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ATMIS Transition and Post-ATMIS Security Arrangements in Somalia

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STIMSON

On August 22, 2024, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a workshop to discuss the ongoing transition of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and the post-ATMIS security arrangements in Somalia. This discussion was part of a series of workshops that aims to support the sustained engagement of UN member states on how to make UN peace operations mandates more realistic, effective, and achievable. This meeting note was drafted collaboratively by IPI, the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report. It summarizes the main points raised in the discussion under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution and does not necessarily represent the views of all participants. The project is funded with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Introduction

In April 2022, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was reconfigured as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS).¹ The mandate of ATMIS includes degrading al-Shabaab; providing security to population centers and securing the main supply routes; developing the capacity of the Somali Security Forces (SSF) to enable them to take over security responsibilities by the end of the transition period; supporting the peace and reconciliation efforts of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS); and assisting in developing the capacity of the security and justice sector and other institutions of the FGS and Federal Member States. The mandate was structured around a four-phase transition and gradual handover of security responsibilities to the SSF by December 2024.

Considering Somalia's persistent security challenges, the FGS requested a follow-on mission to replace ATMIS. In August, the AU Peace and Security Council endorsed the establishment of a new AU-led and UN-authorized mission, the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), and transmitted the concept of operations for the mission to the UN Security Council.² On August 15th, when extending the authorization of ATMIS until December 31, 2024, the Security Council requested the UN secretary-general, jointly with the AU Commission chairperson and in consultation with Somalia and other partners, to report on the overall mission design by November 15th. It asked for the report to include, among other things, a proposed mission structure, including options for UN support; a transition plan for UNSOS and ATMIS to the successor mission; and a comprehensive exit strategy for the new mission.³

Against the backdrop of these developments, the International Peace Institute (IPI), Stimson Center, and Security Council Report co-hosted a roundtable on August 22, 2024, to discuss the ongoing transition of ATMIS and the post-ATMIS security arrangements in Somalia. Participants unpacked salient policy considerations surrounding the post-ATMIS mission and the role the UN is expected to play in supporting the transition of ATMIS to the successor mission. As ATMIS draws down in December 2024 and the successor mission's mandate is anticipated to begin in January 2025, participants agreed that it remains critical to avoid a security vacuum and build on the progress

1 UN Security Council Resolution 2628 (March 31, 2022), UN Doc. S/RES/2628.

2 AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué, 1225th Session, August 1, 2024.

3 UN Security Council Resolution 2748 (August 15, 2024), UN Doc. S/RES/2748.

achieved in recent years. They further highlighted the importance of ensuring that the transition reflects the conditions on the ground and of promptly reaching consensus on funding modalities for the successor mission.

The ATMIS Transition

Al-Shabaab continues to pose a significant threat to international peace and security, with participants particularly highlighting the growing insecurity of maritime routes in the Red Sea. Somalia is also grappling with the effects of climate change, further exacerbating insecurity. Given the complexity of these threats, participants emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to peace support in Somalia that includes fostering political dialogue and reconciliation, promoting social cohesion and community resilience, and implementing stabilization measures to address the root causes of conflict.

Since 2022, ATMIS has adapted to the evolving political and security landscape in Somalia. As one participant noted, ATMIS “evolved without a template” due to the fluid dynamics on the ground. While the mission has a broad mandate including supporting state-building and political processes, there is a gap between aspirations for ATMIS and the realities on the ground. As part of its transition, ATMIS has modified its posture, with the SSF taking a lead in offensive operations. However, force generation in the SSF has been a challenge, leading to delays in the drawdown of ATMIS. There was consensus among participants that a security vacuum must be avoided during the transition. Although the withdrawal of AU troops has not yet resulted in a major security reversal, there has been a resurgence of al-Shabaab attacks.

Participants further identified lessons from the transition from AMISOM to ATMIS, including the importance of realistic mandates supported by adequate resources and the need for force agility and expanded capabilities. In addition, participants noted the need to align drawdown plans with security conditions on the ground and to maintain the mission’s momentum throughout its deployment. Other lessons included the need to link the work of peace support operations with broader political strategies, including by cultivating closer collaboration with the host state and striving to

build long-term, sustainable security in the host country. Given the long-standing participation of neighboring countries as troop contributors to AMISOM and ATMIS, some participants underscored the need for clarity on the role of these countries in the new mission.

