

UN Support to Regional Peace Operations: Lessons from UNSOA

PAUL D. WILLIAMS



Cover Photo: Foodstuffs from the UN Support Office for the AU Mission in Somalia are offloaded from a UN helicopter as part of a support package to troops from the Somali National Army supporting the AU mission. AU/UNISTPHOTO/Mohamed Guled.

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Suggested Citation:

Paul D. Williams, "UN Support to Regional Peace Operations: Lessons from UNSOA" New York: International Peace Institute, February 2017.

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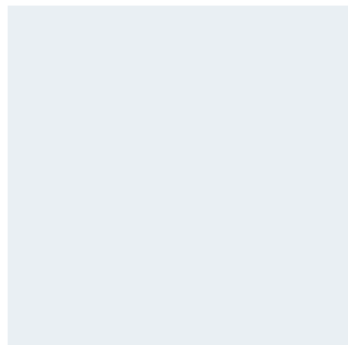
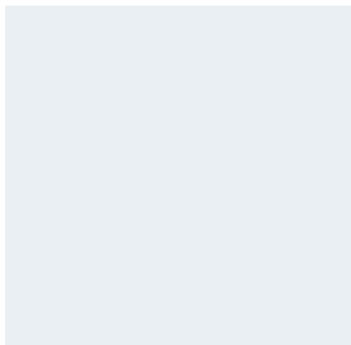
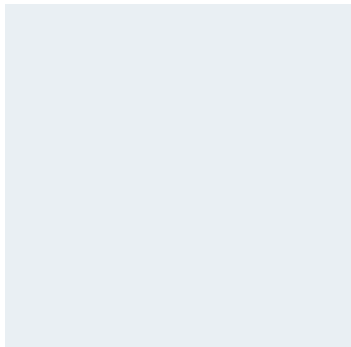
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PAUL D. WILLIAMS is Associate Professor of International Affairs at the George Washington University and a Non-Resident Senior Adviser at the International Peace Institute.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their constructive comments on earlier versions of this paper I would like to thank Arthur Boutellis, Katharina Coleman, Lesley Connolly, and Walter Lotze. I also gratefully acknowledge the receipt of a SOAR award from the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University, which provided financial assistance for some of this research.

This is part of a series of IPI papers exploring field support challenges currently facing UN peace operations. IPI owes a debt of gratitude to the French Ministry of Defense's Department for International Relations and Strategy (DGRIS) and other donors for making this series possible.



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Executive Summary

Authorized in January 2009, the United Nations Support Office for the African Union Mission in Somalia (UNSOA) was an unprecedented operation. Through UNSOA, the Department of Field Support (DFS) used the UN's assessed contributions for peacekeeping to directly support a non-UN regional peace operation, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). To do so, UNSOA employed a range of innovative techniques to provide field support to AMISOM by pioneering the "light footprint" concept and outsourcing model.

UNSOA significantly enhanced AMISOM's capabilities and played a major role in increasing the mission's overall effectiveness. Nevertheless, UNSOA faced numerous challenges that severely inhibited its ability to deliver on all its mandated tasks. It is also notable that, to date, the UN Security Council has not authorized a similar mechanism in other theaters where it has partnered with African Union (AU) peace operations engaged in enforcement. Instead, it has opted for a transition from AU to UN missions in both Mali and the Central African Republic and for alternative forms of support to the AU-authorized multinational forces operating against the Lord's Resistance Army in Central Africa and Boko Haram in West Africa.

After providing an overview of UNSOA's origins and deployment in the field, this report analyzes five sets of challenges that constrained the mission's effectiveness from its creation in 2009 through to 2015, not all of which were overcome. These challenges revolved around the expanding scope of UNSOA's mandated tasks; the clash between the UN and the AU's organizational cultures; the highly insecure operating environment in Somalia, which necessitated a "light footprint" approach; the problems posed by the size of UNSOA's theater of operations from 2012;

and some of the idiosyncrasies of its principal client, AMISOM. UNSOA had a mixed record in response to these challenges but overall produced positive results for AMISOM and demonstrated a new, flexible mechanism for the UN to deliver field support.

The experience of UNSOA offers several lessons for future UN support for regional peace operations:

1. It is unwise to separate control over logistical functions from the operational commander concerned, especially in peace operations involved in combat.
2. The UN's current bureaucratic rules and procedures are unable to quickly and flexibly provide the level of logistical support an African regional organization would need to conduct sustained maneuver warfare with forces dispersed over large distances.
3. When using the UN's assessed peacekeeping contributions, regional organizations must put in place mechanisms to ensure accountability and a reasonable degree of transparency to guard against problems related to civilian harm.
4. Better information sharing must occur between all stakeholders, in this case the UN (at both headquarters and in the field), the AU, the European Union, and other AMISOM partners.
5. The UN should explore how best its field missions can support the development of host-state national security forces.
6. A better link is needed between UN and AU field operations and the planning processes in New York and Addis Ababa, with more emphasis on risk and crisis management. To that end, the UN and regional organizations should reflect on whether future peace enforcement operations should operate under a different set of rules than peacekeeping missions.

Introduction

On January 16, 2009, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1863 requesting the secretary-general to deliver a logistical support package to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).¹ Shortly thereafter, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon decided that the package should be delivered through a stand-alone support office overseen by the Department of Field Support (DFS): the UN Support Office for the African Union Mission in Somalia (UNSOA).² UNSOA's initial package covered "accommodation, rations, water, fuel, armoured vehicles [for AMISOM's police officers], helicopters, vehicle maintenance, communications, some enhancement of key logistics facilities, medical treatment and evacuation services."³ In order to deliver these services, DFS adopted a staffing model that deployed personnel to Mogadishu, Nairobi, and Entebbe (with some support staff in Addis Ababa).⁴

UNSOA was unprecedented in several respects. First, it was the first time that the UN had established a new mission to use its assessed peacekeeping contributions to directly support a non-UN regional peace operation.⁵ Second, it was the first field mission led by DFS.⁶ And third, it pioneered the "light footprint" concept and outsourcing model to deliver services in a non-permissive environment.

Initially, UNSOA was intended to raise AMISOM's operational standards in order to facilitate its transition into a UN peacekeeping operation, but that day never came. Instead, UNSOA underwent two reviews, in September 2012 and July–September 2015, in order to make it more effective. As a result of the 2015 strategic review, UNSOA transitioned into the UN Support

Office for Somalia (UNSOS) on November 9, 2015.⁷

After providing an overview of UNSOA's origins and its deployment in the field, this report analyzes five sets of challenges that constrained its operational effectiveness. These revolved around the expanding scope of UNSOA's mandated tasks; the clash between the UN and the AU's organizational cultures; the highly insecure operating environment in Somalia; the problems posed by the size of UNSOA's theater of operations from 2012; and some of the idiosyncrasies of its principal client, AMISOM. Although UNSOA was tasked with supporting multiple entities, this report principally focuses on the support it provided to AMISOM between 2009 and the end of 2015. UNSOA had a mixed record but overall produced positive results for AMISOM and demonstrated a new, flexible mechanism for the UN to deliver field support. The conclusion identifies six lessons UNSOA's experience offers for the UN's future engagement with regional organizations, especially in Africa.

UNSOA's Origins

UNSOA's origins lie in an earlier and broader debate about how the UN should support AU efforts to increase its conflict management capabilities, including the deployment of peace operations. Since 2006, the UN's ten-year capacity-building program for the AU had supported institution building and various capabilities for responding to peace and security challenges. The Somali case became particularly important. Although the UN Security Council decided that Mogadishu was not an appropriate place to deploy a UN peacekeeping operation—essentially because there was no peace to keep—the AU sent soldiers. However, it was

1 To my knowledge, this report represents the first academic analysis of UNSOA. As such, it is based principally on primary-source materials and interviews with a range of UNSOA personnel and officials from other relevant institutions.

2 For details, see UN General Assembly Resolution 64/287 (June 24, 2010), UN Doc. A/Res/64/287; and UN General Assembly and Security Council, *Support to African Union Peacekeeping Operations Authorized by the United Nations*, Report of the Secretary-General, UN Doc. A/65/510-S/2010/514, October 14, 2010, para. 30.

3 See UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 19 December 2008 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2008/804, December 19, 2008, para. 8c; and *Letter Dated 30 January 2009 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2009/60, January 30, 2009.

4 Initially, only third-party staff deployed through a UN contractor could deploy to Mogadishu because they were not subject to the security ruling issued by the UN Department of Safety and Security.

5 In 2007, the cost of the UN's light and heavy support packages to the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) was borne by the UNMIS budget, but no new mission was created.

6 UNSOA, *UNSOA Scoping Exercise Opportunities for Policy and Best Practices Support, Nairobi 24–28 September 2012*, internal UN document, 2012, para. 3.

7 UNSOS is mandated to support AMISOM, the UN Assistance Mission for Somalia (UNOSOM), the Somali National Army, and the Somali Police Force on joint operations with AMISOM. See UN Security Council Resolution 2245 (November 9, 2015), UN Doc. S/RES/2245.

unable to provide them with appropriate equipment, logistical support, or financial support.

