

Lessons for “Partnership Peacekeeping” from the African Union Mission in Somalia

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Introduction

Deployed to Mogadishu in March 2007, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) operates through a complicated and extensive system of partnerships. It is a crucial example of what the UN secretary-general has called “partnership peacekeeping”—peacekeeping supported by several international organizations, individual states, private firms, and local authorities.¹

For the African Union (AU), AMISOM is its longest, largest, most expensive, and deadliest peace operation. For the UN, AMISOM remains the organization's most profound experiment not only with providing logistical support in a war zone but also with partnering on the political front. For the European Union, AMISOM has received by far the largest slice of the African Peace Facility's funds for stipends and other forms of support. For Somalia's neighbors, AMISOM was initially a way to avoid deploying their own forces, but since December 2011, all three have contributed forces to the mission. For the United Kingdom and United States, in particular, AMISOM has been a salient example of the challenges of providing security force assistance to a peace enforcement operation. For the Somali authorities, AMISOM has been both a vital source of security and a magnet for international assistance that might have been better focused on building effective indigenous forces.

This complex set of interdependent relationships between multilateral organizations and bilateral partners has been referred to as the “AMISOM model” of partnership peacekeeping (see Figure 1).² AMISOM's specific configuration of forces and mechanisms is unlikely to be repeated, in part because it is so complicated. Nevertheless, AMISOM remains the longest-standing case of a peace enforcement operation built on such international partnerships. The mission has also been involved in an extended project to build effective local security forces to facilitate its own exit. However, better local security forces alone will not enable AMISOM's exit. It requires far more extensive political reconciliation among Somalia's political elites, something outside the mission's control.

If the AU and UN are going to continue deploying missions into such difficult environments, AMISOM's experience offers lessons for how partnership peacekeeping can work better. This report summarizes the main

1 UN Security Council, *Partnering for Peace: Moving towards Partnership Peacekeeping—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. S/2015/229, April 1, 2015.

2 Paul D. Williams, *Fighting for Peace in Somalia: A History and Analysis of the African Union Mission (AMISOM), 2007–2017* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Figure 1. The AMISOM model



operational-level lessons identified from over a decade of research and numerous publications analyzing AMISOM's activities.³ Most of these lessons have not yet been truly learned by the actors and organizations in question.

Lessons from the AMISOM Model

While the operational-level lessons that can be learned from AMISOM are often interconnected, they can be organized around seven themes: force generation, logistics, security sector reform, protection of civilians, strategic communications, stabilization, and exit strategy.

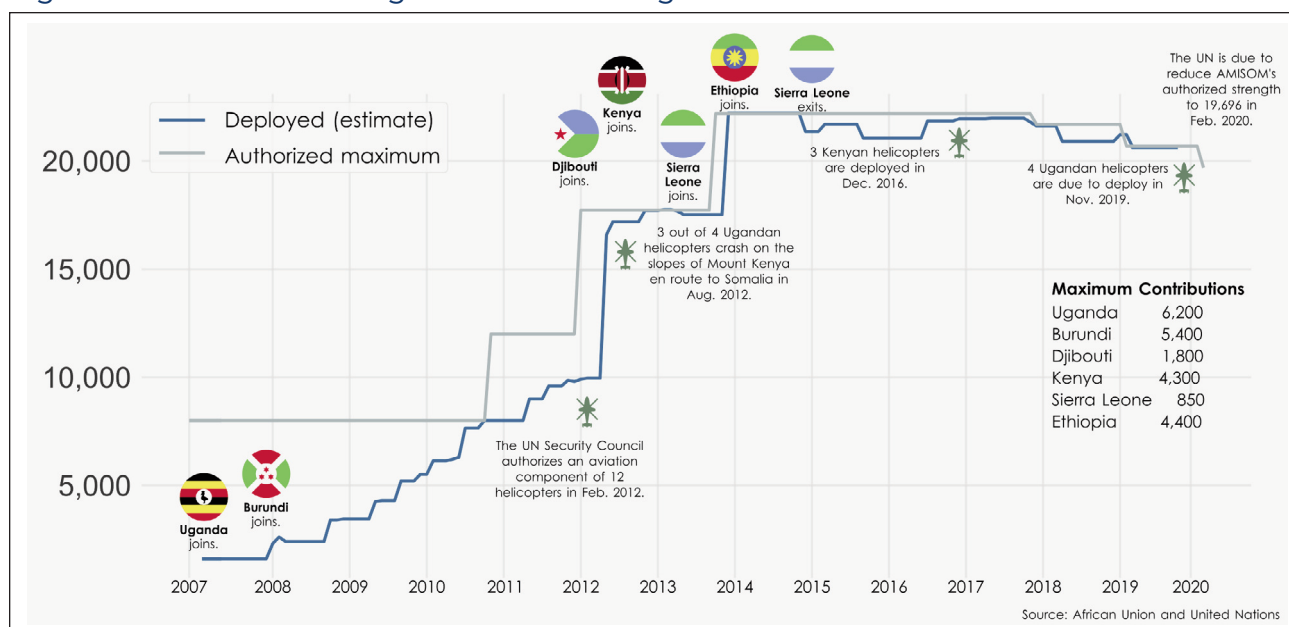
FORCE GENERATION

AMISOM has consistently struggled to generate its authorized level of force, both in terms of personnel and in terms of force enablers and specialist capabilities, including aviation, engineering, medical, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance units. AMISOM made slow progress generating its authorized number of personnel, which climbed from an initial strength of 8,000 to over 22,000 by 2014 (see Figure 2). In the mission's first few years, the difficulties were linked to negative perceptions of its chances of success, the high level of insecurity in Mogadishu, and suspicion that the AU was hiding its true casualty figures.⁴ Since AMISOM's initial deploy-

³ For an assessment of AMISOM's effectiveness, see: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, "Assessing the Effectiveness of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)," 2018. More details related to each basket of lessons can be found in the publications identified in the footnotes.

