What next for African Union peace operations in Somalia?

PARTHA MOMAN

LSE !deas

STRATEGIC UPDATE
AUGUST 2025

The Author

Partha Moman is a PhD candidate in International Relations at LSE, exploring the impact of changing geopolitics on security dynamics in the Horn of Africa. He has also provided research and advisory services for the FCDO, UN, the World Bank, SIDA, and other institutional donors. He previously led the Somali Dialogue Platform at the Rift Valley Institute. Earlier in his career he worked for Africa's Voices Foundation, Chatham House, and the Centre of Governance and Human Rights at the University of Cambridge. He is a fellow of Somali Public Agenda in Mogadishu and the Institute for Peace and Security Studies in Addis Ababa.

Introduction

On 15 May 2025, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) missed a deadline to confirm funding for the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), making the future of the mission uncertain (Forti, 2025). AUSSOM, which began this year, is the third iteration of African Union (AU) peace operations in the country since the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) first deployed in 2007. Successive AU peace operations have become major military players in the country, re-capturing key towns from the Salafi Jihadist group, Al Shabaab. Despite this impact, Al Shabaab continues to control parts of the country and its war with the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has continued unabated. Frequent, and occasionally violent, disputes also occur between political groups over control of institutions.

If AUSSOM is forced to fully or partially withdraw due to funding constraints, it will likely exacerbate these conflicts, preclude their resolution, and lead the FGS to come under significant military pressure. More widely, as the AU's only active peace operation, the mission's perceived failure could dampen appetite for future AU missions at a time of growing insecurity on the continent.

This Strategic Update suggests that resolving the mission's funding challenges first requires re-conceptualising its value to improving peace and stability in Somalia, as a mission with clear and feasible objectives is more likely to elicit financial contributions. It argues that the primary objective of AMISOM—the degrading of Al Shabaab—was not fully attainable as the mission ceased offensive operations, even as the group remained a potent militarily and political force. AMISOM's successor, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), which took over in 2022, was similarly mandated to degrade the group with a view to handover security responsibilities to the FGS, despite the fact that this was clearly unfeasible.

This update argues that negotiations to establish AUSSOM's mandate between the FGS, AU, and other international actors have failed to address the mission's lack of feasible strategic direction, as they have become sidetracked by other geopolitical, political, and budgetary concerns. Consequently, AUSSOM's mandate, finalised at the end of 2024, remains premised on significantly degrading the group, even as it faces funding gaps that make this prospect even less likely. Instead, if the mission remains without money or clear purpose, there is likely to be a deterioration in the security environment.

To avoid this predicament, this paper proposes reconceptualising AUSSOM as a critical tool for enabling productive negotiations between the FGS and Al Shabaab, by recognising that the mission's greatest value is its ability to deter the group from making major military gains. The role of the mission in enabling dialogue with Al Shabaab can be further improved by: enhancing its defensive posture; expanding its political mediation role; increasing its security sector reform capacity; supporting disarmament and ceasefire monitoring; and tackling perceived issues of resource inefficiency. Based on an exit plan that emphasizes the resolution of Somalia's conflicts, rather than unattainable military objectives, this reconceptualisation of AUSSOM's mandate can motivate more productive funding discussions, enable the mission's continuity, and allow it to support Somalia's trajectory towards peace.

To make this case, the next section outlines the evolution of AU peace operations in Somalia to show how their focus on offensive operations against Al Shabaab has faced significant limitations. Section Three shows how ongoing negotiations over AUSSOM's mandate have been unable to establish a new, collective, and achievable vision for the mission. The fourth section reviews the result of this process and the risks ahead. It concludes by proposing an alternative strategic approach for the mission.

The evolution of AU peace operations in Somalia

AMISOM first deployed in 2007, led by Ugandan troops, and later joined by Burundian forces. AMISOM's instantiation responded to an escalation in conflict after Ethiopian military intervention to oust the Union of Islamic Courts faced resistance from the latter's more radical offshoot—Al Shabaab (Williams, 2018). AMISOM's initial mandate was limited, focused on protecting the Somali authorities in Mogadishu and transitioning to a United Nations (UN) mission after

six months (UNSC, 2007); African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC, 2007). The mission initially struggled to implement even this narrow objective, given it was only mandated to deploy 8,000 troops, and faced challenges in mobilising this number. It also faced several major logistical impediments (Williams, 2018).

AMISOM would gradually develop capacity to shift to offensive operations against Al Shabaab. By 2010, the mission's mandated size was increased to 12,000 and bolstered by a UN logistical support package—the UN Support Office to AMISOM (UNSOA) (UNSC, 2010). The mission, along with Somali security forces, began scoring major military successes against the group. This included pushing the group out of Mogadishu in 2011, and the subsequent re-capture of most major towns in southern Somalia, aided by bilateral Kenyan and Ethiopian military interventions. In support of these offensives, AMISOM reached a peak size of 22,000 troops in 2014, supported by the addition of Djiboutian forces, as well as the integration of some Kenyan and Ethiopian soldiers present in the country (Williams, 2018). Importantly, military advances enabled the establishment of permanent government in Mogadishu in 2012, signified by the ratification of the provisional constitution.

“Since 2016 the mission's purpose has become less clear as it ceased offensive operations and the war with Al Shabaab slid into a grinding stalemate.”

