission Operation Centre (MOC) and the Mission Analysis Cell (MAC) will be crucial for planning and coordinating the mission's operations.

The MOC is responsible for day-to-day information gathering relevant for operations. The MAC is expected to analyse the information generated by the MOC in ways that will strengthen AMISOM's operations. Neither of these coordination structures has been fully staffed yet. Setbacks in staffing can be attributed to slow recruitment processes at the AU Commission and the lack of budgetary allocation for funding these posts during successive budget planning sessions by AMISOM and the AU finance department.

AMISOM would benefit from a quick reaction force capable of responding to emergency situations or unexpected security threats

The AU PSC communiqué following the 865th meeting held on 7 August 2019 expressed 'deep concern that key AMISOM leadership positions are vacant' and requested the AU Commission chairperson to expedite the process of recruitment.¹⁴ Priority must be given to the MOC and MAC as part of this renewed process of recruitment and the enhancement of AMISOM to facilitate a transition.

AMISOM would benefit from having a quick reaction force that is capable of responding to emergency situations or unexpected security threats. Such a force would possess the capability to respond across sectors in real time. This force doesn't have to be airborne to respond across all sectors. Rather, the enhancement of an effective information-sharing capability within the mission would inform how the quick reaction force is deployed.

The establishment of such a force will be dependent on AMISOM's ability to generate additional enablers as mission assets. Additional assets required for AMISOM in general and for a potential quick reaction force include mission reconnaissance intelligence surveillance, secure communication systems, a target acquisition system and additional combat helicopters.

UN Security Council Resolution 2036 (2012) authorised the deployment of 12 helicopters (both utility and combat). However, extensive negotiations and the finalisation of Letters of Assist (LoAs) especially with Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda have prolonged the deployment of all authorised assets.



AMISOM SHOULD BECOME
A MORE AGILE AND
OFFENSIVE MISSION

AMISOM's Command and Control Architecture must be revised to alleviate troop-contributing countries' unnecessary interference with AMISOM's operations. Sector commanders have reportedly received direct instructions from their respective countries on ongoing or future operations. Such interference affects the effective coordination and implementation of AMISOM's operations.

A collective institutional regional political leadership could reduce the risks of such limited command and control. At an operational level, there should be a clear standard operating procedure on unity of effort and mutual support in the relationships between AMISOM contingents. Enforcement measures should be put in place to sanction commanders who breach operational chains of command across AMISOM's areas of operation.

The Military Operations Coordination Committee (MOCC) convened by the AU Commission remains a mechanism that could be revisited and empowered to ensure that troop-contributing countries comply with established command and control structures.

In addition, the AU Commission chairperson's report to the PSC, often transmitted to the UN Security Council, could be used as a platform to 'name and shame' troop-contributing countries that violate command and control structures within the mission.

The AU and the international community need to collectively enhance and resource AMISOM

Finally, AMISOM police must support federal member states in the establishment of effective community policing. Currently the mandate of AMISOM's police component is limited to training and capacity building and maintaining public order.

Despite commendable work in supporting the Somali Police Force (SPF), especially in Mogadishu, there are still considerable tasks to be done in the regions. This is compounded by the fact that AMISOM police are only able to deploy with the protection of AMISOM's military component.

Working with regional administrators, community leaders and youth groups in developing and implementing

a community-led policing model following the New Policing Model will be essential for curbing the persistent influence of al-Shabaab in local communities.

Conclusion

The planned transition of primary security responsibilities from AMISOM to the SNSF by 2021 is unrealistic. Addressing the political impasse in Somalia will accelerate an effective transition and transcend the timeline of the next elections that coincide with a Somali-led security takeover.

Increased and coordinated regional leadership to support Somalia through a successful political process is also crucial to facilitate a transition.

In the meantime, it's critical for the AU and the international community to collectively enhance and resource AMISOM. This is needed to be able to sustain the security gains made, further degrade the capabilities of al-Shabaab and other armed opposition groups and create the conditions for a viable transfer of security responsibilities to Somali authorities.

This will require dual investments in AMISOM while also supporting the FGS and its federal member states. AMISOM must be reconfigured and sufficiently resourced to become a more agile, mobile and offensive mission – one that can significantly degrade al-Shabaab.

In the immediate term, genuine operational collaboration between AMISOM and the UN must be further enhanced in Somalia to improve AMISOM operations, especially with the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia, the UN Support Office for AMISOM and the UN Mine Action Service in their respective mandated tasks.

Circumventing such a comprehensive process through an arbitrary and progressive reduction in AMISOM's strength masked in the political narrative of a transition process will only reverse the hard-won gains made by AMISOM in Somalia.

Notes

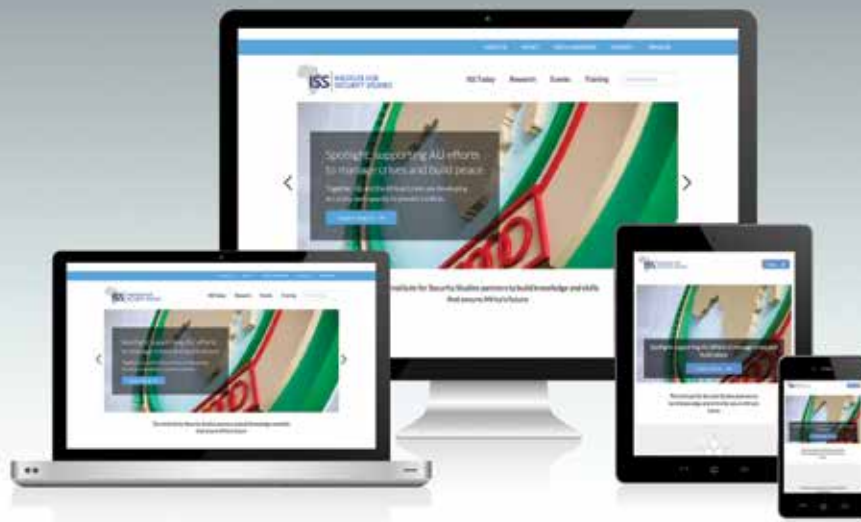
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