⁴ For an estimate of AMISOM's fatalities, see Paul D. Williams, "An Update on How Many Fatalities AMISOM Has Suffered," *IPI Global Observatory*, September 10, 2019.

Figure 2. AMISOM’s force generation challenges



ment, six troop-contributing countries have joined the mission, while its small police and civilian components have drawn from over a dozen African states.⁵ What have been the main lessons from AMISOM’s force generation process?

A first lesson is that architects of peace enforcement operations must be prepared to develop clear and positive narratives about the mission’s purposes and how they will be achieved. This should include establishing clear strategic objectives and benchmarks for identifying progress toward them. AMISOM’s failure to identify relevant benchmarks during its first few years fueled the impression that the mission lacked a viable pathway to success, and it therefore struggled to attract contributing countries. In missions like AMISOM that involve multiple partners, it is also important for those partners to have a shared understanding of the mission’s character. In this case, there was sometimes an unhelpful divergence in understanding between the UN Security Council—which saw AMISOM primarily as a military enforcement mission—and the AU Peace and Security Council—which thought of it more as a multidimensional peace

support operation. This divergence became particularly apparent during debates on generating forces for AMISOM’s police and civilian components beginning in 2012.

A second lesson is that an under-resourced mission like AMISOM must find a way to manage international and local expectations. For its entire existence, AMISOM has been under-resourced, operating with large gaps between the force authorized by Security Council resolutions and the force deployed on the ground. For example, the failure to generate critical enablers and multipliers rendered it almost impossible to destroy al-Shabab’s main combat forces. Yet international and local actors often complained that AMISOM had failed to eliminate al-Shabab. One particularly salient gap was aviation: despite the authorization of an aviation component of twelve military helicopters in February 2012, AMISOM did not receive any until December 2016, when Kenya deployed three helicopters (see Figure 2).⁶ Attack helicopters, for instance, would have offered AMISOM a means to rapidly strike al-Shabab (and hence degrade some of its key combat capabilities), provide air cover for troops, escort convoys, rapidly respond to attacks,

5 Paul D. Williams, “Joining AMISOM: Why Six African States Contributed Troops to the African Union Mission in Somalia,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 12, no. 1 (2018).

6 Even these were not truly mission assets since AMISOM’s force commander was not able to task them to conduct operations outside Kenyan areas of operations.

fly rescue and evacuation missions, and airdrop forces.

A third, and related, lesson is that force generation is particularly difficult for organizations—in this case the AU—that do not have a developed body of policies and guidance for managing relationships with contributing countries. This can lead to deficits in transparency and accountability that might dissuade some states from contributing and some organizations from providing certain types of support. Particularly after the UN established its Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) in 2011, these deficits became central to discussions at the UN about how to support AMISOM and how it was using various assets—from intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance equipment to military helicopters.

Fourth, AMISOM's experience suggests that multilateral peace enforcement operations deployed to active war zones are likely to rely on a smaller pool of potential troop-contributing countries than more traditional peacekeeping operations. This pool is likely to consist largely of states willing to tolerate higher levels of casualties than those sustained by more traditional peacekeeping operations, as well as countries from the region and immediate neighborhood. As a consequence, force generation in challenging theaters will probably require additional incentives, such as security force assistance packages and political quid pro quos.⁷

Finally, missions that rely heavily on troops from neighboring states should weigh the benefits and challenges of these contributions and be prepared to mitigate potential negative consequences. In 2005, the UN Security Council and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) had thought it unwise for neighboring, frontline states to deploy to Somalia as peacekeepers. However, the UN Security Council later dropped this concern, and all three of Somalia's neighbors—Djibouti, Kenya, and Ethiopia—joined AMISOM between December 2011 and January 2014. On the positive side,

Somalia's neighbors had vital interests on the line so were willing to commit considerable resources and endure significant setbacks, including large numbers of casualties. At the same time, however, their partisan agendas had negative political and military consequences for AMISOM. Notably, they undermined local support for the mission, intensified conflicts over governance in Somalia's south-central regions, and did not always follow the force commander's orders, which made it difficult to engage in cross-sector operations.⁸ These neighboring states' engagement in local governance—including backing their preferred politicians—and financial issues—including illicit trading—also may incentivize them to stay in Somalia, complicating AMISOM's exit strategy (see below).

LOGISTICS

Until late 2009, AMISOM's logistics were provided through a combination of troop-contributing countries (Burundi and Uganda) and bilateral partners (principally the United Kingdom and United States). From late 2009, the UN Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA) assumed a major role, providing a range of services funded by UN assessed peacekeeping contributions.⁹ UNSOA was transitioned into the UN Support Office for Somalia (UNSOS) in November 2015. Because AMISOM was already deployed, the UN's logisticians had to retrofit their support packages, which became a growing problem, as detailed inventories of AMISOM's equipment, and even of its personnel, were not always available.