Almost immediately after AMISOM's deployment, the AU asked the UN to provide its peacekeepers with logistical support. At the time, AMISOM was an all-Ugandan force whose peacekeepers were supported logistically by their own government and its bilateral partners, most notably the United States. As the UN secretary-general noted in April 2007, the AU "urged the United Nations to consider another vision of engagement, whereby troops might not be needed, but rather resources and management structures could be contributed by the Organization in support of African Union troops."⁸ That same year, the UN sent about ten planning staff to Addis Ababa to help the AU support AMISOM and tasked a few staff in New York to help facilitate any potential transition of AMISOM into a UN peacekeeping operation.

Developments on the ground in Somalia, however, compelled additional UN action. During the middle of 2008, al-Shabaab militants were gaining strength by drumming up local support against the Ethiopian troops who were occupying Mogadishu. At the same time, a peace deal was being forged in Djibouti that would see those Ethiopian troops withdraw, leaving AMISOM alone to protect the besieged Somali Transitional Federal Government. The prospect of al-Shabaab gaining major ground following an Ethiopian withdrawal and perhaps even overrunning the government and forcing AMISOM to depart was considered a real possibility.

At the UN, the George W. Bush administration pushed for the Security Council to take a greater role in responding to this threat, driven in large part by concerns that al-Shabaab was cooperating with al-Qaida and was probably harboring the perpetrators of the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The resulting flurry of diplomatic activity in New York culminated in mid-November 2008 with the UN secretary-general

recommending that an international stabilization force of "approximately two brigades" be deployed to Mogadishu. This force would support the implementation of the Djibouti peace agreement and create conditions for the deployment of a multidimensional UN peacekeeping operation.⁹

Despite attempts by the US and senior AU officials to drum up support for an international stabilization force, the force never materialized. In mid-December the UN secretary-general informed the Security Council that while he still believed only "a multinational force" was "the right tool for stabilizing Mogadishu," just fourteen of the fifty countries approached had responded to his request for contributions. Of these, only two offered funding (the United States and the Netherlands). None of them pledged any troops or offered to lead the force. With the death of this concept, the secretary-general explored other options to prepare for the expected security vacuum in Mogadishu.¹⁰

Within the Security Council, Italy and South Africa had backed the US, while France, Russia, and the UK resisted the idea of a UN peacekeeping force.¹¹ However, political dynamics shifted with Barack Obama's election victory in November 2008. Obama's administration quickly declared it would not support deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation. The following month, the UN secretary-general reiterated his view that a UN peacekeeping operation was not suitable for Somalia and noted that a multinational force was not feasible without volunteer states. Instead, he suggested the Security Council consider a logistical support package for AMISOM, including equipment and services normally provided to UN peacekeepers.¹² The AU Commission, on the other hand, kept pushing for an international stabilization force and, when that failed, a UN peacekeeping operation to take over from AMISOM.¹³ The growing recognition that sustaining AU operations would likely require some form of UN support was also at the heart of the Prodi Report. Released in December 2008, this report focused on potential UN financial and

8 UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Somalia*, UN Doc. S/2007/204, April 20, 2007, para. 34.

9 UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Somalia*, UN Doc. S/2008/709, November 17, 2008, paras. 31–43.

10 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 19 December 2008 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council*, Annex.

11 David Clarke, unpublished study on UNSOA, May 2014, p. 50.

12 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 19 December 2008 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council*, Annex para. 8c.

13 AU Peace and Security Council, *Communiqué of the 163rd Meeting of the Peace and Security Council*, AU Doc. PSC/MIN/4(CLXIII), December 22, 2008.

logistical support mechanisms to the AU, although not in the form that UNSOA ultimately assumed.¹⁴

UNSOA thus emerged as a compromise deal struck between the UN Security Council and the African Union whereby the council would assist AU troops in Somalia but would not deploy a peacekeeping operation. The other crucial element of the overall bargain was that the European Union would pay the allowances for AMISOM's troops.¹⁵ In this context, Resolution 1863 expressed the Security Council's "intent to establish a United Nations Peacekeeping Operation in Somalia as a follow-on force to AMISOM, subject to a further decision of the Security Council by 1 June 2009." It also requested that "in order for AMISOM's forces to be incorporated into" such an operation, the UN should provide a "logistical support package to AMISOM."¹⁶ UNSOA's initial goal was therefore to raise AMISOM's operational standards to enable its forces to be incorporated into a future UN peacekeeping operation.¹⁷

At this point, in mid-January 2009, a small UN team was dispatched to conduct a technical assessment of the situation. In late January the team reported back that the UN should establish a new field support headquarters in Nairobi, a small presence in Addis Ababa, and a forward element in Mogadishu, security permitting. Its strategic objectives should be to facilitate relocation of the peace process to Somalia, support the parties to create a minimum level of security to broaden participation in the peace process, and create conditions that would enable the deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation.¹⁸ The details were then left to the head of DFS, Susana Malcorra; the new assistant secretary-general for field support, Anthony Banbury; and the director of UNSOA, Craig Boyd.

UNSOA Deploys

It took UNSOA's vanguard team of seven staff until June 9, 2009, to get security clearance to go to Mogadishu. Shortly thereafter, in August, UNSOA set up its logistical support base in Mombasa by leasing storage space from a commercial provider for a year because the Kenyan government could not find a suitable site in time.¹⁹

As noted above, UNSOA was initially intended to raise AMISOM's standards so it could transition into a UN peacekeeping operation. However, things turned out rather differently. First, unlike the earlier UN support provided to the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) in 2007, with AMISOM there was no clear timetable to transition. UNSOA thus began without a clear exit strategy.²⁰ Second, the UN Department of Safety and Security ruled that because of security concerns, UNSOA personnel were only permitted to live in Mogadishu for short periods and had to be located in the same building as the AMISOM force commander.²¹

When the first UNSOA personnel arrived in Mogadishu in June 2009, they were shocked by what they found. About 4,000 AMISOM troops were living in the bush. The whole airport compound was trees and brush. Even two years into the mission, AMISOM personnel were still in tents with no "hard" protected shelters, no mess hall, no purpose-built latrines, no conference rooms, only rudimentary medical facilities with an unrefrigerated tent as a mortuary, and no reliable medevac services. They suffered considerable shortages of everything from vehicles to flak jackets. AMISOM's base camp had no fixed perimeter, and various Somalis regularly came and went.²² An internal study conducted for UNSOA described the situation as follows:

14 *Report of the African Union-United Nations panel on modalities for support to African Union peacekeeping operations*, A/63/666-S/2008/813, 31 December 2008.

15 For details, see Paul D. Williams, "Paying for AMISOM: Are Politics and Bureaucracy Undermining the AU's Largest Peace Operation?" *IPI Global Observatory*, January 11, 2017, available at <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/01/amisom-african-union-peacekeeping-financing/>.

16 UN Security Council Resolution 1863 (January 16, 2009), UN Doc. S/RES/1863, op. paras. 4 and 10.

17 See UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 7 October 2015 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2015/762, October 7, 2015, para. 7.

18 UN, *Technical Assessment Mission to Somalia, 12–25 January 2009*, internal document, n.d. The assessment noted seven benchmarks to judge whether the conditions were in place to deploy a UN peacekeeping operation, p. 8.

19 Clarke, UNSOA study, p. 69.

20 Interview, DFS official, telephone, October 21, 2012.

21 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

22 Clarke, UNSOA study, pp. 21, 58, 62, 86–88.

With the help of DynCorp contractors, the Ugandans had sourced rice, meat, fruit and water locally. They brought in live cows for beef and cooked in huge pots over charcoal fires. Sourcing locally served a dual purpose. It meant they were not solely dependent on flights from Entebbe to keep them alive, but they also wanted to ensure they were giving something back to the local community. “We never invested in concrete and walls. We invested in security through people being turned around to invest in peace. They were investing in their own protection,” said [a member of] the first fact-finding mission.²³

Cooking without refrigeration was risky. Soon after their arrival, UNSOA staff discovered that hundreds of AU troops had contracted a mystery disease.²⁴ Unsure what it was, the UNSOA team sent blood samples to doctors in the United States and United Kingdom, and by July the World Health Organization was alerted. It turned out that between April 2009 and May 2010, approximately 250 AMISOM soldiers had contracted lower limb edema and symptoms compatible with wet beriberi from lack of thiamine/vitamin B1. Over fifty soldiers were airlifted to hospitals in Kenya and Uganda, and four died.²⁵ This episode, probably unique in the history of modern peace operations, illustrated the vital importance of logistical support and how badly AMISOM was struggling before UNSOA. As even a stoic Ugandan officer acknowledged, “Before UNSOA came, it was bad, it was bad.”²⁶ A Western diplomat put it more vividly: “We had a despicable situation. The field hospital was a cesspool.”²⁷

By December 2009, UNSOA had made an impact but was struggling. For one thing, it proved difficult to recruit personnel, not least because the positions were not suitable for families, and the terms were not as attractive as those in some other UN missions. During 2009, 215 candidates were interviewed and 25 received job offers, but only 15 accepted. By the end of 2009, less than half of the

required positions had been filled, and the Mombasa operation was particularly stretched.²⁸ By May 2010, UNSOA had just fifty personnel.²⁹ By December 2009, UNSOA had shipped 1,200 tons of rations to Mogadishu, with ships sailing every fortnight.³⁰ Other services proved more difficult to provide and could take up to a year for the UN to process and deliver.³¹

To deliver these services, UNSOA used a range of commercial vendors willing to take the risks involved, including Alpha Logistics (a Kenyan firm), American International Group (AIG), and RA International. Other big US firms, such as PAE and DynCorp, inquired about the project but decided there was not enough money to be made and the situation was too risky. Alpha Logistics regularly had its ships attacked by mortars when they arrived in Mogadishu. Among other things, these firms built a range of prefabricated structures, warehouses, and the compound fencing.