Since 2016 the mission's purpose has become less clear as it ceased offensive operations and the war with Al Shabaab slid into a grinding stalemate. Al Shabaab continued to control parts of the country and conduct asymmetric attacks in Mogadishu and other urban centres throughout this period, with a particular spike in 2017 (Mwai, 2022). The SNA-led Operation Badbaado led to the recapture of crucial bridges in Lower Shebelle from 2019-2020, but otherwise Somali security forces struggled to score lasting strategic victories against the group (Hassan, 2020). In parallel, AMISOM remained in

a defensive posture (International Crisis Group (ICG), 2021). This resulted in part from significant overstretch following previous offensives—by 2017 AMISOM was spread over 87 Forward Operating Bases (FOBs). Increasingly vulnerable, Al Shabaab began targeting FOBs, further reducing risk-appetite amongst the Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) for further offensives (Williams, 2023). One attack on Kenyan forces in El Adde in 2016 may have killed as many as 173 soldiers (KTN News Kenya, 2018).

As the mission's role in offensive operations faded, discussion between the FGS, AU, and international supporters of the mission, gradually turned towards enabling AMISOM's exit and transferring security responsibilities to the Somali authorities. In tandem, after 2012, international assistance to develop the Somali National Army (SNA) also increased. United States support to the Danab brigade and Turkish support to Gorgor brigades were the most prominent amongst these efforts—both units can conduct offensive operations against Al Shabaab (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2021). However, outside of these forces, the SNA continued to face challenges in terms of politicisation and lack of capacity, especially in holding new territory (Keating and Abshir, 2018).

Yet, discussions continued around AMISOM's potential exit as donors became frustrated with the defensive posture of the mission and its growing cost. The FGS was also assertive in reducing the mission's scope, buoyed by a new wave of Somali nationalism (ICG, 2021). In 2018, the FGS produced the Somali Transition Plan (STP), an ambitious strategy for degrading Al Shabaab and taking over responsibility from the AU by 2021 (The Federal Government of Somalia, 2021). Although little of the STP was implemented, it informed negotiations over the mandate of AMISOM's successor mission, ATMIS, that would begin in 2022 (ICG, 2021). As a result, the new mission's Concept of Operations (CONOPS) was geared toward 'jointly planned and targeted operations with the [Somali Security Forces] to degrade Al-Shabaab', even though there was little scope for further such operations (African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) (2022); AUPSC, 2022). The only major change was that ATMIS was based on the equally unfeasible premise that, following military successes against the group, it would exit Somalia and handover security to the FGS in less than three years (ATMIS, 2022; AUPSC, 2022).

This represented a growing dissonance between the formal objectives of the mission and battlefield realities. The war between the FGS and Al Shabaab has remained volatile, exacting a heavy toll on the population. In 2022, the FGS capitalised on fighting between Al Shabaab and the Hawiye/Hawadle clan to make territorial gains in Hir-shebelle and Galmudug. However, Al Shabaab overturned much of these following a counterattack in Osweyn in August 2023, as the SNA struggled to manage long supply lines and deploy effective holding forces (Barnett, 2023).[1] At the beginning of 2025, Al Shabaab launched an offensive in Middle and Lower Shebelle, reversing gains made during Operation Badbaado and recapturing the town of Adan Yabal (Houreld and Gobobe, 2025). Throughout, Al Shabaab has remained resilient as a military and political actor due to its illicit revenue streams, manipulation of Somali clan dynamics, provision of justice and other services, and mobilisation of Somali nationalist narratives (Mubarak and Jackson, 2023; Haji, 2024).

> “[S]uccessive AU missions, focused on reaching a military solution to the FGS-Al Shabaab war, have played only a limited role in addressing wider political disputes in Somalia.”

Concurrently, the value of ATMIS has been contested as insecurity has persisted and the military defeat of Al Shabaab remained out-of-reach. Since 2022, FGS and international officials privately criticized ATMIS for playing no military role in new government offensives, although it did provide logistical support.[2] Buoyed by initial military successes and eager to demonstrate progress, the FGS insisted that ATMIS had served its purpose and would leave at the end of its mandate in December 2024 (Royal United Services Institute, 2023). Following the Al Shabaab counter-attack in August 2023, however, the FGS reversed its position, requesting a delay to the drawdown timetable. This was so the mission could continue its ‘deterrent’ role and support Somali security forces ‘recuperate’ from setbacks (Federal Republic of Somalia, The Presidency, Office of National Security, 2023). These challenges

also triggered negotiations on the need for a follow-on mission, as Somali and international actors became concerned about the security situation on the ground.[3] In parallel, the ATMIS drawdown was delayed and stopped by November 2024, at a force strength of 12,626 (Kithumbu, 2024).

Before analysing the trajectory of these negotiations, it is worth highlighting that successive AU missions, focused on reaching a military solution to the FGS-Al Shabaab war, have played only a limited role in addressing wider political disputes in Somalia. Between 2012 and 2016, conflict centred on the formation of Somalia's Federal Member States (Mosley, 2015). Since then, political instability has spiked each time the country heads to federal elections - in 2016, 2021, and the present moment. At each juncture, political actors attempt to influence election design to shift the outcome in their favour, occasionally triggering political violence. Notably, in April 2021 opposition-aligned military units mobilised in Mogadishu to prevent the government unilaterally extending its term, bringing the country to the brink of civil war (Walsh and Mohamed, 2021). During each crisis there has been extensive diplomatic activity to resolve the conflict, but the AU's role has been limited, despite its explicit mandate to engage and the leverage offered by its military presence.