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's procedures, mechanisms, and frameworks were designed for more traditional UN peacekeeping operations in relatively benign environments rather than a war-fighting mission. For instance, compared to UN missions, AMISOM's vehicles and equipment suffered more damage and wear and tear, ammunition and medical supplies were used at much faster

⁷ See Marina E. Henke, "Buying Allies: Payment Practices in Multilateral Military Coalition-Building," *International Security* 43, no. 4 (2019).

⁸ Williams, *Fighting for Peace in Somalia*.

⁹ UNSOA provided support in terms of functional supplies (rations, fuel, general supplies); engineering, including construction, power generation, and water supply; medical care; aviation; transportation; strategic movement; equipment repair and maintenance; public information; strategic and tactical communications; and information and technology. Paul D. Williams, "UN Support to Regional Peace Operations: Lessons from UNSOA," International Peace Institute, February 2017; *Fighting for Peace in Somalia*, Chapter 8.

rates, and the tempo of operations meant that supplies were often needed more rapidly. The level of support needed to counter improvised explosive devices—provided through the UN Mine Action Service and private contractors—was also unprecedented in traditional peacekeeping. Finally, the multiple international donors that provided equipment to AMISOM, and later to Somali security forces, often required different spare parts, making the UN’s job that much more difficult.

UNSOA was able to paper over the cracks while AMISOM operated in just one city, Mogadishu. But as AU forces spread across south-central Somalia, the logistical challenges increased exponentially. This left the UN unable to deliver needed logistical support, putting UNSOA staff in an impossible position and frustrating AMISOM commanders.

Seven lessons can be drawn from AMISOM’s experience with logistics. First, from an operational perspective, it is unwise to separate control over logistics from the operational commander concerned. AMISOM’s situation—where an AU force commander runs operations but the UN controls logistics—should be avoided in all peace operations. This is especially true in missions that are primarily military and involve combat operations. The problem in AMISOM’s case was that there were arguably no better options given the AU’s inability to provide its own logistical support. The resulting arrangement put a premium on UN-AMISOM coordination, which did not always work well because AMISOM lacked a coherent chain of command. As a result, support requests came to UNSOA/UNSOS from multiple parts of the AU mission.

Second, in situations of partnership peacekeeping, the partners need to ensure they have appropriately sized and compatible bureaucratic systems for managing the “push” or “pull” approaches to delivering logistical supplies. For most of its existence, AMISOM had limited capacity to absorb international logistical support. In particular, it struggled to hire and retain sufficient numbers of personnel with relevant experience in managing logistics, and even when it did so, the frequent rotation of those personnel caused problems. In addition, AMISOM did not always have clear statements of unit requirements, which meant it had not defined what capabilities it

needed and for what operational needs.

Third, the UN’s administrative and financial rules and procedures could not quickly and flexibly provide the level of logistical support needed to conduct sustained maneuver warfare with forces dispersed over large distances. Despite some pioneering efforts by innovative individuals, UNSOA struggled to strike a healthy balance between being flexible, nimble, and responsive to AMISOM’s needs, on the one hand, and being compliant with relevant UN rules and regulations and accountable, on the other. 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.

Fourth, when using UN assessed peacekeeping contributions, regional organizations must put in place mechanisms to ensure they meet the requirements set out in the UN’s Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) on UN support to non-UN security forces. Conversations between the UN and AMISOM on whether the AU could prove that it meets these requirements have been ongoing since 2013, and it remains a controversial issue today. In January 2019, for example, the head of UNSOM was expelled from the country because the UN mission questioned the role Ethiopian and Somali government forces played in the detention of a former al-Shabab leader and the subsequent deaths of protesters in the South West regional administration. Beyond Somalia, accountability and compliance remain works in progress for the multilateral missions in the Lake Chad Basin and Sahel.

A fifth lesson is the need for better information sharing between all stakeholders, in this case, the UN (at both headquarters and in the field), the AU, the EU, and other AMISOM partners. Sharing information more effectively and in a timelier manner would enable joint planning, though an appropriate balance must be found to ensure information sharing does not compromise operational security in war-fighting missions. Once information is shared, it also needs to be channeled to the right people at the right time and in the right way so that it is interpreted in the way it was meant. This requires not only streamlining communication channels and standardizing some documentation and reporting but also collocating more

personnel from different organizations. While it should be acknowledged that different organizations have their own processes and procedures that cannot easily be changed to suit others, the UN Security Council and AU Peace and Security Council need to align their political approaches to missions where the UN and AU must collaborate in the field. Finally, the UN and its regional partners need a shared reporting framework that clarifies what type of information should be passed on to the UN, when, and how.¹⁰

Sixth, peace operations must be better prepared to support host-state security forces. In AMISOM's case, UNSOS was not well prepared to support the development of Somalia's national security forces. Specifically, the UN was tasked with providing logistical support to just under 11,000 Somali National Army (SNA) troops engaged in joint operations with AMISOM. However, the disorganized state of the SNA meant it was difficult to ascertain which troops comprised the 11,000, let alone to ensure they were compliant with the HRDDP. As a result, UNSOS—along with other international partners—struggled to build legitimate, inclusive, and professional Somali security forces, which is a crucial part of AMISOM's exit strategy (see below).