Challenges Faced by UNSOA

It was in this uncertain and insecure context that UNSOA began its operations. As it did so, however, it faced at least five major challenges. These revolved around the expanding scope of UNSOA’s mandated tasks; the clash between the UN and the AU’s organizational cultures; the highly insecure operating environment in Somalia; the problems posed by the size of UNSOA’s theater of operations from 2012; and some of the idiosyncrasies of its principal client, AMISOM.

CHALLENGE 1: AN EXPANDING LIST OF TASKS

UNSOA’s first major challenge was that its mandate was repeatedly expanded without a commensurate increase in resources. As the 2015 strategic review of UNSOA noted, between 2009

23 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 22.

24 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

25 John T. Watson et al., “Outbreak of Beriberi among African Union Troops in Mogadishu, Somalia,” *Plos One* 6, no. 12 (December 2011).

26 Cited in Clarke, UNSOA study, p. 58.

27 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 59.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

29 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

30 Clarke, UNSOA study, p. 70.

31 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

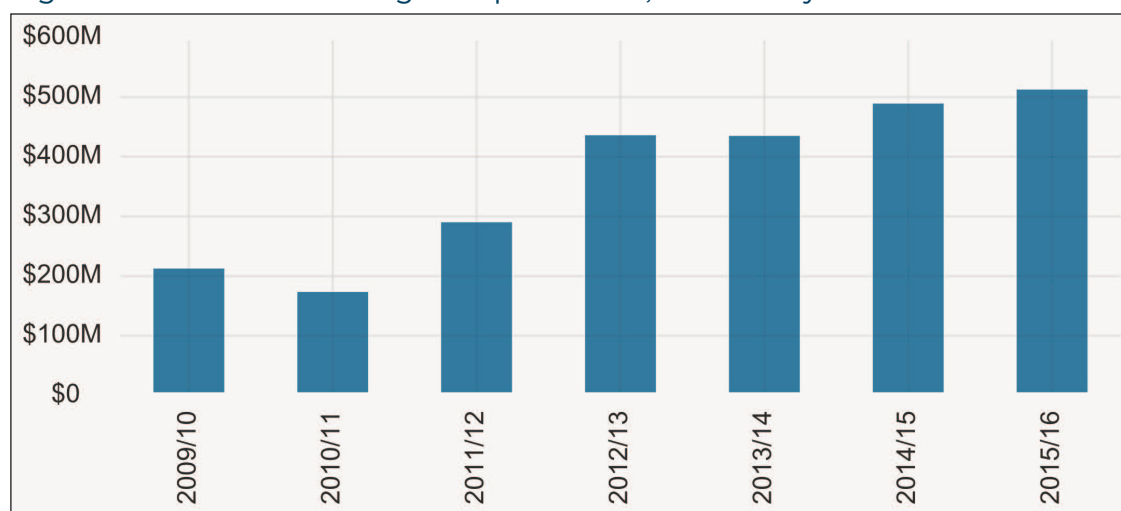
and the end of 2015, the mission's mandate was expanded at least eight times.³² In quantitative terms, the number of uniformed personnel UNSOA was supposed to support went from 8,000 in 2009 to nearly 33,500 by November 2013 (plus an additional 750 civilians).³³ Geographically, UNSOA's area of operations increased by 4,000 times during the same period (from a few blocks of central Mogadishu to the whole of south-central Somalia) to take account of AMISOM's expansion beyond the capital city. To make matters worse, it was tasked with supporting five different entities (not all of which were even in Somalia).³⁴ To do all this, UNSOA's personnel numbers were only increased from the initially authorized 249 to 450.³⁵ Similarly, its annual budget grew only 2.8 times, from \$214 million to \$513 million, and most of this was to cover the introduction of major equipment reimbursement and associated operational costs in 2012 (see Figure 1 and below).

The expansion of UNSOA's tasks occurred in several phases. Its initial task was to raise operational standards for 8,000 AMISOM troops to transition into a UN peacekeeping operation. At this point AMISOM's area of operations was roughly 100 square kilometers. Between 2009 and

late 2011, the initial package expanded to include services normally included as self-sustainment in the UN peacekeeping model (such as catering, communications, and cleaning and sanitary services), the provision of explosive hazard management capacities, and strategic communications. It is notable that the latter involved UNSOA managing a public information strategy for AMISOM via the AU-UN Information Support Team.

During 2012, AMISOM's area of operations expanded to over 400,000 square kilometers, and the force increased to 17,731 personnel. In addition, UN Security Council Resolution 2036 expanded UNSOA's support package to include reimbursement of major contingent-owned equipment, a major additional set of costs, and support for up to seventy AMISOM civilian personnel. Initially, the AU had promised to reimburse AMISOM troop-contributing countries for the equipment they owned, but this did not happen in practice because of the AU's lack of funds. The UK therefore volunteered to cover this cost at UN "wet lease" rates through the UN Trust Fund for AMISOM and advocated intensely during 2011 for this to be covered by UN assessed contributions.³⁶ Moreover, the annex of Resolution 2036

Figure 1. UNSOA total budget requirements, UN fiscal year 2009–2016³⁷



32 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 7 October 2015 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*.

33 This figure represents AMISOM plus the 10,900 troops from the Somali National Army conducting coordinated operations with AMISOM. See UN Security Council Resolution 2124 (November 12, 2013), UN Doc. S/RES/2124.

34 The entities were: AMISOM, UNSOM, the Somali National Army, the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, and the UN special envoy for the Great Lakes region.

35 For the 2009/2010 fiscal year, the total staff costs for UNSOA were \$22.2 million. For 2015/2016, they were \$54.3 million.

36 Communication, senior UNSOA official, August 1, 2014.

37 Data from UN Peacekeeping, "Financing Peacekeeping," available at www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/financing.shtml#gadocs.

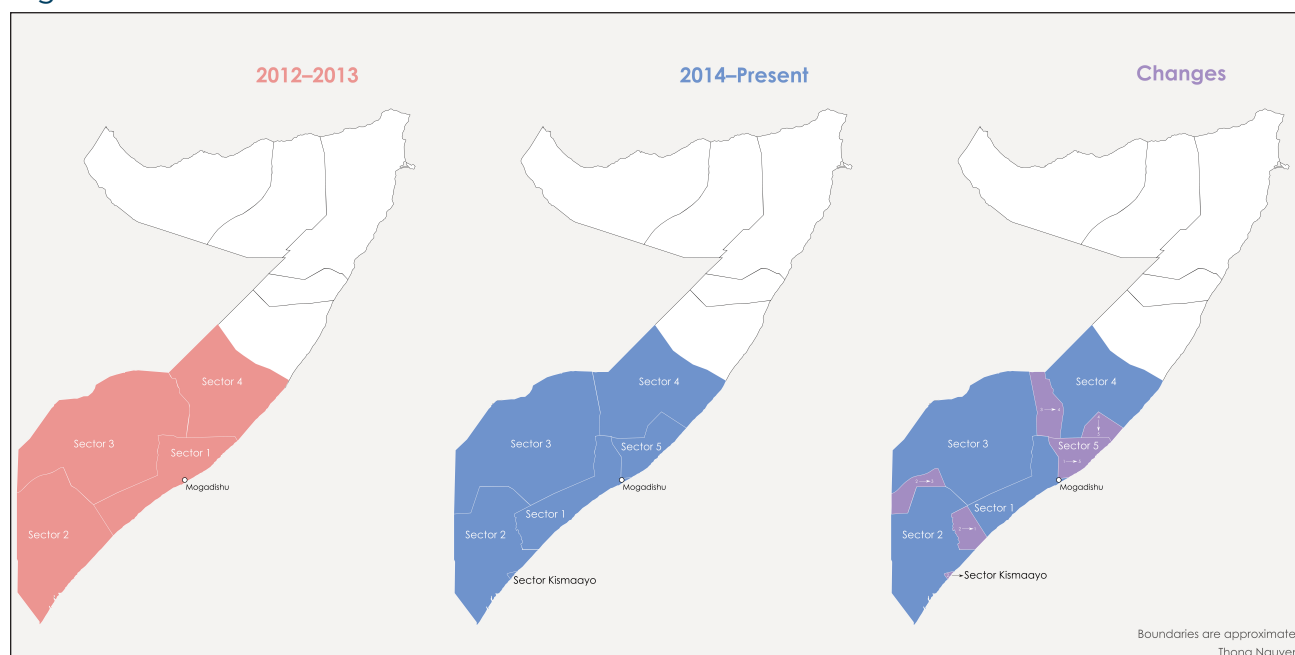
stated that in order to avoid donors paying for equipment twice, AMISOM troop-contributing countries could not receive UN reimbursement for equipment that had been donated to them for use in AMISOM. UNSOA was also required to establish logistical hubs in each of AMISOM's four new sectors (see Figure 2). Other areas that UNSOA took on included helping to train AMISOM troops in areas such as dispensing first aid, controlling movement, supply engineering, operating information technology (IT) systems, and using kitchens, as well as assisting AMISOM in dealing with ex-combatants.³⁸