> “Negotiations to establish AUSSOM have failed to re-think how the mission could make a more positive and valuable contribution to the country's political trajectory. .”

Negotiating AUSSOM's mandate

Despite the reluctant realisation that the AU's withdrawal from Somalia would generate risks to the security environment, negotiations to establish AUSSOM have failed to re-think how the mission could make a more positive and valuable contribution to the country's political trajectory. Budget imperatives alongside wider political and geopolitical calculations have narrowed the discussion to three main issues: the funding mechanism,

force size, and the role of different TCCs. The result is that negotiations have generated a mission geared towards sustaining the status quo, with little clarity on a broader strategic purpose. AUSSOM's CONOPS is very similar to that of ATMIS, focused on offensive operations that are unlikely to occur or meet their stated objectives of degrading Al Shabaab (ATMIS, 2022). Changes to funding, force size, and TCCs that occurred through these negotiations have only made the degrading of the group even more unfeasible.

Negotiations over how AUSSOM should be funded has dominated the conversation. The mission's budget is best understood in two parts: the AU's own budget—primarily top-up stipends paid to TCCs for each soldier deployed—and the United States Support Office to Somalia (UNSOS)—the successor to UNSOA—which provides a range of services from delivering rations for the troops to the construction of FOBs and the reimbursement of TCCs for their use of equipment such as helicopters. AUSSOM's annual budget is currently estimated at $166.5 million, although the exact figure has been a point of contention.[4] The UNSOS budget is substantially larger; from June 2024 to July 2025, it was estimated at $499.8 million (United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), 2025a). UNSOS is paid for by UN-assessed contributions, with allocations from UN Member States based on several criteria—primarily the size of a country's economy.

Negotiations over TCC stipends have been the focus of contention. The European Union (EU) has been the primary donor to successive AU peace operations since 2007, investing over €2.7 billion, and covering most of the budget in 2024 (Council of Europe, 2024). The UK has made separate contributions since leaving the EU (British Embassy Mogadishu, 2024). However, donor officials have become frustrated with the mission's defensive posture.[5] Moreover, Western diplomats claim that TCCs are motivated to participate in the mission by economic incentives, both the income from troop stipends and illicit economic activities.[6] The war in Ukraine in 2022 has also overshadowed EU security engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa.[7] As a result of these factors, since the transition to ATMIS in 2022, the EU signalled that support for the mission would be reduced.[8] Together with repeated delays to the drawdown schedule, the AU has developed arrears to the TCCs, as ATMIS force size became larger than the EU's budget envelope. The AU is now in debt to the TCCs

to the tune of $93.9 million, adding to the mission's financial woes (Amani Africa, 2025b).

Efforts to reach collective agreement on plugging the growing funding gap have been deeply time-consuming, but unsuccessful. The EU, AU, UK, and others pushed for the implementation of UNSC resolution 2719. The resolution, passed in December 2023, instantiated a mechanism by which up to 75% of funding for an AU peace operation could be drawn from UN-assessed contributions (UNSC, 2023). But the US did not support its use in the Somali context, due to accountability and compliance concerns, the protraction of AU operations in Somalia, and differing views over how the mechanism should be applied (UN Web TV, 2024).[9] Congressional pressure, led by Senator Jim Risch, Chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, was central to determining this position (Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman, 2024). As a result, in last-minute discussions in December 2024 to agree AUSSOM's mandate at the UNSC, the US allowed language enabling the use of 2719 but inserted a clause that this would take place 'if the Council confirms the request…by 15 May 2025' (UNSC, 2024). Since the vote, the US position has been mantained by the new administration under President Donald Trump. This posture was again reinforced by Senator Risch, who introduced a bill prohibiting the US from endorsing the use of 2719 to fund AUSSOM (Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 2025). As a result, no consensus was reached by 15 May to confirm the use of assessed contributions to fund the mission, triggering more diplomatic activity in search of a solution.

The UNSOS budget has featured less in these negotiations so far. The UN and AU proposed several budget cuts to make savings to fund troop stipends via resolution 2719 (UNSC, 2025). However, after this prospect fell through, the UN General Assembly's Administrative and Budgetary Committee (known as the 'Fifth Committee') agreed in June to maintain the mission's funding at current levels (UNGA, 2025a). UNSOS could, however, still face longer-term funding challenges given the wider financial crisis in the UN. In particular, the White House Budget for the fiscal year 2026 proposes reducing US support to all peace operations to zero (Executive Office of the President, 2025). Though the ultimate decision would lie with US Congress, a question mark therefore remains over whether UNSOS may have to operate without around 25% of its approved budget.

Contention over which countries should be TCCs also consumed diplomatic bandwidth during negotiations. Although there has been continuity in AU TCCs in Somalia since 2014, the escalation of tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia threatened to disrupt this status quo. This followed the signing of a controversial Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ethiopia and Somaliland in January 2024, which reportedly gave Ethiopia the use of a stretch of Somaliland's coast for military and commercial purposes in exchange for Ethiopia taking steps towards recognising Somaliland's independence claims (ICG, 2024). The subsequent diplomatic row between Mogadishu and Addis Ababa led to the FGS insisting that Ethiopian troops, including around 2,500 under an AU mandate, and an additional 10,000 deployed bilaterally, should leave Somalia by the end of 2024 (Hassan, 2024). The FGS also struck a new security partnership with Egypt, Ethiopia's regional rival, in July last year, further complicating the discussion by including a commitment from Egypt to become a TCC (Sheikh and Paravicini, 2024).