Finally, the UN's experience with logistical support in Somalia suggests that a stronger link is needed between field operations and planning processes in New York and Addis Ababa, with more emphasis on operational flexibility and risk and crisis management. To that end, the UN and regional organizations should develop a set of rules, procedures, and frameworks for supporting peace enforcement operations that is distinct from more traditional peacekeeping missions. A significant step in that direction was taken as part of the UN's recent management reforms, which have delegated more authority to entities such as UNSOS to take decisions on operational requirements that were previously the prerogative of headquarters.

Overall, UNSOA's transition into UNSOS in late 2015 helped ease several of the problems identified above. Most notably, UNSOS was tasked with

servicing only clients operating in Somalia and developed a novel set of tripartite memoranda of understanding to facilitate better coordination between the UN, the AU, and AMISOM's troop-contributing countries. But it did not resolve the fundamental challenges of the relationship between operational command and logistical support, nor could it solve all the problems of overstretch and timely delivery and ensure that AMISOM's equipment was fully maintained (to at least 75 percent serviceability).

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

Part of AMISOM's mandate is to support Somalia's security forces, which had dissolved following the collapse of the central government in early 1991. A transitional authority was established in the early 2000s but did not set foot in Mogadishu until December 2006—on the back of Ethiopian forces—and the Somali National Army (SNA) was not formally reconstituted until late 2008, as part of the Djibouti peace agreement.¹¹ From that point on, AMISOM had to grapple with two fundamental questions: how to fight together with the SNA to degrade their common enemy, and how to develop “good enough” indigenous armed forces to allow the AU mission to withdraw. In retrospect, AMISOM's experience with security sector reform can be summarized as an attempt to provide a wide range of technical support in a political context characterized by bickering Somali elites that was not conducive to building “national” security forces.

In this context, AMISOM was far from ideally placed to build Somalia's national security forces, not least because its troops were from multiple countries and not explicitly prepared to act as trainers and mentors. Ideally, one major partner would have led the development of Somali forces. As the two main providers of security assistance, it would have made the most sense for either the United States or Turkey to train the Somali army according to NATO standards. But because such partners were unwilling to commit to this agenda or operate in sufficient numbers in Mogadishu's difficult conditions, AMISOM was the only plausible option for training Somali forces inside

¹⁰ As called for in UN Security Council Resolution 2378 (September 20, 2017), para. 20.

¹¹ Williams, *Fighting for Peace in Somalia*, Chapter 9; “What Went Wrong with the Somali National Army?” *War on the Rocks*, May 20, 2019; “Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a Failure, 2008–2018,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, forthcoming (2019).

Somalia.

What lessons stand out from this support? First, external actors must get local political elites to take certain decisions as soon as possible to lay the foundation for security sector reform. Evidence from the last decade suggests that Somali national politics have been the biggest barrier to reforming the country’s security sector. Since 2007, there has not been elite consensus on a shared vision for the national security architecture, how to finance it, and how decisions will be taken within it. The London Security Pact agreed to in May 2017 and the National Security Council it envisaged remain the best chance to achieve such a consensus. Before that, Somali elites had refused to forge the consensus necessary to take difficult political decisions about power sharing between the center and the regions, clan integration, and financing. External actors took different positions on how they could best encourage implementation of the London Security Pact. For example, while the United States temporarily suspended most of its security force assistance to Somalia from late 2017 due to concerns about corruption, Turkey ramped up its assistance program without imposing similar conditions.

The second, and related, lesson is that international and local actors must avoid having overly optimistic expectations about the time it takes to make progress on security sector reform when the conditions for success are absent but international politics necessitate engagement. Since late 2011, for example, AMISOM’s concept of operations (including its authorized strength) was based on the flawed assumption that a force of about 17,000 Somali soldiers would effectively support AU peacekeepers—a force that has still not materialized. Such unrealistic assumptions continue to affect the stability of the political coalition supporting AMISOM, efforts to secure sustainable financing, and the prospects for a successful exit strategy. Indeed, AMISOM’s partial drawdown of troops beginning in December 2017 has been more an attempt to pressure the Somali authorities to get their house in order than a reflection of the mission meeting its stated benchmarks for withdrawal.

Third, at the operational level, peacekeepers and

local forces fighting together require not only shared strategic objectives but also effective communication, coordination, and, crucially, mutual trust. Ultimately, trust must be earned, but it is more likely to develop where the different armed forces can regularly liaise within one another and collocate whenever possible. In AMISOM’s case, security partners have not always had sufficient liaison channels and are rarely sufficiently collocated to consistently conduct truly joint operations. As one Somali government official put it in February 2016, “What signal does it send to the locals when they see the SNA and AMISOM still not working very closely together and using two separate bases? It signals that AMISOM are really like an occupying force not working with the SNA.”¹² While AMISOM and the SNA have conducted joint operations in Lower Shabelle since mid-2019, AMISOM troops elsewhere have departed forward operating bases as part of the transition without being replaced by an equivalent Somali force.

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Unlike almost all UN peacekeeping operations, AMISOM was not given an explicit protection of civilians mandate, though it was tasked with protecting certain Somali and international VIPs. In recent years, however, various statements from the UN Security Council and AU Peace and Security Council have urged AMISOM to do what it can to track and reduce civilian harm, including from its own activities.