Then in 2013, UNSOA was mandated to provide support services to the new UN Assistance Mission for Somalia (UNSOM), which replaced the smaller UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS).³⁹ Unlike UNPOS, UNSOM would be permanently based in Mogadishu (and would subsequently deploy staff across the south-central regions). UNSOA was tasked with supporting the mission, including logistically, and with building its accommodations. This was quite demanding given that UNSOM's

personnel were split; some were in the new Bancroft-built camp in the airport compound, and others in the compound of the UN Mine Action Service (formerly the UN compound).⁴⁰

UNSOA's engagement with UNSOM was costly in two senses. First, UNSOM required much greater expenditure of time, money, and other resources than UNPOS, and being effectively collocated with UNSOA meant that it was often given priority attention. Second, after UNSOM was established, UNSOA's director had a dual reporting line to both UNSOM's special representative and the head of DFS. The practical effect was that UNSOA was stretched in both directions, which generated discontent within AMISOM and the UN. Some personnel within UNSOM felt that they were initially just an afterthought, with UNSOA's principal focus on AMISOM.⁴¹ In distinct contrast, some AMISOM commanders felt that UNSOA became primarily focused on supporting UNSOM and that AMISOM's needs became secondary.⁴² One former UNSOA official echoed this view, claiming that setting up UNSOM broke UNSOA,

Figure 2. AMISOM sector boundaries



38 UNSOA, *Scoping Exercise*, paras. 12–13; and Clarke, UNSOA study, p. 100.

39 UN Security Council Resolution 2102 (May 2, 2013), UN Doc. S/RES/2102.

40 Interview, senior UNSOA official, telephone, July 22, 2013.

41 Communication with UN officials, September 2, 2016 and January 11, 2017.

42 Communication, former AMISOM official, July 19, 2016.

which in turn affected AMISOM.⁴³

In November 2013, UN Security Council Resolution 2124 authorized another major expansion of UNSOA. Not only were AMISOM's numbers increased to over 22,000, but UNSOA was also tasked with providing non-lethal support to 10,900 personnel of the Somali National Army engaged in joint operations with AMISOM (consisting of food, water, fuel, transport, tents, and in-theater medical evacuation). This support was funded by the now renamed UN Trust Fund for AMISOM and the Somali National Army, not the UN's assessed peacekeeping contributions (like most of UNSOA's activities). Moreover, UNSOA personnel in Nairobi were mandated to provide support to the special envoy of the UN secretary-general for the Great Lakes region and the Monitoring Group for Somalia and Eritrea. It is also worth noting that in July 2015, the UN secretary-general recommended that UNSOA provide a non-lethal support package to 3,000 security forces in Puntland, but the Security Council decided not to authorize it.⁴⁴

Overall, these various expansions led the 2015 strategic review to the conclusion that UNSOA's name had become a misnomer—it was not serving as a “support office” to AMISOM. Moreover, the mission was massively under-resourced and suffered from “a progressively widening gap between mandated tasks and its capacity to deliver.” In sum, UNSOA's “overall capacity” was deemed “simply inadequate.”⁴⁵

CHALLENGE 2: CLASH OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES

At the operational level, UNSOA represented the UN and AU's most intense attempt to develop a strategic partnership on peace operations. UNSOA's second set of challenges consequently stemmed from the differences between the doctrinal and organizational cultures of the UN and the AU concerning peace operations. This

challenge had several dimensions: doctrinal differences, bureaucratic challenges, and the resulting problems of building trust and ensuring coordination among the relevant players.

The basic contours of UN-AU doctrinal disagreements about peace operations can be summarized quickly. The UN's peacekeeping doctrine is based on three basic principles: (1) consent of the main conflict parties, particularly of the host-country government; (2) impartiality; and (3) non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate. On the basis of more than six decades and nearly seventy missions, the UN believes peacekeeping is unlikely to succeed where one or more of the following conditions are not in place: (1) a peace to keep, with the signing of a cease-fire or peace agreement as one (but not the only) important indicator of when parties are genuinely seeking peace; (2) positive regional engagement; (3) the full backing of a united Security Council; and (4) a clear and achievable mandate with resources to match.⁴⁶

The AU does not have an official doctrine for its “peace support operations,” but its emerging practices suggest a significantly different approach from UN peacekeeping. This is in part because AU peace operations are intended to address the entire spectrum of conflict management challenges and in part because they are more willing to engage in combat against particular target groups.⁴⁷ As articulated in its major January 2012 report on UN-AU cooperation, the AU argued that the UN's peacekeeping doctrine renders it unable to “deploy a peace mission...in a situation like Somalia...even though significant advances have been made on the ground.” Unlike the UN, the AU claims it developed “a different peacekeeping doctrine; instead of waiting for a peace to keep, the AU views peacekeeping as an opportunity to establish peace before keeping it.”⁴⁸

These different approaches can generate signifi-

43 Communication, former UNSOA official, August 20, 2015.

44 For details, see UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 7 October 2015 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, paras. 15, 61–67.

45 Ibid, paras. 54, 70, 79.

46 UN DPKO/DFS, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* (New York: UN, 2008), pp. 49–51.

47 See Cedric de Coning, Linnéa Gelot, and John Karlsrud, eds., *The Future of African Peace Operations: From the Janjaweed to Boko Haram* (London: Zed, 2016).

48 Of course, numerous UN peacekeeping operations have also deployed into areas of ongoing armed conflict. AU Peace and Security Council, *Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Partnership between the African Union and the United Nations on Peace and Security: Towards Greater Strategic Coherence*, AU Doc. PSC/PR/2.(CCCVII), January 9, 2012, para. 71.

cantly divergent notions of the purpose, configuration, and force requirements for peace operations within the UN and AU. They did just that in Somalia. In sum, UNSOA was rooted in an organization that was prepared to do no more than robust forms of peacekeeping but had to support an AU mission that was fighting a war.

From these differences there flowed a number of bureaucratic challenges. First, the UN bureaucracy was slow and hence unable to cope with the high tempo of AMISOM's war-fighting operations. A senior UNSOA official noted that the mission's financial model, like all other mission support components of UN peacekeeping operations, meant that items of over \$1 million needed for its core tasks required approval from New York. For non-core items, approval was required for anything over \$500,000.⁴⁹ The mission could only purchase at its discretion items that cost less than these thresholds. (By 2012, the core requirements threshold had increased to \$2 million.)⁵⁰ Hence, when UNSOA staff wrote contracts for items such as wells or prefabricated structures in August and September 2009, they were presented in New York in March 2010 and not processed until May, with work starting in Somalia in July and August 2010.

This was a problem not only for UNSOA but for UN peace operations more generally; in mid-2015 the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations concluded that "the current administrative framework for peace operations is often slow, cumbersome and averse to risk."⁵¹ Even by 2015, UNSOA's administrative framework took, on average, 180 days to recruit someone off a roster, 288 days to have purchases off a system contract delivered, and 114 days to amend an existing contract.⁵²

This inefficiency led to political fights to give UNSOA some flexibility. After Malcorra departed DFS, efforts were made to ensure some continuity

and retain the "light footprint" approach (see below). Nevertheless, UNSOA's leadership experienced persistent conflicts with New York, especially the Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of Central Support Services, and the controller. The routine pace at which these offices processed requests did not remotely match the needs of UNSOA and AMISOM in the field. The lack of a sense of urgency also generated considerable frustration among UNSOA staff as memorandums of understanding were left unsigned for months. Initially, UNSOA had just one desk officer in New York, and his job became to act as a sort of messenger reminding people that UNSOA contracts needed a rapid turnaround.⁵³

Even if New York had attended to UNSOA's needs more urgently, however, it is unlikely it could have overcome the fundamental problem: that a mission based on mechanisms designed for peacekeeping was being asked to support a war-fighting operation. One of the ways UNSOA personnel tried to bridge the gap was to procure goods and services on an exigency basis to meet the immediate operational requirements (i.e., procurement processes were fast-tracked on the grounds that if the service was not provided quickly people would die).⁵⁴ The UN had used a similar approach following major crisis situations, including the mission start-up in Darfur in 2008 and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.⁵⁵ This did not solve the problem entirely but was a reasonable Band-Aid.

The disjuncture between UNSOA's structures designed for peacekeeping and the realities of war in Somalia manifested itself in several ways. First was the sheer volume of supplies required by UNSOA because the tempo of AMISOM operations was far higher than the UN norm. As one senior UNSOA official recalled, "We were operating at roughly ten times the UN's standard rate for medical supplies but we had to have long

49 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

50 Interview, DFS official, telephone, October 21, 2013.

51 UN Security Council and General Assembly, *The Future of United Nations Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, Report of the Secretary-General, UN Doc. A/70/357-S/2015/682, June 17, 2015, para. 76.

52 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 7 October 2015 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, para. 32.

53 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Nairobi, December 13, 2012.

54 Clarke, UNSOA study, p. 92; and communication with DFS official, September 2, 2016. Rule 105.16 (vii) in the UN's financial rules and regulations allows for the formal methods of solicitation to be waived under exigent circumstances. Under General Assembly Decision 54/468 (April 7, 2000), an exigency is defined for the purposes of procurement as "an exceptional compelling and emergent need, not resulting from poor planning or management or from concerns over the availability of funds, that will lead to serious damage, loss or injury to property or persons if not addressed immediately."