Diplomats became consumed by this issue, due to their view that Ethiopian withdrawal would lead to a security vacuum in South-West State.[10] Türkiye began mediating in July last year, supported by diplomatic interventions from the US, UK, EU, Qatar, Kenya and others, to de-escalate tensions. Elections in November in Somaliland and the US also affected the calculus of both Somalia and Ethiopia, leading to the signing of the Ankara Declaration on 11 December 2024, which ostensibly resolved tensions over the MoU (Republic of Türkiye 2024). The Ethiopian role in AUSSOM would not be finalised until February 2025, after Somalia attempted to limit the size of the Ethiopian contingent, triggering further negotiations (Hiraan Online, 2025a). Another dispute between the FGS and Burundi, over the number of Burundian soldiers in AUSSOM, led to Burundi's withdrawal from the mission and has further taken up bandwidth (Hiraan Online, 2025b).

Beyond funding and regional tensions, the substantive aspect of AUSSOM's mandate that has received most attention is force size. The debate over numbers has been shaped by the considerations of the AU, FGS, and EU, rather than re-thinking the purpose of the troops deployed. At the end of 2023, the FGS presented initial proposals for a mission consisting of 6,000-8,000 troops, spread across ten FOBs.[11] The FGS was motivated to reduce numbers in order to project political and military progress in Somalia and increase the role of its own security forces.[12] The EU, too, pushed for numbers to be

reduced, reflecting budgetary concerns and a view that mission should return to a focus on offensive operations.[13] The AU and TCCs argued for higher numbers to be able to better protect their own forces, though others involved in the negotiations claimed that economic incentives played a role in this position.[14] For the first half of 2024, negotiations focused almost entirely on the numbers of the force, rather than re-thinking their purpose. The final number agreed at the AU Peace and Security Council in August 2024, 11,911, across an expanded number of FOBs, reflected a compromise between the different starting positions of these actors, rather than a revitalised conception of the mandate of the new mission (AUPSC, 2025).

The state of play and risks ahead

These negotiations resulted in an AUSSOM mandate very similar to ATMIS (Amani Africa, 2025a). It remains focused on reaching an end-state of 'a significantly degraded Al Shabaab', despite the reality that this is neither possible nor what AU troops directly contribute towards (African Union, 2024). Nominally, AU force size has reduced, but this has been offset by an increase in bilateral troops deployed by TCCs, especially Uganda, concerned about force protection.[15] A conference in Kampala at the end of April 2025, further proposed that TCCs would deploy another 8,000 troops bilaterally, with AU endorsement, following recent Al Shabaab offensives though this is unlikely to materialise in full (Extraordinary AUSSOM-TCC Ministerial Meeting, 2025). The number of FOBs has reduced from 70, but around 50 are still operational. Viewed from one angle, the foreign multilateral military presence in Somalia has therefore changed relatively little following these extensive negotiations, even as its purpose remains unclear. However, this masks a growing number of risks ahead for the Somali security environment that result from AUSSOM's current challenges.

Most importantly, the funding gap for AUSSOM remains large and could trigger changes in the mission and Somalia's security, if it remains unfilled. Of the estimated $166.5 million of AUSSOM's budget for 2025-2026, only $4.5 million is confirmed (UNSC, 2025). The AU has also attempted to mobilise $20 million from the AU's Peace Fund (AUPSC, 2025). The UK has historically pledged between £10-£20 million per year and is expected

to continue a similar level of support.[16] The EU has provisionally earmarked €60 million for Somalia from the European Peace Facility for the year but has yet to clarify how this will be divided between the AU and the SNA.[17] Regardless, it would be a major decrease in their contribution. These commitments may cover around half the annual budget of the mission. They would not address the AU's existing arrears of $93.9 million and liabilities for January-June of 2025 of $92 million (Beshah and Dersso, 2025). In this context, there is general agreement that there needs to be a donor conference to generate further pledges. The UK, as the penholder on Somalia at the UNSC, has sought to mobilise momentum for such an initiative, but finding a host and agreeing a date has proven challenging. Various diplomatic sources are also sceptical as to whether such an initiative will generate all the required funds.[18] Even if a donor conference were to fill the gap for this year, the need to constantly generate funds in this way leaves the mission's long-term financing uncertain.

This funding predicament, if unchanged, is likely to have a gradual impact on the Somali security environment as it erodes the deterrent effect of the mission, in combination with changes in TCCs and increasing reliance on bilateral troops. Although the mission rarely supports offensive operations, the efforts by the FGS and other international partners to prevent withdrawal of the mission highlight its value in deterring military gains by Al Shabaab. The AU's deterrent value continues to be apparent in the most recent phase of Al Shabaab's offensives, as the group mostly avoided attacking towns with an AUSSOM FOB—with the one exception of Bal'ad, which was briefly overrun on 28 February 2025 (Somali Digest, 2025).