What lessons can be drawn from AMISOM’s ambiguous experiences with the protection of civilians? First, a small, under-resourced force that is unable to protect itself is hardly in a position to proactively protect civilians. AMISOM has arguably been in this position for its entire existence. The best that could be hoped for under such circumstances is that the force conducts its operations in line with international humanitarian law to avoid unnecessarily harming civilians. However, AMISOM has not even always cleared this low bar.

Second, the fact that AMISOM lacked an explicit mandate to protect civilians did not stop many Somali civilians from expecting AU peacekeepers

¹² Cited in Williams, *Fighting for Peace in Somalia*, p. 258.

to protect them, not just to avoid harming them. Enforcement operations like AMISOM—even when they lack an explicit protection of civilians mandate—must always work hard to minimize civilian harm in their area of operations. In AMISOM's case, since 2011, international partners have pushed for the establishment of a civilian casualty tracking cell, but AMISOM's senior leadership resisted. As a result, despite being authorized by the UN Security Council in 2012, the cell did not become operational until late 2015, and even then comprised just a single individual. It is also only very recently that AMISOM instituted a victim compensation fund.¹³ Not paying sufficient attention to mitigating harm to civilians inevitably erodes the mission's legitimacy, pushes victims and their families to aid the mission's opponents, and ultimately undermines the mission's effectiveness. It also makes it difficult for the UN to prove compliance with its HRDDP. This is also a problem in several peacekeeping theaters beyond Somalia.

A third lesson is that it is important to be clear about what peacekeepers are being asked to do to protect civilians, especially when they are charged with stabilization or even counterterrorism tasks. Of particular importance is clarity about whether their obligations end with complying with international humanitarian law, or if they are also expected to proactively reduce threats to civilian populations. This is part of a wider debate about when and how peacekeepers should use military force beyond self-defense. AMISOM personnel have been given mixed messages on this issue in their mandates and rules of engagement as well as in political statements from both the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council. To take just one example, although AMISOM's mandate has never officially included proactive protection of civilians, several UN Security Council resolutions have called for the mission to do more in this area without specifying what this might entail or providing additional resources and capabilities.

A fourth lesson is that protection of civilians mandates require the investment of considerable resources and specialized capabilities, especially to be compatible with war-fighting efforts. To be

given even a chance of success, these capabilities must be built into the mission's force requirements and concept of operations documents and related budgets. Specifically, protection of civilians mandates require missions to have a multidimensional structure with sufficiently robust military, police, and civilian components, a mission-specific pre-deployment training regime, appropriate means of mobility and coercive capacity, and capabilities to gather, process, and act upon relevant intelligence and information. It is particularly important not to neglect analytical capabilities, because the mission will only be able to mitigate threats to civilian populations if it has an accurate understanding of what those threats are and where they are most likely to occur. In AMISOM's case, the mission lacked almost all these things.

Fifth, despite these problems, AMISOM's experience shows the value of remedial action—though this is not the same as addressing the whole spectrum of challenges to protecting civilians. Beginning in 2009, the AU leadership, AMISOM, and its partners took steps to address some of the challenges facing the mission in its efforts to protect civilians. New approaches to strategic communications (in 2010) and indirect fire (in 2011) in particular enhanced AMISOM's ability to undercut al-Shabab's propaganda and guarded against an important cause of civilian harm. In contrast, they did not adequately address victim compensation or sufficiently bolster the mission's capabilities to analyze threats to civilians. Remedial action thus had limits, and it did not prevent AMISOM personnel from killing Somali civilians and engaging in sexual exploitation and abuse. AMISOM has undertaken another round of remedial efforts since late 2015. For example, it established a Civilian Casualty Tracking, Analysis and Response Cell, and over the last three years it has developed new procedures for its boards of inquiry into security incidents, including making compensation payments to civilian victims of AMISOM.

A sixth lesson is that while protection of civilians is important during war-fighting operations for moral, legal, political, and strategic reasons, it

¹³ For background, see: Natasja Rupesinghe, "The Civilian Casualty Tracking Analysis and Response Cell in the African Union Mission in Somalia," Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, January 2019.

becomes even more salient as operations shift toward broader stabilization tasks (see below). In AMISOM’s case, stabilization operations occurred after the mission forced al-Shabab to withdraw most of its fighters from Mogadishu in August 2011. A series of expansion operations between 2012 and 2015 recovered several dozen settlements from al-Shabab, extending the mission’s area of operations across much of south-central Somalia. Protecting civilians was crucial for AMISOM’s stabilization agenda, which centered on defending Somali civilians from al-Shabab using violence to enforce civilian compliance with their demands. In such environments, ensuring peacekeepers comply with international humanitarian law is not enough. More proactive measures need to be taken to keep civilians from harm, especially retribution by al-Shabab against communities that have cooperated with AMISOM and the SNA.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

AMISOM was established without an appropriate strategic communications capability. As part of the broader AU-UN partnership, in 2009, the UN paid several private firms to establish AMISOM’s Information Support Team (IST). It was these firms, in tandem with the mission and its partners, that developed and implemented AMISOM’s strategic communications strategy.¹⁴ For several years, the IST’s work helped shift the tide against al-Shabab’s dominant narrative. AMISOM’s strategic communications needed to evolve, however, as the nature of the threat from al-Shabab changed, the mission brought on more troop contributors, the new federal government started to undertake its own embryonic strategic communications, and the UN expanded its field presence in Somalia.