55 UNSOA, *Scoping Exercise*, para. 11.

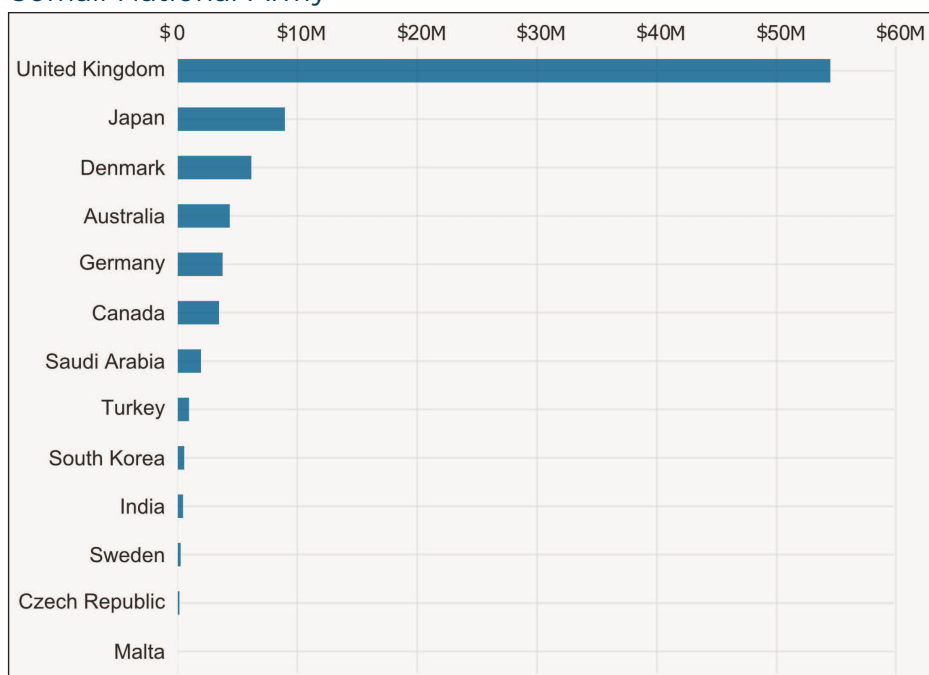
fighters with New York to get them to understand this.”⁵⁶

A second manifestation of this disjuncture was the way the UNSOA package was stripped of anything that might be considered payment for military personnel, military hardware, or any kind of lease arrangement with the Ugandan or Burundian army to provide such equipment.⁵⁷ Consequently, UNSOA did not provide ammunition, which was still done through arrangements with bilateral partners or by the AMISOM troop-contributing countries themselves. Even a few years later, there was no funding from the UN assessed peacekeeping contributions to support the establishment of an AMISOM force headquarters or civilian staff in Mogadishu. Money for these mechanisms all had to come out of the Trust Fund for AMISOM and the Somali National Army, where donations usually came with caveats about what they could be spent on.⁵⁸ In 2009, for instance,

Japan provided funds for outreach activities, but UNSOA could not spend the money because of the dire security situation. Similarly, the UK’s initial contribution of \$10 million could not be used to reimburse troop-contributing countries for lethal equipment they owned.⁵⁹ Finally, contributions to the trust fund were rarely transparent, so it was often unclear to AMISOM how the money was being spent. Some AU officials joked that the UN was running an “UNtrustworthy fund.”⁶⁰

A third example of the organizational culture clash was the UN and AU’s different views on how to fight Somalia’s insurgents. A senior Ugandan officer recalled that initially the vehicles his troops received from bilateral partners were painted white, which is standard policy for UN peacekeeping operations. Even some of the Ugandan tanks were white. After he complained that this left AMISOM troops engaged in war-fighting badly exposed, UNSOA provided paint for them to be changed to

Figure 3. Contributions to Trust Fund for AMISOM and the Somali National Army⁶¹



56 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

57 Clarke, UNSOA study, p. 60.

58 Ibid, pp. 61, 100–101.

59 Communication, senior UNSOA official, August 1, 2014.

60 Communication, former AMISOM official, July 19, 2016.

61 Data compiled by author.

the usual military colors. Another example was that UN standard peacekeeping procedures did not permit UNSOA to pay for medicines for AMISOM troops to distribute to local civilians. The Ugandan officer's response was that he needed information from the civilians and for them to realize that AMISOM was not the enemy. Medicines and water, he argued, should be used as a bridge to connect with the local population.⁶² Another commander said AMISOM was ultimately in Somalia to protect civilians so it should help them whenever it could, and win hearts and minds in the process.⁶³ As a result, AMISOM used its own limited supplies and sought bilateral donations from some personal friends of senior Ugandan officers. Similarly, UNSOA would not provide support to Somali security forces, who lacked basic supplies. AMISOM commanders, who had to develop working relations with the Somali troops on the frontlines, ended up sharing their own supplies.⁶⁴ Overall, these commanders concluded that Somalia was a learning experience for UNSOA and that it should have been more flexible.

A fourth case involved confusion over the type of equipment UNSOA was able to provide. Officially, UNSOA was limited to non-lethal support to AMISOM. But the lines quickly blurred over fighting vehicles. AMISOM thought UNSOA would provide it with frontline fighting vehicles in the form of armored personnel carriers. UNSOA, however, said it would only provide vehicles for headquarters operations and that fighting vehicles would have to be sourced via the UN Trust Fund for AMISOM or bilateral support packages.⁶⁵

Finally, there were accountability challenges. The problem here was that AMISOM did not share the UN's many rules and regulations for accountability. Even on basic issues such as accounting for supplies in a transparent manner, AMISOM forces were not organized to provide such information. Keeping track of fuel was a constant source of

stress, as thousands of liters disappeared each month from vehicles that were supposed to remain on the main base. In another example, generators powering the force headquarters and the hospital would regularly stop working in the middle of the night because some of the fuel had been stolen.⁶⁶ The creation of the Joint Support Operations Centre in Mogadishu in 2010, which collocated AMISOM and UNSOA personnel and processed all AMISOM logistics requests, helped overcome some of these issues. A related obstacle for UNSOA's contractors was that they were not given access to UN software because they were not UN staff. Hence, they had to develop from scratch their own spreadsheets to catalog everything that arrived in Mogadishu. There were other risks for the UN too, including supporting an AU mission facing allegations of using indiscriminate force against civilians, engaging in sexual exploitation, and causing environmental damage through poor wastewater management (AMISOM had no environmental baseline study or AU policy to guide its operations).⁶⁷

It was therefore hardly surprising that UNSOA's mantra became "One Mission–One Team" in an attempt to bridge some of these gaps.⁶⁸ But it was not always successful. AMISOM's assault to capture the town of Jowhar in late 2012 provides a good example of the operational problems that ensued. As a senior UNSOA official recalled, UNSOA had been sending film crews to document AMISOM operations in real time and hence needed to be kept informed about what was going on. For the Jowhar operation, however, AMISOM did not inform UNSOA until twelve hours after it captured the town. As a result, UNSOA was unable to get the required resources to the theater in advance and no film crew showed up for twenty-four hours.⁶⁹

Instances like this generated frustration on both sides and left UNSOA unable to meet AMISOM's

62 Interview, senior Ugandan commander, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

63 Interview, senior Ugandan commander, telephone, March 4, 2015.

64 Ibid.

65 Secure military radios also became a source of contention. Ammunition was clearly outside UNSOA's mandate and hence was provided either by the troop-contributing countries themselves or by bilateral donors. Clarke, UNSOA study, pp. 79–80.

66 Ibid, pp. 81–82.

67 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 7 October 2015 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, paras. 36–37.

68 Clarke, UNSOA study, p. 66.

69 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Nairobi, December 13, 2012.

needs. AMISOM was therefore less likely to always keep UNSOA in its information loop. Over time, these issues reduced the level of trust between the operations. The problem was only compounded by the fact that UNSOA did not have a reporting line to AU headquarters.⁷⁰ Multiple coordination problems were still evident between UNSOA, AMISOM, and the Somali National Army as late as March 2014 during the conduct of Operation Eagle, a set of offensive operations to capture over a dozen key towns from al-Shabaab.⁷¹

CHALLENGE 3: INSECURITY IN SOMALIA

UNSOA's third set of challenges stemmed from the highly dangerous operating environment in Somalia. In response to this environment, UNSOA developed a new model of operations in order to remotely manage most tasks from Nairobi. This approach was driven by three main factors: insecurity in Mogadishu, the desire to keep down financial costs, and a determination to maintain a "light footprint" in terms of UN personnel.⁷²

Fundamentally, the security situation in Mogadishu drove UNSOA's approach.⁷³ As the UN secretary-general would later summarize, the situation presented UNSOA with the challenge of how to "stay and deliver" its programs in partnership with the AU.⁷⁴ UNSOA's solution was to adopt remote management and a light footprint—namely, running the mission out of Nairobi and using contractors for most of the work in Mogadishu—to provide logistical support in the war-torn city. To take just one example, UNSOA was tasked with maintaining and repairing AMISOM's fleet of over 700 combat and support vehicles. But the insecure environment meant that when vehicles broke down near the frontlines, UNSOA faced huge challenges in getting them back to its workshop in the rear.⁷⁵

As noted above, in a radical move for the UN, the decision was taken to outsource many of UNSOA's needs to local sources in Kenya. But this led to conflicts between UNSOA and New York, and later within UNSOA itself, as more new UN staff preferred to operate according to the traditional UN framework for getting things done.⁷⁶