These and other lessons are expected to be captured in a report on lessons learned and best practices from AMISOM and ATMIS, which the AU Peace and Security Council has requested to be completed by December 2024. One participant noted the benefit of an earlier release of the report so that the findings can feed into the ongoing discussion on the transition of ATMIS and the new mission’s design and funding modalities.

Planning for the Post-ATMIS Peace Operation in Somalia

Participants also discussed planning for the post-ATMIS mission, including questions around force generation for the SSF and the capabilities gap, predictable and sustainable funding for the new mission, coordination and partnerships, and the role of the UN in providing ongoing support.

Force Generation and Capabilities Gaps

Participants noted that a well-defined force generation process for the SSF is essential for ensuring a smooth and effective transition to the follow-on mission. This has been a major obstacle during the ongoing drawdown of ATMIS and must be prioritized as planning for the new mission commences. Without a clear plan, the transition could be disrupted by the inadequate preparation of national forces tasked with assuming the mission’s security responsibilities.

The other challenge participants raised was the capabilities gap. ATMIS’s ability to effectively carry out its mandate has been hampered by lack of capabilities, particularly air assets for reaching remote areas. To prevent such gaps, the new mission needs to be well-equipped with capabilities that align with the nature of the mission and the number of operating bases. While the new mission will take over responsibility for approximately

twenty-three forward operating bases (FOBs), compared to ATMIS's seventy-four, it will still need to focus on offensive operations and the protection of critical infrastructure and population centers. This will require robust capabilities and logistical support from the UN. Some participants also expressed concerns about the new mission's air capabilities, noting that with fewer FOBs, the demand for logistical support will increase as each FOB has to cover a larger area.

Several participants cautioned that the gains achieved in Somalia's stabilization efforts could be reversed if the transition is not approached carefully. They stressed the importance of acknowledging the persistent threat posed by al-Shabaab and the significant capacity building and resources the SSF will require to effectively combat this threat with more proactive measures. Some participants highlighted the need for greater clarity regarding the planned transition to the new mission. They specifically inquired as to whether the transition would involve a complete withdrawal of existing troops or the re-hatting of forces. Additionally, they emphasized that the replacement of troops in forward operating bases has to be done gradually and to be supported by rear operating bases to provide fallback positions.

Predictable and Sustainable Funding

Citing lessons from the transition from AMISOM to ATMIS, many participants underlined the need to agree on funding modalities before the transition to the new mission. ATMIS has already incurred a deficit of \$150 million since the beginning of its mandate in April 2022 due to reduced financial contributions from multilateral and bilateral donors.⁴ Participants suggested that planning and budget preparation for the new mission need to take into account these existing financial gaps to ensure a funding shortfall does not undermine its ability to meet its objectives. Participants also noted that adequate and predictable funding is

needed both for the new mission itself and for ongoing capacity building for the SSF.

To avoid the risk of having an unfinanced mission at the end of the year, stakeholders in New York, Addis Ababa, and Mogadishu need to take prompt action to reach consensus on funding modalities. Participants called for creativity and flexibility, including options for collective burden sharing and mobilizing funding beyond the current donors to a broader coalition of partners.

Some participants underscored the need to take a "prudent approach" to financing, including by exploring funding modalities beyond those outlined in Security Council Resolution 2719, which allows AU missions to access UN assessed contributions on a case-by-case basis.⁵ Others suggested that discussions on the financing of the successor mission in Somalia should be separated from discussions on the operationalization of Resolution 2719, especially given that agreement on funding is needed by December 2024. If discussions become too entangled with the operationalization of Resolution 2719, there is a higher risk of delaying the financing of the successor mission, which could create a security vacuum. While financing under Resolution 2719 could be one option for consideration, some participants noted the need to consider all options, including tapping into nontraditional donors.

Other participants emphasized the need to look at the broader elements of Resolution 2719, including the workstreams agreed upon by the AU-UN task team developing the joint roadmap for the operationalization of the resolution.⁶ These workstreams include joint planning, decision making, and reporting; mission support; financing and budgeting; and human rights compliance and the protection of civilians. Considering that the AU Peace and Security Council has mandated the mission and adopted its concept of operations, some participants further noted that it is now critical to agree on working modalities between the AU and UN.