The most basic lesson is that deploying a peace operation without the capabilities to wage an effective strategic communications campaign is a major error. To ensure this is not repeated, the AU needs a standing strategic communications mechanism equipped to develop policies and plans, ensure coherence among them, and support communications in all its peace operations. The

precise nature of the capabilities should be in accordance with the needs on the ground. To date, the AU continues to require external assistance in this area.

A second lesson is that a clear vision and sound policy is needed to guide strategic communications. Mission leaders should clearly articulate the desired effect of communications on particular audiences and how this supports the mission’s goals. Moreover, it is not enough to devise a coherent strategic communications policy; it must be implemented by the mission’s contributing countries, which must also build trust and remain credible with local populations. Here, the issue of casualties (both civilians harmed by AMISOM and the mission’s own casualties) has been key. While the AU has tried to emphasize that it is committed to reducing civilian harm, the contributing countries have not always prioritized this issue. There have also been differences in the reporting of AMISOM’s own casualties, with contributing countries sometimes releasing partial or contradictory information.¹⁵ It was therefore unsurprising that the IST sometimes struggled to build trust both with some of the mission’s contingents and with Somalis.

A third lesson is that effective strategic communications require an expeditionary mindset and a willingness to take the risks associated with securing and supporting media access under difficult and insecure circumstances. In AMISOM’s case, strategic communications were covered by the IST, which consisted of civilian personnel hired from the private sector who were willing to operate on or near the military frontlines, rather than a standard UN public information unit. The IST was initially designed to ensure a strategically focused and decentralized approach to strategic communications. While this approach was curtailed in 2013 when the UN and AU adopted a new contractual arrangement, the IST’s flexibility and willingness to take risks was crucial to operating in an insecure and fluid environment like Somalia.

Finally, future IST-like mechanisms probably need to be comprised predominantly of local staff

14 Paul D. Williams, “Strategic Communications for Peace Operations: The African Union’s Information War Against al-Shabaab,” *Stability* 7, no. 1 (2018), p. 3; *Fighting for Peace in Somalia*, Chapter 11.

15 See, for example, Paul D. Williams, “The Battle at El Adde: The Kenya Defence Forces, al-Shabaab, and Unanswered Questions,” International Peace Institute, July 2016.

to ensure they have expertise in local conflict dynamics. The challenge facing AMISOM early on was the absence of a Somali commercial capability to manage an effort of the scope, scale, and complexity of the IST. The situation improved over time, and the IST eventually maintained over 50 percent local staff. But it remained difficult to hire and retain the best people, and some AMISOM personnel initially mistrusted Somalis, which often raised practical obstacles to running an effective campaign, such as the inability to collocate local employees within AMISOM bases. Hiring of local communications staff will remain a sensitive political balancing act in enforcement operations where most foreigners lack detailed local knowledge of conflict dynamics but security forces remain wary of close cooperation with local civilians.

STABILIZATION

By late 2011, AMISOM had expelled the majority of al-Shabab's forces from Mogadishu and its environs, and over the next six months it integrated two new troop-contributing countries: Djibouti and Kenya. In April 2013, a battalion from Sierra Leone joined the Kenyan forces in Jubaland, and in January 2014, about 4,000 Ethiopian troops also joined the mission as part of what was supposed to be a temporary "surge" capacity. Since 2012, therefore, AMISOM's activities have revolved around recovering and stabilizing settlements across south-central Somalia held by al-Shabab.¹⁶

What lessons can be identified from AMISOM's ongoing attempts to stabilize south-central Somalia? A first, and recurring, lesson is that a mission must be appropriately configured and resourced to fulfill its mandated tasks. A mission as military-heavy as AMISOM cannot be expected to deliver stabilization alone, especially when it is configured to conduct offensive operations and counterterrorism. Stabilization requires effective police and civilian capabilities, which neither AMISOM nor the Somali authorities possess. Until recently, AMISOM had no police or civilians permanently based outside Mogadishu, while Somali authorities lacked an effective "holding" force and civilian administrators to deliver a peace

dividend to people in these settlements.

A second lesson is that the political and military elements of a stabilization strategy need to be in sync. Successful stabilization requires military action that supports a viable political strategy. This is difficult to achieve if the military and political dimensions of stabilization are separated from one another and carried out by different, uncoordinated actors. In AMISOM's case, AU troops recovered dozens of settlements from al-Shabab in 2014 and 2015, but there was no effective Somali holding force or interim governance apparatus to stabilize them. Both the military and political pieces are needed: it is an inherently political task to develop an effective local security sector, and nonviolent political processes require a degree of military order.

A third lesson is that extending state authority is not synonymous with peacebuilding, at least in the short term. A peace operation mandated to extend state authority in a context where the government is not widely accepted as legitimate will not always be viewed as an impartial force. In such circumstances, extending state authority is likely to generate conflict. Success will therefore depend on the mission's ability to support effective reconciliation and peacebuilding processes with aggrieved actors at the same time as extending state authority. Ongoing conflict over control of Somalia's new federal member states remains a case in point wherein AMISOM personnel have been drawn into taking sides in sometimes acrimonious and even violent conflicts.