How exactly funding gaps translate to changes in the security situation depend on the exact size of the shortfall and how this affects the incentives of individual TCCs to participate. The continuation of UNSOS may also dampen the effects of declining funds for troop stipends on TCC incentives, though this may depend on if it receives the entirety of its approved budget. Ethiopia's incentives are least likely to change. Its troops entered Somalia before being included in AMISOM, and the majority remain outside its mandate.[19] Funding is less critical to its military presence and, as Somalia's neighbour, Ethiopia is motivated to remain due to national security interests.[20] Kenya, too, may be inclined to stay for similar reasons, although its presence in the mission has reduced considerably.[21] Given Kenya's own economic challenges it could also decide to maintain border

security by withdrawing troops to the Kenya-Somalia border, potentially allowing Al Shabaab to expand its influence in Lower Juba.[22]

Uganda, the largest contributor to AUSSOM, may see more change in its incentives as funding dries up. It lacks the same national security imperative of Somalia's neighbours, though it may face reputational costs were it to leave and trigger a major security crisis.[23] A reduction of Ugandan presence is therefore possible, affecting the volatile region of Lower Shebelle, from where Al Shabaab conducts most of its attacks on Mogadishu. At the same time, Uganda's willingness to deploy bilateral troops suggests its force size will not be a simple function of available funds. Increasing Turkish military deployments may also offset some of the impact of any Ugandan soldiers withdrawing from Lower Shebelle (Soylu 2025). Djibouti may see its incentives change in a similar manner, though it also appears willing to deploy bilateral forces. In the case of Egypt, funding concerns may be contributing to delays to its deployment to Middle Shebelle, from where it is set to take over from Burundian troops who were scheduled to leave by the end of June, but have agreed to remain in country.[24] It is unclear exactly how long Burundi is willing to deploy troops in Somalia since its departure from the mission—a withdrawal before Egyptian troops are deployed could lead to a security vacuum in a region that is already suffering from Al Shabaab's recent offensives. Overall, if a solution to AUSSOM's funding challenges is not found, a gradual deterioration in security is likely, with Al Shabaab most likely to make further gains in Lower Shebelle and Middle Shebelle.

> “Long-term, an AUSSOM without sustainable funding and clarity of purpose will be unable to support the Somali authorities to positively transform the country.”

Long-term, an AUSSOM without sustainable funding and clarity of purpose will be unable to support the Somali authorities to positively transform the country. The FGS-Al Shabaab war will continue unabated, with the latter likely gaining influence and territorial control. The pressure on the Somali security forces will constrain the scope for their reform, as they are forced into more active fighting. As the space for multilateral intervention subsides, the FGS would likely have to rely more on its neighbours for security, with whom relations have not always been straightforward, further adding to unstable conflict dynamics. Arguably, even if the mission does receive funding but its purpose is not re-clarified, it would only contribute to the cyclical status quo in which the FGS-Al Shabaab war continues with no clear end and Somali citizens bearing the brunt.

Conclusion: Rethinking the mission's value

After AMISOM developed a purpose around degrading Al Shabaab, successive AU peace operations have gradually lost clarity in their mission as this proved unfeasible. The negotiation over AUSSOM from late 2023 has failed to provide it new strategic purpose. Resulting uncertainties around the mission's funding are likely to exacerbate the volatility of the FGS-Al Shabaab war and constrain efforts by Somali authorities to transform the country.

Developing a new, collective, and achievable objective for AUSSOM is critical to focusing upcoming discussions to fund the mission. Any changes to the mission's purpose need to be led by the AU, owned and accepted by the FGS, and agreed to by key international partners. A possible funding conference this year presents an opportunity to start this essential work. If the mission's purpose is shared amongst relevant stakeholders and feasible, it is likely to incentivise sustainable funding, as well as clarify how AUSSOM can support Somalia's peace and stability in the long-term. Whilst the mission alone cannot guarantee the peaceful resolution of Somalia's conflicts, it can create a more enabling environments for Somali actors to lead reform and the development of viable political processes. As security challenges are proliferating across the continent, the successful continuation and eventual exit of AUSSOM can also contribute to a wider re-invigoration of AU peace operations as a tool of the African Peace and Security Architecture.

This Strategic Update concludes by proposing several pillars on which to base the mission's mandate going forward:

- **Re-orient the mission towards enabling the peaceful resolution of the FGS-Al Shabaab conflict**. Whilst this would be a major shift in approach, both the FGS and Al Shabaab have at times hinted at openness to dialogue. International actors are also not entirely opposed to the idea but may lay down conditions such as Al Shabaab renouncing its affiliation with Al-Qaeda and ceasing to conduct attacks outside of Somalia (ICG, 2022). Negotiations would likely be extremely challenging and fraught with many risks. They would need to be led and owned by FGS, while allowing space for wider public engagement, to have a chance of being successful. Nevertheless, given the failure of the military approach and the human toll of the status quo, searching for a political solution to the conflict is the most likely strategy to positively transform Somalia. AUSSOM can play a critical role in enabling such dialogue. In the first instance the mission's timeframe for withdrawal should be open-ended but based on the more attainable objective of a negotiated end to the conflict. Premising the mission's exit on the peaceful resolution to the FGS-Al Shabaab war would likely encourage the group to negotiate to achieve the withdrawal of foreign troops from the country, one of their stated objectives. The rest of this paper's recommendations highlight how AUSSOM can be further reconfigured around this purpose.