The security risks dictated that UNSOA's "light footprint" relied upon contractors who were willing to assume considerable risks—if the money was right. Deploying UN personnel to Somalia was out of the question because the UN Department of Safety and Security initially assessed Mogadishu as a Phase V security risk, meaning international UN staff must evacuate immediately. UNSOA therefore deployed a few of its old UN hands to Mogadishu as contractors to set up support from the Somali side. Naturally, working in this environment required a different skill set and approach than more traditional UN peacekeeping operations.⁷⁷ UNSOA's reliance on contractors and AMISOM personnel to undertake tasks that would usually be performed by UN staff was thus entirely understandable.⁷⁸

A good example of UNSOA's reliance on contractors was its approach to air services. Whereas most UN peacekeeping operations have a large fleet of aircraft, UNSOA decided instead to lease seats on commercial aircraft.⁷⁹ Instead of paying for a plane and crew to be on standby throughout the year, UNSOA signed agreements with three companies to provide planes as and when they were needed. This allowed UNSOA to hire the most suitable plane for the required passengers or cargo.⁸⁰ It also saved money. As an internal analysis of UNSOA concluded, "In the first three years of operations, UNSOA spent \$4.2 million on flights, or 70 percent of the initial \$6 million budget, which was meant to pay for one

70 UNSOA, *Scoping Exercise*, para. 24.

71 AU, *Report of After Action Review for Operation Eagle*, internal AU document, June 5, 2014.

72 UNSOA, *Scoping Exercise*, para. 8.

73 Interview, DFS official, telephone, 21 October 2012.

74 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 7 October 2015 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, para. 7.

75 Interview, DFS official, telephone, October 21, 2013.

76 Interviews, senior UNSOA officials, Nairobi, December 13, 2012 and telephone, July 17, 2014.

77 Interview, DFS official, telephone, October 21, 2013.

78 UNSOA, *Scoping Exercise*, para. 9.

79 Interview, DFS official, telephone, October 21, 2013.

80 Clarke, UNSOA study, p. 72. A similar approach was adopted for sea transport. See pp. 76–77.

UN plane for one year.”⁸¹ Similarly, the 2012 UNSOA review estimated that this approach produced savings of up to 60 percent.⁸² But outsourcing flights generated political pushback in New York, even though UNSOA had no other feasible option in its start-up phase. This pushback largely came down to international politics, because the majority of long-term charter agreements for UN missions are struck with companies from a handful of powerful UN member states.⁸³ UNSOA’s use of local air charters was ended in early 2013 as security conditions improved.⁸⁴

The extensive use of contractors meant that AMISOM’s support was ultimately dependent upon a four-way partnership with UNSOA, the various private firms involved, and the bilateral donors that supplied the ammunition and lethal equipment.⁸⁵ As noted above, while outsourcing to firms resulted in considerable cost savings and efficiency for UNSOA, it also raised the problem of giving contractors access to UN information systems and generated

some political pushback from powerful member states. For AMISOM, this outsourcing enabled the delivery of services the UN would have been unable to provide but raised additional concerns about operational security and safeguarding against leaked information while fighting its war.⁸⁶

CHALLENGE 4: THE TYRANNY OF DISTANCE

UNSOA’s fourth challenge stemmed from the massive increase in AMISOM’s area of operations once it pushed al-Shabaab forces out of Mogadishu in August 2011 and started to spread out from the city in early 2012. The area it covered went from roughly 100 square kilometers to over 400,000 with personnel in more than eighty locations. While it was possible to stretch some of UNSOA’s resources when AMISOM operated in just parts of Mogadishu, it was impossible for UNSOA to cope with the logistical challenges presented by AMISOM’s new mandate and force posture from early 2012 when its operations expanded across south-central Somalia (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distances between Somali cities (kilometers)

Beledweyne										
Baidoa	585									
Bardera	782	197								
Bosaso	1,053	1,638	1,835							
Adado	245	830	1,027	570						
Dolo	807	222	258	1,860	1,052					
Galkayo	373	958	1,155	680	128	1,180				
Garowe	611	1,196	1,393	442	366	1,418	238			
Kismayo	803	527	330	1,856	1,048	588	1,176	1,414		
Mogadishu	343	242	439	1,396	588	464	716	954	460	
	Beledweyne	Baidoa	Bardera	Bosaso	Adado	Dolo	Galkayo	Garowe	Kismayo	Mogadishu

81 Ibid, p. 74.

82 Interview, DFS official, telephone, October 21, 2013.

83 Clarke, UNSOA study, p. 74.

84 Ibid, p. 76.

85 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

86 Ibid.

While logistical support to AMISOM forces in Mogadishu was difficult, there was a major seaport and airport to bring supplies in, and UNSOA personnel became familiar with the locales and could prepare accordingly. As AMISOM spread beyond Mogadishu, other problems emerged. First, as AMISOM deployed further inland from Mogadishu and the Somali border regions, it needed to arrange alternative lines of communication beyond the sea route from Mombasa.

Second, insecurity along the main supply routes meant that even contractors would not take the risk. Consequently, AMISOM's troop-contributing countries were made "responsible for the delivery of goods and services from UNSOA logistics hubs to the 'front line' or more insecure areas."⁸⁷ This, in turn, required UNSOA to train those forces in how to conduct such operations. Moreover, the distances started to expose AMISOM's lack of enabling units, which might have been able to open up major ground supply routes for UNSOA to provide support. In particular, in addition to logistics personnel, AMISOM emphasized the need for "heavy transport and logistics assets to move goods and services forward, along with combat engineers and aviation assets to secure, recce and support convoys along the Lines of Communication."⁸⁸ Even when such assets did arrive, AMISOM did not have sufficient personnel to operate them. Hence, some heavy transport equipment and an engineering plant provided by UNSOA and donors to allow the movement of goods, food, and water sat idle. Nor did AMISOM have sufficient medical staff for the medical facilities needed in each sector.⁸⁹

Third, UNSOA had to deal with long logistics supply chains, and the process of constructing AMISOM's supply routes was difficult, dangerous (because of regular al-Shabaab attacks), and slow.⁹⁰ It is notable just how significant the journeys

involved were. For example, in 2012 AMISOM estimated that while the trip from Mogadishu to Kismayo (the Sector 2 headquarters) took one hour in a helicopter and forty-five minutes by fixed-wing plane, it would take four days to drive. Getting from Mogadishu to Beledweyne (in Sector 4) was a two-hour helicopter ride or a two-day drive, and getting to Baidoa (in Sector 3) took forty-five minutes by helicopter but also two days to drive (see Table 1).⁹¹ For emergency medical evacuation, road transport was often out of the question, but UNSOA had only two contracted civilian helicopters, and air operations were very expensive. Moreover, evacuated casualties had to be taken to Mogadishu to ensure effective medical support because of the lack of medical support elsewhere.⁹²

Finally, once again, the need to meet AMISOM's rapid reaction requirements over such large distances fell afoul of cumbersome UN bureaucratic procedures.⁹³ With AMISOM forces capturing more and more towns, UNSOA fell further behind the pace of the operations.⁹⁴ In part, this was because UN standards are generally used to supply static forces, whereas AMISOM needed to be mobile. With the expanded geographic area, UNSOA's leadership thought it would be impossible to meet them. The basics might just be doable if corners were cut, but senior UNSOA officials recommended that the phrase "to UN standard" be removed from the mandate.⁹⁵

CHALLENGE 5: AMISOM AS A CLIENT

The final challenge analyzed here stemmed from some of AMISOM's limitations as UNSOA's principal client. In sum, while UNSOA was not a perfect match for AMISOM's needs, the AU mission was also not in a position to work well and efficiently with its UN partner.

As noted above, some of the tensions stemmed from UNSOA's inability to keep pace with AMISOM's demands, others from misunderstand-

⁸⁷ AMISOM, *Military Strategic Concept of Operations for AMISOM*, internal document, February 14, 2012, Annex D, para..

⁸⁸ Ibid, Annex D, para. 6.

⁸⁹ Communication, senior UNSOA official, December 30, 2012.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ AMISOM, *Military Strategic Concept of Operations*, p. 2.

⁹² Interview, UN Office to the AU official (UNOAU), telephone, December 20, 2012. For a self-assessment of one of the firms contracted to provide air medical evacuations, see Adam Low and Bettina Vadera, "Air Medical Evacuations from a Developing World Conflict Zone," *Air Medical Journal* 30, no. 6 (2011), pp. 313–16.

⁹³ Interview, senior UNSOA official, Nairobi, December 13, 2012.

⁹⁴ Interview, UNOAU official, telephone, December 20, 2012.