Fourth, AMISOM's experience suggests that territorial expansion is less important than degrading the capabilities of spoilers. Specifically, stabilization efforts focused on expanding territory and denying the opposition territorial control are unlikely to work where opponents adopt asymmetric tactics. Extending a mission's responsibilities over new territory without degrading the opponent's combat capabilities risks overextending mission forces and leaving supply routes increasingly vulnerable. The opponent may simply adapt to losing territory by becoming more mobile and flexible, as was the case with al-Shabab. Mission

¹⁶ Walter Lotze and Paul D. Williams, "The Surge to Stabilize: Lessons for the UN from the AU's Experience in Somalia," International Peace Institute, May 2016; Williams, *Fighting for Peace in Somalia*, Chapter 12.

planning and resource allocation should therefore focus on separating opponents from the local population and degrading their combat capabilities rather than traditional objectives of territorial control. Since no single actor can accomplish the stabilization agenda alone, it is crucial that relevant partners strategically coordinate and recognize that this is principally a political rather than a technical task.

Fifth, implementing complex stabilization agendas involving numerous partners in the face of concerted hostility from local actors requires having shared planning assumptions, threat analyses, and operational responses. Moreover, where missions engage in war-fighting activities, the headquarters of multinational forces are unlikely to exercise real control over troop-contributing countries. Instead, the principal function of the force headquarters will probably be limited to ensuring unified political leadership and strategic coordination among the troop-contributing countries.

A sixth lesson is that failure to coordinate can have negative political and military effects. Politically, the inability of AMISOM’s force headquarters to ensure that all troop-contributing countries followed the mission’s mandate led many Somalis to view the mission as providing cover for rogue contributors, especially Ethiopia and Kenya. In military terms, when a mission loses local support, its personnel, particularly those in exposed forward operating bases, become especially vulnerable to attack. This was apparent in several of the large-scale al-Shabab attacks on AMISOM bases between 2015 and 2017.¹⁷ Moreover, lack of coordination between some of AMISOM’s troop-contributing countries prevented the execution of cross-sector operations, which enabled al-Shabab fighters to find sanctuary in the areas between AMISOM’s sectors.

It also became apparent during AMISOM’s operations that implementing complex stabilization agendas is impossible without the support of local populations. Locals are best placed to identify insurgents and inform a peace operation of militants’ movements and routines. Peacekeepers who do not develop positive relationships with

local populations risk, at best, operating without optimal information and, at worst, driving locals to collaborate with the insurgents. AMISOM’s model of running small (often company-sized) forward operating bases without regular active patrolling or substantive engagement with the local communities has not always forged positive ties with local populations. Nor has its decision to withdraw from some settlements shortly after recovering them from al-Shabab but before an alternative security force could take over. As discussed above, effective and trusted public communications also play a significant role in building local trust.

The penultimate lesson is that successful stabilization requires capable and legitimate local security forces. In large parts of Somalia, security had long been provided by a range of informal actors, usually clan-based and self-defense militias, and only rarely by regional or (especially) federal security forces. This was a problem in both the military and policing sectors. For too long, AMISOM’s international partners put too little emphasis on building effective Somali national security forces, making it harder for the mission to achieve stabilization goals. Sometimes this was because donors were reluctant to invest in this area given the high level of corruption and lack of short-term positive results.

Finally, there is a mismatch between the UN’s organizational frameworks and bureaucratic culture for delivering logistical support and the needs of a mission engaged in sustained maneuver warfare. It is never ideal to separate military commanders from their logistical support, and while UNSOA improved AMISOM’s logistical capabilities, it was always apparent that the UN’s organizational culture, technical frameworks, and procurement rules would be insufficient to meet all of AMISOM’s needs. This put UNSOA personnel in an impossible situation. When AMISOM was operating in just part of one city (until early 2012), UNSOA could just about cope. But when AMISOM’s area of operations was extended across the whole of south-central Somalia, UNSOA (and later UNSOS) was exposed as chronically under-resourced and not suited to operating in such an insecure environment. If peace operations are

¹⁷ See, for example, Williams, “The Battle at El Adde.”

given war-fighting mandates, their personnel should expect appropriate logistical support. As noted above, the recent UN management reforms are a useful step toward giving such UN mechanisms greater operational flexibility.

EXIT STRATEGY

The AU originally intended AMISOM to stay in Somalia for just six months before handing over to a UN peacekeeping operation. Because that did not happen, AMISOM had to develop alternative ways of thinking about its exit strategy. A strategy is not the same as a plan. Plans tend to fall apart because of unpredicted events, whereas strategies are about creating power and leverage over relevant actors and adapting to unforeseen circumstances.¹⁸ AMISOM could exit at any time under a range of plausible scenarios.¹⁹ But for the mission's exit to be effective, peacekeepers need to rely on other actors and processes outside of their control. Hence, the key lesson for AMISOM and the wider universe of contemporary peace operations is that an exit strategy should be conceptualized as a political process aimed at mitigating inevitable dilemmas. What follows are summaries of AMISOM's seven most serious dilemmas.

The pace of withdrawal: Peace operations face a dilemma between leaving too early and empowering local spoilers or staying too long and becoming a recruiting tool for those spoilers. If AMISOM adopts a predetermined and inflexible timetable for its exit that Somali authorities are unlikely to be able to meet, it would encourage al-Shabab to wait out the AU forces. This would risk an irresponsible exit by AMISOM before the SNA is ready to take over. On the other hand, the longer AMISOM remains, the more it risks outliving its shelf-life, losing Somali popular support, and playing into al-Shabab's recruitment strategy.