- **Recognize and enhance the deterrent value of the mission.** AUSSOM can further incentivise Al Shabaab to engage in dialogue, as its presence prevents the group from pursuing a military solution to the conflict. The deterrent role of AU troops is especially important given challenges the SNA face in holding territory. Enhancing AUSSOM's defensive posture is therefore critical. This can be achieved in a number of ways: improving physical security at FOBs; concentrating troops in a smaller number of FOBs; and increasing the regularity of patrols to deny Al Shabaab freedom of manoeuvre and improve relationships with surrounding communities. Improving the mission's Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance functions, especially around re-supply convoys,

can also reduce their exposure to attack. The latter is best achieved through a coordinated strategy with the SNA focused on securing main supply routes into Mogadishu, rather than the re-capture of territory from Al Shabaab.

- **Re-vitalise the AU's role in security sector reform.** Such efforts are vital for improving security for the Somali population and further incentivising Al Shabaab to engage in negotiations, especially if the Somali security forces are re-focused on securing existing territory and their citizens within it. The AU can support this process by operationalising its capacity-building role, which has featured in previous mandates but never properly materialised. This could build off the role TCCs have already played bilaterally in training troops, many of which are potential holding forces. Uganda has trained the Military Police brigades in Mogadishu that have been credited with improving security in the city. Ethiopia and Kenya have also provided support to the South-West State and Jubbaland Darwish forces, respectively. These efforts could be integrated under AU auspices, potentially with wider international expertise, to de-politicize, standardise, and accelerate them. This is best complemented by supporting effective and accountable policing units at the local level, potentially leveraging AUSSOM's police component. Coordination with Somalia's other security assistance partners will also be essential. The AU could also combine training with supporting wider efforts to finalise Somalia's national security architecture, for example by supporting the Somali authorities develop policy that clarifies the role such Darwish forces play vis-à-vis other units.

- **Play a greater mediation role.** Whilst in its mandate, the AU's political role has been under-utilised as successive UN Special Political Missions have led in this area. With the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS) set to close by October 2026, the AU could play a more robust role in political dialogue, drawing on the role its TCCs have played in mediating conflict, especially Djibouti and Uganda. This could involve a more active role for the AU Commission in Addis Ababa. Alongside other actors, the AU could play a role in enabling dialogue between Al

Shabaab and the FGS—establishing channels for communication and providing good offices to any eventual negotiations. The AU could also leverage its military presence to play a mediation role regarding Somalia's recurrent political conflict.

- **Support ceasefire monitoring and disarmament.** In the long-term, AUSSOM could support the implementation of any agreements. This can include ceasefire monitoring, drawing on lessons from the AU's previous experience of such missions, as well as supporting the necessary disarmament and re-integration process. This is likely best served by reconfiguring AUSSOM at such a juncture to a smaller force, perhaps briefly incorporating TCCs that have not been involved in the conflict. This process could also be supported by Somalia's existing bilateral security partners.

- **Respond to perceptions of resource inefficiency.** This can enhance the collective sense of the mission's value. In terms of cost-effectiveness, savings can be made across UNSOS and AUSSOM through improving the security of ground convoys and reducing the reliance on aviation for supplying troops. Rationalising the use of contingent-owned equipment also provides an opportunity for making savings. To improve transparency, the AU could work with TCCs and donors to agree clearer parameters and oversight for how money is spent downstream. The AU could also strengthen its internal audit function though the Office of Internal Oversight by releasing regular public reports on audit findings. UNSOS could also support transparency by publishing all audits conducted. ■

References

African Union (2024). *Strategic Concept of Operations (CONOPS) for the African Union Support Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM)*.

African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) (2025). *Communiqué from the 1287th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council, held on 3 July 2025, on Update on the Situation in Somalia and Operations of the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM)*. Addis Ababa: African Union. Available at: https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-from-the-1287th-meeting-of-the-peace-and-security-council-held-on-3-july-2025-on-update-on-the-situation-in-somalia-and-operations-of-the-au-support-and-stabilization-mission-in-somalia-aussom (Accessed: 14 July 2025).

African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) (2024). *Communiqué of the 1225th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council Held on 1 August 2024, on Consideration of the Concept of Operations of AU-Led Mission in Somalia Post-ATMIS*. Addis Ababa: African Union. Available at: https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-of-the-1225th-meeting-of-the-peace-and-security-council-held-on-1-august-2024-on-consideration-of-the-concept-of-operations-of-au-led-mission-in-somalia-post-atmis (Accessed: 14 July 2025).

African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) (2022). *Communiqué of the 1068th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council on the mandate of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)*. Addis Ababa: African Union. Available at: https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/eng.-final-rev1.-communique-for-the-1068th-meeting-on-atmis-mandate-8-march-2022-1-.pdf (Accessed: 9 July 2025).

African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) (2007). *Communiqué of the 69th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council*. Addis Ababa: African Union. Available at: https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/communiqueeng-69th.pdf (Accessed: 9 July 2025).

African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) (2022). *Strategic Concept of Operations (CONOPS) 2022–2023*.

Amani Africa (2025a). *The New AU Somalia Mission (AUSSOM) Is ATMIS by Another Name but with More Problems*, 5 February. Available at: https://amaniafrica-et.org/the-new-au-somalia-mission-aussom-is-atmis-by-another-name-but-with-more-problems/(Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Amani Africa (2025b). *Update briefing on the status and operations of the AU Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia*, 10 April. Available at: https://amaniafrica-et.org/update-briefing-on-the-status-and-operations-of-the-au-support-and-stabilisation-mission-in-somalia/ (Accessed: 14 July 2025).

Anon. (2024). *UNSCR 2719 Non-Paper*.