⁹⁵ Interview, senior UNSOA official, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

ings and misaligned expectations on both sides. But as a client, AMISOM had some significant limitations. First, the many complex issues began to overwhelm the three AMISOM political officers who were present by mid-2012.⁹⁶ Second, many of AMISOM's specialists in these areas rotated every six to nine months, making it difficult to build institutional memory and relationships.⁹⁷ Third, it was not until 2012 that AMISOM established a multinational force headquarters. This left UNSOA to deal with a fragmented mission where the national contingents often adopted their own way of doing things.⁹⁸

Things became more complicated once Djibouti joined the mission in December 2011, and Kenya in the first half of 2012. Both of these new troop-contributing countries caused UNSOA headaches. Djibouti took nearly a year to deploy its first battalion and caused much aggravation in the process. When the initial company of Djiboutian troops arrived in Mogadishu in December 2011, its commander refused to deploy outside the airport to the designated area of operations (near Beledweyne in AMISOM Sector 4) and demanded that UNSOA build them new barracks there.⁹⁹ At the instruction of the AU, UNSOA refused, and the Djiboutian soldiers remained in the international airport compound until they and their equipment were sent back to Djibouti by sea. The Djiboutian government then sent UNSOA a bill for “wear and tear” on their equipment during the process.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, when Djibouti finally agreed to deploy its pledged battalion in November 2012, UNSOA was forced to fly the troops to their sector base in batches of roughly forty per day in Dash 8 planes because they refused to be bused through Ethiopia.¹⁰¹ Overall, it cost UNSOA over \$3 million to get the initial forty Djiboutian troops to Beledweyne nearly a year later than planned.¹⁰²

UNSOA's relationship with the Kenyans was also fraught, not least because the government in Nairobi wanted reimbursement for its maritime assets. UNSOA refused, not only because they were not AMISOM assets but also because the Kenyans had engaged in indiscriminate shelling of local targets. AMISOM's Sector 2 functioned as a unilateral Kenyan operation, and UNSOA was regularly left completely without information as it worked to establish a presence in the port of Kismayo to deal with all the logistical requirements.¹⁰³

As noted above, the fact that AMISOM failed to generate sufficient enabling units also made UNSOA's task more difficult. For example, UN Security Council Resolution 2124 (2013) authorized 1,845 uniformed personnel to serve as enabling units, but only a few of them materialized in the mission, and those that did were deployed as contingent rather than mission assets. Even by 2015, AMISOM had only one-third of the organic support assets of a normal UN peacekeeping operation.¹⁰⁴ Nor were AMISOM's troops very mobile, possessing only about 30 percent of the mobility support capabilities of a similarly sized UN mission.¹⁰⁵ As a result, UNSOA had to provide many services by air because the main supply routes were in such a bad state of disrepair or were insecure. The 2015 strategic review later concluded this was “operationally and financially unsustainable.”¹⁰⁶

The compromise worked out during 2012 was that UNSOA would operate on a “hub and spoke” approach: UNSOA would deliver supplies to the sector hubs and battalion headquarters, then AMISOM would be responsible for moving the supplies to its forward operating bases.¹⁰⁷ But AMISOM's expansion across more and more territory with more bases necessitated more logistical support as the force broke down into

96 Interview, AMISOM official, Nairobi, August 7, 2012.

97 UNSOA, *Scoping Exercise*, para. 20.

98 Interview, DPKO official, telephone, October 21, 2013.

99 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Nairobi, August 12, 2012.

100 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Nairobi, December 13, 2012.

101 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

102 Ibid.

103 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Nairobi, December 13, 2012.

104 Communication, senior UNSOA official, September 22, 2015.

105 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 7 October 2015 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, paras. 40–41.

106 Ibid, para. 42. See also para. 85.

107 Ibid, para. 43.

smaller, more dispersed units. For instance, while a battalion based in Mogadishu might need two fuel trucks because the fuel only has to go from the seaport to the base compound, a battalion deploying and breaking down to company level needs seven fuel trucks.¹⁰⁸ Overall, UNSOA struggled to effectively implement this model. The 2015 strategic review later concluded that it could not work unless AMISOM's individual contingents provided more of their own equipment.¹⁰⁹

Nor was AMISOM always able to make requests in a timely and appropriate manner. Before the force headquarters was established in 2012, AMISOM had operated without any staff officers, so there was nobody dedicated to such tasks as ordering logistics, medical, and engineering items. Even when eighty-five headquarters staff posts were created, it took time to fill them. Moreover, when AMISOM communicated its needs, UNSOA personnel would usually be handed long lists of items. Lists were problematic because they lacked the narrative context that would enable UNSOA to prioritize between items that were crucial and those that could wait or be ignored.¹¹⁰

Finally, even when UNSOA instigated positive reforms within AMISOM, it was met with resistance. For example, when UNSOA first arrived, AMISOM was cooking without refrigeration and using charcoal. Not only did this lead to the wet beriberi outbreak (discussed above), but much of the charcoal came from areas of southern Somalia controlled by al-Shabaab. Although this did not break the UN ban on Somali charcoal exports, it was politically counterproductive. UNSOA therefore introduced 100-person kitchens powered by diesel burners, but it took time to train AMISOM cooks to use them, and some soldiers initially resisted the change.¹¹¹ This change also raised AMISOM's expectations, but UNSOA then struggled to meet similar standards for the contingents out in the sectors.

Assessing UNSOA

How should UNSOA's operations be assessed in light of these challenges? Naturally, UNSOA's own publications provide glowing reviews. Its 2015 handbook, for instance, includes ten brief testimonies praising UNSOA from senior AMISOM military commanders and the head of mission.¹¹²

Other forms of assessment, including by the UN, were mixed. Between 2011 and 2015, for instance, the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services conducted several audits of some aspects of UNSOA's operations. On the positive side, rations were provided in a timely manner and in the requested quantities, and UNSOA's risk management, control, and governance processes at the Mombasa support base were deemed satisfactory.¹¹³ On the negative side, recruitment of staff suffered from initially high vacancy rates and subsequent delays; the management of UNSOA's procurement activities was only partially satisfactory; its use of vehicles in Kenya was only partially satisfactory; its management of fuel was rated as unsatisfactory overall, principally because of inaccurate financial reporting and noncompliance with mandates and regulations; and its management of air operations was also deemed unsatisfactory overall, mainly because of a lack of efficient and effective operations and noncompliance with mandates and regulations.¹¹⁴

So how should UNSOA be judged overall? In my research, some critics were scathing about UNSOA, referring to it as "a defunct organization" that was "at the heart" of AMISOM's failures.¹¹⁵ But this verdict is too harsh. First, it is important to recall that UNSOA was a political compromise forged because the UN's most powerful member states did not want to deploy a UN peacekeeping operation in Somalia. Its design and level of resources reflected that deal. Second, UNSOA was

108 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

109 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 7 October 2015 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, para. 87.

110 Interview, senior UNSOA official, Mogadishu, January 3, 2013.

111 Clarke, UNSOA study, pp. 84–85.

112 UNSOA, UNSOA, 2015, pp. 11–13, available at <https://unsoa.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsoa-booklet.pdf>.

113 UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), Internal Audit Reports AP2010/638/03, February 25, 2011; and AP2011/638/02, September 30, 2011, available at <https://oios.un.org/page?slug=report>.

114 See, in order, OIOS, Internal Audit Reports AP2010/638/05, February 25, 2011; AP2011/638/04, May 1, 2012; AP2012/638/08, November 8, 2013; AP2013/638/05, August 8, 2014; and AP2013/638/01, January 28, 2015, available at <https://oios.un.org/page?slug=report>.

115 Communication, US official, Djibouti, November 22, 2014.

created as an attempt to help a struggling AU mission that operated in only a few parts of one city, and it had no clear exit strategy or plan in case those circumstances changed. Third, UNSOA was also constrained by the fact that it was an unprecedented (and contentious) experiment, in part because it was a logistics mechanism without a leading political arm. While it worked with two UN political missions in Somalia, neither was able to provide strong political leadership: UNPOS had enormous challenges even getting personnel into Somalia let alone leading politically, while UNSOM managed a larger presence but also struggled to take the political reins. Hence, UNSOA often found itself providing logistics in something close to a political vacuum.¹¹⁶

With regard to the five challenges discussed above, UNSOA's record was mixed. UNSOA coped reasonably well with its regularly expanding list of tasks. Its arrival in Somalia clearly constituted a major improvement on what existed before. As one AMISOM officer noted, "Before UNSOA, the logistical challenges were huge."¹¹⁷ The 2012 review was also broadly positive. "Overall," it concluded, "the UNSOA model has been successful in providing an effective logistics backbone for AMISOM operations in Somalia."¹¹⁸ AMISOM and donor personnel also gave positive assessments. As one former AMISOM force commander recalled, with its roots in the UN's bureaucratic systems, UNSOA should be commended for doing a job that it was not formatted for.¹¹⁹ Similarly, an EU military officer recalled that his days working with AMISOM before UNSOA were shocking because of the dire state of AMISOM's logistics support. Despite its limitations, he admired UNSOA as "a unique instrument to help Africa in its hour of need." Ultimately, he concluded, UNSOA had saved the lives of AMISOM personnel.¹²⁰

The "light footprint" approach was also an entirely reasonable and innovative approach to

dealing with the security situation in Somalia. Especially in the early years, there was no other plausible choice but to innovate along these lines. UNSOA's reliance on contractors was sensible, even though it caused some political frictions in New York. In financial terms, UNSOA managed to generate a significant impact at a much cheaper rate than other UN peacekeeping operations, in large part because of its extensive use of contractors. UNSOA should therefore be seen as a positive example of the effects the UN can achieve for less money than deploying a full peacekeeping operation.¹²¹ In that sense, as the 2015 strategic review concluded, "The light footprint approach has been broadly successful," particularly in its highly efficient use of resources.¹²² Indeed, the AU recognized UNSOA's relative success when it called for the UN to establish similar mechanisms for the African missions in Mali (2013) and the Central African Republic (2014).¹²³

Indeed, what else could reasonably be expected of UNSOA given the available resources? Even by the 2014/2015 fiscal year, for instance, UNSOA had about 700 civilian staff to support over 34,000 personnel working in a variety of different entities in several different countries. This translated into a terrible staff-to-supported-personnel ratio of 1:48. By way of comparison, other UN missions in the region had equivalent ratios of 1:5 (MONUSCO and UNAMID) and 1:4 (UNMISS).¹²⁴ This suggests UNSOA was basically designed to fail, and the "light footprint" was the only way it could achieve even partial success.