4 AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué, 1275th Session, April 12, 2022.

5 UN Security Council Resolution 2719, adopted in December 2023, allows AU-led peace support operations authorized by the Security Council to receive up to 75 percent of their annual budget from UN assessed contributions on a case-by-case basis.

6 AU and UN, "Outcome of The Consultative Meeting between the AU and UN Task Teams on UNSCR 2719," Addis Ababa, May 23–24, 2024.

Coordination and Partnerships

Some participants noted that the AU and UN are working collaboratively to ensure the effectiveness of the new mission. UN Security Council Resolution 2748 has brought the UN into the planning process for the new mission by establishing an initial joint reporting process to be conducted by the UN in consultation with the AU. The report, which will be submitted by the secretary-general in November, will guide the scope and modalities of the AU and UN's engagement, the mission design, and funding modalities. These, in turn, will determine the joint working arrangement between the AU and UN. Resolution 2719 envisages a closer working relationship between the two councils and the two secretariats, but if a different model is used, working arrangements will need to be adapted to that model. Beyond the UN and AU, participants also emphasized the need for consultations with a broad range of donors and other key stakeholders.

Collaboration is also required with the FGS. The tripartite partnership model between the AU, UN, and FGS has been the foundation for building a common understanding of needs and priorities and has facilitated effective coordination. One participant underscored how this collaborative approach guided the transition from AMISOM to ATMIS, including the development of the concept of operations. This enabled the missions to prioritize essential sectors during the transition and established a shared framework for the reconfiguration of AMISOM. This tripartite partnership needs to be deepened in preparation for the new mission. Agreement between the AU, UN, and FGS on clear expectations, benchmarks, and an exit strategy can enhance the new mission's effectiveness and facilitate a smooth transition. It can also help establish a shared understanding of the division of labor and complementarity, particularly considering the presence of bilateral security personnel.

Some participants reflected on the role of the three African members of the UN Security Council (the A3) in enhancing coordination between the two councils. They called on member states that will

concurrently serve on both the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council to play a greater bridging role. The presence of Somalia on the UN Security Council starting in 2025 will also bring a new dimension to the council's coordination with the host state and deliberations on the successor mission.

Role of UNSOS

Some participants noted that UNSOS has provided valuable support to AMISOM/ATMIS and the SSF. Established as an innovative model to support the AU presence and, later, elements of the SSF, UNSOS has fostered a long-standing partnership with these institutions by building trust and collaboration. Despite bureaucratic constraints, UNSOS has demonstrated flexibility and adaptability in meeting the evolving needs of its partners.⁷ Once there is clarity on the new mission, further consultation between the AU Commission and UN Secretariat will determine whether to maintain the current model of UNSOS, reconfigure it, or explore alternative support mechanisms.

Participants suggested that as the new AU mission evolves, it will be essential to maintain a strong and adaptable support mechanism that aligns with changing needs and priorities on the ground. As mentioned above, the tripartite partnership between the AU, UN, and FGS will be a crucial framework for identifying these needs and priorities as ATMIS transitions to a new mission.

Conclusion

Since 2007, AMISOM and ATMIS have played a critical role in fighting al-Shabaab and supporting the SSF. However, adequate and sustainable financing has been a perennial challenge. While the adoption of Resolution 2719 presents an opportunity, some participants argued that it should not be the only model considered for financing the new AU mission in Somalia. The transition from ATMIS to a new AU-led and UN-authorized mission will require the AU, UN, FGS, and donors to agree on funding modalities, the overall design of the mission, and joint working arrangements.

⁷ Paul D. Williams, "The United Nations Support Office Model: Lessons from Somalia," International Peace Institute, September 2024.

Delays in building such consensus will threaten Somalia's security and stability. As partners prepare for this critical phase, they need to maintain their focus on preventing a security vacuum and the reversal of the gains made so far, ensure that the new mission is adequately

resourced, and build on existing collaboration frameworks between the AU, UN, and host state. Addressing these challenges proactively and applying lessons from the long-standing partnership framework in Somalia will make the transition smoother and more orderly.

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