Barnett, J. (2023). *Faltering Lion: Analyzing Progress and Setbacks in Somalia's War against al-Shabaab*, Hudson Institute, 28 September. Available at: https://www.hudson.org/terrorism/faltering-lion-analyzing-progress-setbacks-somalia-war-against-al-shabaab-james-barnett. (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Beshah, Zekarias and Solomon Ayele Dersso (2025). 'Will the Possible End of the AU Mission in Somalia Open New Opportunities for Peace?' *Amani Africa*, 23 May. Available at: https://amaniafrica-et.org/will-the-possible-end-of-the-au-mission-in-somalia-open-new-opportunities-for-peace/ (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

British Embassy Mogadishu (2024). *UK Boosts Somalia Security with Additional £7.5 Million to ATMIS*, 16 October. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-boosts-somalia-security-with-additional-75-million-to-atmis (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Council of the EU (2024). *EU Support to Somalia: Council Approves Further Support under the European Peace Facility to the Somali National Army and to the Military Component of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia*, 16 April. Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/04/16/eu-support-to-somalia-council-approves-further-support-under-the-european-peace-facility-to-the-somali-national-army-and-to-the-military-component-of-the-african-union-transition-mission-in-somalia/ (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Executive Office of the President (2025). *Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request*, 2 May. Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Fiscal-Year-2026-Discretionary-Budget-Request.pdf. (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Extraordinary AUSSOM-TCC Ministerial Meeting((2025). *Official Statement*, 24 April. Available at: https://igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ES-Statement-Extraordinary-AUSSOM-TCC-Ministerial-Meeting-24.04.2025.pdf (Accessed: 14 July 2025).

Federal Government of Somalia (2022). *Transition Plan*, February.

Federal Republic of Somalia, The Presidency, Office of National Security (2023). *Technical pause to the UN Security Council mandated Phase 2 drawdown of ATMIS personnel*, 19 September. Available at: https://www.scribd.com/document/844951867/Letter-to-so-on-Technical-pause (Accessed: 14 July 2025).

Forti, D. (2025). 'Security Council Misses Funding Deadline for AU Mission in Somalia', *International Crisis Group*, 16 May. Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/african-union-regional-bodies-somalia/security-council-misses-funding-deadline-au-mission-somalia (Accessed: 9 July 2025).

Haji, Mohamed. (2024). 'Al-Shabaab Is Seeking Cultural Influence with the Recruitment of Poets', *Geeska,* 7 May. Available at: https://www.geeska.com/en/al-shabaab-seeking-cultural-influence-recruitment-poets (Accessed: 6 June 2025).

Hassan, H. (2020). *Lower Shabelle Stabilization: Lessons from Operation Badbaado 1, 2019-2020.*

Hassan, M.O. (2024). 'Somalia insists Ethiopia not be part of new AU mission', *Voice of America*, 10 November. Available at: https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-insists-ethiopia-not-be-part-of-new-au-mission-/7858887.html (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (2021). *Structural Impediments to Reviving Somalia's Security Forces*, April. Available at: https://heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Structural-Impediments-to-Security-English-version-April-17-Final-.pdf (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Hiraan Online (2025a). *Somalia and Ethiopia Formalize Military Cooperation under AU Mission*, 23 February. Available at: http://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2025/feb/200381/somalia_and_ethiopia_formalize_military_cooperation_under_au_mission.aspx. (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Hiraan Online (2025b). *Burundi Ends Somalia Deployment after 18 Years over Troop Allocation Dispute*, 26 February. Available at: http://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2025/feb/200432/burundi_ends_somalia_deployment_after_18_years_over_troop_allocation_dispute.aspx. (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Houreld, K. and Gobobe, M. (2025). 'How U.S. cuts in Somalia could imperil the fight against al-Shabab', *The Washington Post*, 27 May. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/05/27/somalia-al-shabab-american-troops-trump/ (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

International Crisis Group (ICG) (2021). *Reforming the AU Mission in Somalia*, 15 November. Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b176-reforming-au-mission-somalia (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

International Crisis Group (ICG) (2022). 'Considering Political Engagement with Al-Shabaab in Somalia', 21 June. Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/309-considering-political-engagement-al-shabaab-somalia (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

International Crisis Group (ICG) (2024). *The stakes in the Ethiopia-Somaliland deal*, 8 January. Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia-somaliland/stakes-ethiopia-somaliland-deal (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Keating, M. and Abshir, S. (2018). *The politics of security in Somalia*. New York: Centre on International Cooperation. Available at: https://cic.nyu.edu/resources/the-politics-of-security-in-somalia/ (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Kithumbu, A. (2024). *Burgavo Base handover marks end of ATMIS Phase Three drawdown. African Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)*, 14 November. Available at: https://atmis-au.org/burgavo-base-handover-marks-end-of-atmis-phase-three-drawdown/ (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

KTN News Kenya (2018). 'TWO YEARS AFTER EL-ADDE ATTACK: Just why we know so little about worst attack on KDF', YouTube, 16 January. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UtGcbpfuE8 (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Mosley, J. (2015). *Somalia's federal future: layered agendas, risks and opportunities*. London: Chatham House.