In contrast, UNSOA struggled to overcome the clash of organizational cultures between the UN and AMISOM. The central problem was that UNSOA was based in frameworks designed for peacekeeping but tasked with supporting a war-fighting mission. The predictable result was that AMISOM's more intense tempo of operations simply overwhelmed UNSOA, especially once the

116 Interview, DFS official, telephone, October 21, 2013.

117 Interview, AMISOM official, telephone, July 29, 2012.

118 UNSOA, *Scoping Exercise*, Summary.

119 Communication, former senior AMISOM commander, February 12, 2015.

120 Interview, EU official, Nairobi, December 15, 2012.

121 Interview, UK official, Kampala, August 13, 2012.

122 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 7 October 2015 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, para. 79.

123 Ibid.

124 MONUSCO is the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNAMID is the UN-AU Mission in Darfur, and UNMISS is the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan. UNSOA official, presentation at the Africa Logistics Council, Addis Ababa, June 2015.

mission expanded beyond Mogadishu. As the 2012 review exercise noted, this led “some AMISOM personnel [to conclude] the logistics operation is still playing catch up with the security operations on the ground.”¹²⁵ Even as late as 2015, the strategic review identified several important capability gaps that UNSOA was unable to fill, including provision of water in remote locations, field defense supplies, maintenance services, tentage for tactical deployments, recruitment and administrative support, and mobility. There were also significant delays in constructing the UNSOM regional offices and AMISOM sector hubs outside Mogadishu.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, it is unreasonable to expect UNSOA to overcome such huge organizational differences. And by working together in the field, UNSOA and AMISOM personnel were able to better understand one another and develop tactical innovations to mitigate some very difficult problems.

Finally, UNSOA was never going to be able to meet all of AMISOM’s war-fighting needs. This was obvious from the start, and expectations should have been managed accordingly. Fundamentally, this was because the UNSOA-AMISOM partnership broke one of the cardinal rules of war: commanders should always be in control of their logistics. While generally sympathetic to UNSOA, several senior AMISOM commanders saw their separation from their logistical support as fundamentally problematic and ill-advised, as would most military commanders.

UNSOA’s principal weakness was thus its structural design and the political terms on which it was established. As a top Ugandan commander put it, “I did not like having to rely on outside parties for our logistics because it put our force at risk. The AU should build its own logistics depot.”¹²⁷ Similarly, a former AMISOM force commander suggested that “a fighting force relying on the UN supply chain is a big challenge because they are not compatible.”¹²⁸ Another described UNSOA’s logistics package as a suboptimal push, rather than a

pull, system: UN officials determined what to give AMISOM commanders and when (push), rather than AMISOM commanders being given the freedom to determine what they needed and when (pull).¹²⁹ All of this was true, but UNSOA personnel were not in a position to change the nature of their relationship. Rather, the problem originated from the inability of the AU and the AMISOM troop-contributing countries to provide adequate logistics for their troops in Somalia.

Lessons from UNSOA

Despite massively improving the level of logistical support available to AMISOM, UNSOA struggled to meet the needs of a loose multinational force engaged in sustained maneuver warfare. This was partly because UNSOA was based on UN procedures, mechanisms, and frameworks that were designed for more traditional UN peacekeeping operations in relatively benign environments rather than a war-fighting mission. UNSOA was able to paper over the cracks while AMISOM operated in just one city (Mogadishu). But as the AU forces spread across south-central Somalia, the logistical challenges increased exponentially. This put UNSOA staff in an impossible position and frustrated AMISOM commanders because the UN was unable to deliver the logistical support they required.

It is highly unlikely that the factors that coalesced to produce the multiple partnerships on which AMISOM rested will reoccur. Hence, a relationship exactly like that between UNSOA and AMISOM is unlikely to be replicated. Nevertheless, important debates continue about what support the UN should provide to African regional peace operations, either as part of a transition into UN peacekeeping operations or when that prospect is not on the horizon.¹³⁰ With this in mind, six lessons can be drawn from UNSOA’s experience:

1. It is unwise to separate control over logistical

125 UNSOA, Scoping Exercise, para. 30.

126 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 7 October 2015 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, para. 22.

127 Interview, senior Uganda officer, Kampala, August 14, 2012.

128 Cited in Clarke, UNSOA study, p. 93.

129 Communication, senior AMISOM official, June 20, 2013.

130 See, for example, UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 2 January 2015 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2015/3, January 5, 2015; and UN General Assembly and Security Council, *Report of the Joint African Union-United Nations Review of Available Mechanisms to Finance and Support African Union Peace Support Operations Authorized by the United Nations Security Council*, UN Doc. A/71/410-S/2016/809, September 28, 2016.

functions from the operational commander concerned. This should be avoided in all peace operations that are primarily military, and especially in those involving combat operations.

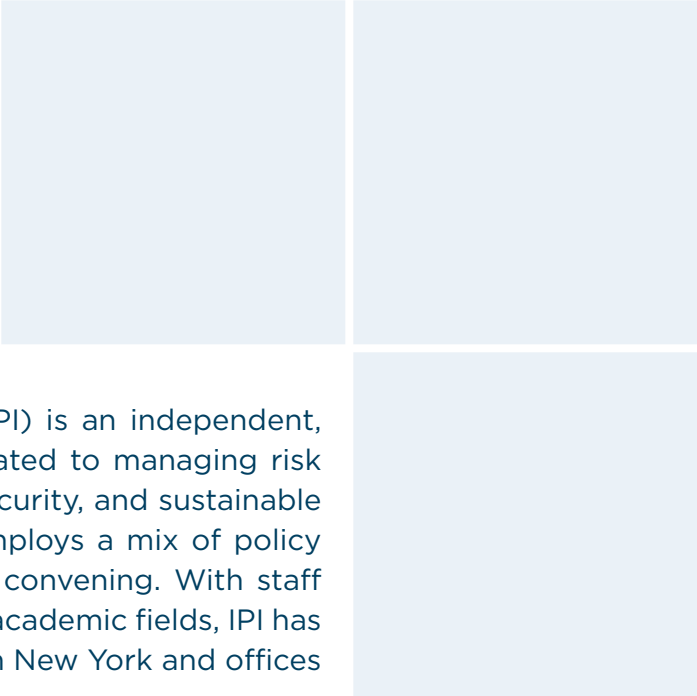
2. The UN's current bureaucratic rules and procedures are unable to quickly and flexibly provide the level of logistical support an African regional organization would need to conduct sustained maneuver warfare with forces dispersed over large distances. If the UN Security Council were to repeat such an arrangement in the future, new mechanisms for supporting enforcement operations—whether by regional or UN forces—will be needed. The AU would therefore be well-advised to develop its own personnel and equipment reimbursement systems, underpinned by its own cost surveys and structured to reflect the types of operations the AU is currently undertaking and expects to undertake in the future.
3. When using the UN's assessed peacekeeping contributions, regional organizations must put in place mechanisms to ensure accountability and a reasonable degree of transparency to guard against problems related to civilian harm.¹³¹ Since 2013, this has meant that regional organizations need to be able to prove that they meet the requirements set out in the human rights due diligence policy (HRDDP) on UN support to non-UN security forces.
4. Better information sharing must occur between all stakeholders, in this case, the UN (at both

headquarters and in the field), the AU, the European Union, and other AMISOM partners. An appropriate balance will need to be found to address concerns about operational security in war-fighting missions. While it should be acknowledged that different organizations have their own processes and procedures that cannot easily be changed to suit others, the UN's HRDDP should set the standard for such inter-organizational assistance.

5. The UN should explore how best its field missions can support the development of host-state national security forces. In this case, building legitimate, inclusive, and professional Somali security forces was a crucial part of AMISOM's exit strategy, but UNSOA was not well-prepared for the task.
6. UNSOA's experience suggests that a better link is needed between the field operations and the planning processes in New York and Addis Ababa, with more emphasis on risk and crisis management. To that end, the UN and regional organizations should reflect on whether future peace enforcement operations should operate under a different set of rules than peacekeeping missions. This could include using support mechanisms designed to use a range of "special measures" that go well beyond the existing six-month UN crisis response and mission start-up measures and provide much greater operational flexibility than is currently available through the "exigency" mechanism.¹³²

¹³¹ A point made by the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations in *The Future of United Nations Peace Operations*, para. 61c; and in *Report of the Joint African Union-United Nations Review of Available Mechanisms to Finance and Support African Union Peace Support Operations Authorized by the United Nations Security Council*.

¹³² See UNSOA, *Scoping Exercise*, Summary.



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777 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017-3521
USA
TEL +1-212-687-4300
FAX +1-212-983-8246

Freyung 3
1010 Vienna
Austria
TEL +43-1-533-8881
FAX +43-1-533-881-11

51-52 Harbour House
Bahrain Financial Harbour
P.O. Box 1467
Manama, Bahrain
TEL +973-1721-1344