Strategic communications: Peace operations face the challenge of how to depart without local spoilers portraying their exit as a defeat or retreat. A successful exit is only possible because AMISOM achieved its principal strategic objective of protecting two transitional and two federal governments in Somalia, as well as facilitating the creation of Somalia's new federal member states between

2013 and 2016. These achievements came at considerable cost. But AMISOM's transition and eventual withdrawal will give al-Shabab an opportunity to portray it in more negative terms, as it has been doing with regard to AMISOM's tactical withdrawals from various settlements for the last few years.

Financing: Peace operations are often under political pressure to reduce their financial costs, including by reducing personnel numbers or exiting entirely. AMISOM's principal donors already have considerable sunk costs from their investments in stabilizing Somalia. However, fatigue and alternative priorities have meant that since January 2016 donors have not provided AMISOM with the full allowances that were promised to its personnel. The financial shortfalls have reduced morale among AMISOM personnel and given the impression that financial cuts will outpace the improvement of conditions on the ground. The lesson for contemporary peace operations is to avoid letting economic issues dictate political objectives.

Divisive local politics: Peace operations cannot implement successful exit strategies if the most powerful local political actors have not reconciled sufficiently to give peace a chance. In Somalia, AMISOM and its international partners failed to implement Somalia's new national security architecture—created in 2017 by the London Security Pact—because the federal government and regional administrations have argued over its details and how it should be implemented. But if AMISOM pushes to implement the terms of the pact, it risks further alienating some regional administrations, without which it will be impossible to build an effective national security sector. Moreover, time spent building political consensus would further delay any coordinated offensive campaigns that might put al-Shabab on its back foot.

Local security sector reform: Peace operations in weak states cannot expect to successfully exit until there are effective local security forces. In Somalia, more than a decade of security force assistance has failed to deliver a professional, effective, sustain-

¹⁸ Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁹ See Paul D. Williams with Abdirashid Hashi, "Exit Strategy Challenges for the AU Mission in Somalia," Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, February 2016.

able, or legitimate SNA. Moreover, operational readiness assessments completed for the army, police, and regional forces from 2017 to 2019 revealed that this project remains far from completion. AMISOM’s partners thus face a dilemma between continuing to wait for an effective SNA to materialize and more directly supporting existing regional, clan-based militias, which would empower clan leaders rather than the federal government and likely result in increased human rights violations.

Transfer of security responsibilities: Peace operations also face difficult choices over where, when, and how to transfer security responsibilities to local forces. For AMISOM, this has revolved around how to reconfigure its forces and which of its forward operating bases to dismantle or transfer to the SNA. However, low levels of trust between AMISOM and the SNA, and the latter’s limited capabilities, have meant that this process has not always gone smoothly across all of AMISOM’s sectors. It has also meant effectively abandoning some recovered settlements, which has undermined the trust of local populations and in some cases facilitated al-Shabab’s return. Another practical problem has been how—and with what—to replace the mission’s relatively large number of battle tanks, most of which have not been used offensively in recent years but are expensive to maintain due to the high reimbursement cost for the contributing countries.

Corrupt local partners: Peace operations are not well equipped to stem elite corruption, but ignoring corruption has negative consequences. Somali elites have been perceived as the world’s most corrupt for over a decade.²⁰ This corruption has undermined attempts to build effective local security forces. AMISOM’s dilemma is that it must try to combat corruption while supporting Somali politicians and security officials. This has been a particularly acute problem in the murky political economy of Mogadishu, where al-Shabab operates a mafia-style protection racket with local businesses.²¹

AMISOM has no quick or simple exit strategy. A successful exit will require genuine agreement and

reconciliation between the federal government and the regional administrations on how to implement the new national security architecture. It will also require stamping out corruption in Somali security forces, taking the fight to al-Shabab, and, in all likelihood, negotiating a peace settlement with them to end the war.

Conclusion

Although the AMISOM model of partnership peacekeeping is unique, it holds important lessons for other contemporary and future peace operations, especially those with stabilization or enforcement mandates. This report has focused on lessons from AMISOM’s main operational challenges related to force generation, logistics, security sector reform, protection of civilians, strategic communications, stabilization, and exit strategy.

Many of the lessons identified here have not been truly learned, internalized, and acted upon by the actors and organizations in question. Hence, a final point to make is the importance of providing peace operations and their architects with the tools to enable organizational learning. In AMISOM’s case, the mission has suffered from a fragmented and ad hoc approach to institutional learning. For instance, the mission’s first major attempts to reflect on lessons learned were a series of conferences funded and organized by the UK that did not start until 2012. Even then, AMISOM struggled to get the most important decision makers to attend and lacked any mechanism to act upon and implement the findings. Similar problems plagued the lessons-learned conference organized for the mission’s ten-year anniversary.²²

Instead of such ad hoc initiatives, all organizations that authorize and conduct peace operations should develop institutional capabilities for monitoring and evaluating their missions. These should focus not only on regularly assessing particular missions but also on developing the institutional memory necessary to implement organizational learning across different operations and, ideally, across different organizations.

20 Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index,” 1995–2018, available at www.transparency.org/research/cpi/overview.

21 Fritz Schaap and Christian Werner, “The Business of Fear in Boomtown Mogadishu,” *Der Spiegel Online*, October 27, 2017.

22 See AU Commission Peace Operations Support Division, “Report on the Ten-Year AMISOM Lessons Learned Conference,” March 2017.

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