Mubarak, M. and Jackson, A. (2023). *Playing the long game: Exploring the relationship between Al-Shabab and civilians in areas beyond state control*. London: ODI. Available at: https://odi.org/en/publications/playing-the-long-game-exploring-the-relationship-between-al-shabab-and-civilians-in-areas-beyond-state-control/ (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Mwai, P. (2022). 'Al-Shabab: Are militant attacks on the rise in Somalia?', *BBC News*, 2 November. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-49908716 (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024). *Ankara Declaration by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Federal Republic of Somalia Facilitated by the Republic of Türkiye.* Available at: https://www.mfa.gov.tr/etiyopya-federal-demokratik-cumhuriyeti-ve-somali-federal-cumhuriyeti-nin-ankara-bildirisi.en.mfa (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) (2023). *Somalia Leader Backs Army to Take Over from African Union.* Available at: https://www.rusi.org/news-and-comment/in-the-news/somalia-leader-backs-army-take-over-african-union (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Senate Foreign Relations Committee (2025). *Risch, Cruz, Scott Introduce Bill to Protect American Taxpayer Dollars from African Peacekeeping Operation*, 2 May. Available at: https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/rep/release/risch-cruz-scott-introduce-bill-to-protect-american-taxpayer-dollars-from-african-peacekeeping-operation (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman (2024). 'Should #Somalia Be the Test Case of UN Security Council Resolution 2719? No, Congress Will Not Approve. Instead, the @AfricanUnion & @UN Should Implement Agreed Reforms and Select a More Feasible UN-Financed Mission.' *X*, 12 June. Available at: https://x.com/SenateForeign/status/1800940896755585114 (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Sheikh, A. and Paravicini, G. (2024). 'Egypt sends arms to Somalia following security pact, sources say', *Reuters*, 28 August. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/egypt-sends-arms-somalia-following-security-pact-sources-say-2024-08-28/ (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Somali Digest (2025). *Al-Shabab Escalates Attacks In and Around Mogadishu*, 27 February. Available at: https://thesomalidigest.com/al-shabab-escalates-attacks-in-and-around-mogadishu/ (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Soylu, R. (2025). 'Turkey doubles troops in Somalia amid Al-Shabab offensive', *Middle East Eye*, 25 April. Available at: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-doubles-troops-somalia-amid-al-shabab-offensive (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2025a). *A/79/724/Add .10 Budget Performance for the Period from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024 and Proposed Budget for the Period from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026 for the United Nations Support Office in Somalia*, 11 April. Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/724/Add.10 (Accessed: 14 July 2025).

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2025b) *A/C.5/79/L.49 Financing of the activities arising from Security Council resolution 1863 (2009)*, 24 June. Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/A/C.5/79/L.49 (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (2025), *Letter Dated 7 May 2025 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council.* 7 May, Available at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4081957. (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (2024). *Resolution 2767 (2024)*, 27 December. Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2767(2024), (Accessed: 3 June 2024).

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (2023). *Resolution 2719 (2023)*, 21 December. Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2719(2023), (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (2010). *Resolution 1964 (2010)*, 22 December. Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1964(2010) (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (2007). *Resolution 1744 (2007)*, 20 February. Available at: https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/s/res/1744-%282007%29 (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

United States Mission to the United Nations (USUN) (2024). *Remarks at a UN Security Council briefing on Somalia*, 21 February. Available at: https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-at-a-un-security-council-briefing-on-somalia-12/ (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

UN Web TV (2024). *The situation in Somalia - Security Council, 9708th meeting*, 15 August. Available at: https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1p/k1pjnxxcmv (Accessed: 17 July 2025).

Walsh, D. and Mohamed, H. (2021). 'Gunfire erupts in Mogadishu as Somalia's political feud turns violent', *The New York Times*, 25 April. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/25/world/africa/somalia-fighting.html (Accessed: 3 June 2025).

Williams, P. D. (2023). 'Conventional Insurgents: Understanding al-Shabaab's Mass Attacks against African Union Bases in Somalia', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 27 April, pp. 1-23. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2023.2207234 (Accessed: 9 July 2025).

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

Endnotes

1 Interview, SNA official, February 2025, Mogadishu; Interview, FGS security official, Mogadishu, February 2025.

2 Interview, FGS official, Mogadishu, March 2025; Interview AU official, Mogadishu, February 2025; Telephone interview, former diplomat, March 2025.

3 Interviews, FGS official, Mogadishu, February 2025; Interview, Diplomatic source, Nairobi, January 2025; Interview, AU official, Mogadishu, February 2025.

4 In particular there has been a dispute over the rate at which TCCs should be deployed per soldier per month. AU officials and TCCs have called for the reimbursement rate to be $1,428 in line with UN Peacekeepers, instead of their current rate of $828. This was resisted by donors wary of rising costs. A compromise was eventually struck to agree a rate of $1,000 but recent deliberations between the AU and UN to cut costs have reduced the rate again to $828—this is the rate used as the basis of the estimate quoted, but this could be revised again (UNSC, 2025).

5 Interview, Diplomatic source, Nairobi, January 2025; Interview, Diplomatic source, Nairobi, February 2025.

6 Interview, Diplomatic sources, Mogadishu, January 2025.

7 Interview, Diplomatic source, Nairobi, February 2025; Interview, Diplomatic source, Mogadishu, February 2025; Interview, Diplomatic source, Nairobi, January 2025.

8 Interview, Diplomatic source, Nairobi, January 2025.

9 The US view was that 2719 should be applied based on 'one-mission, one-budget' model such that UN assessed contributions would cover 75% of the combined budget of AUSSOM and UNSOS; by contrast others at the security council supported the 'hybrid' model, where 75% of troop stipends would be covered by 2719, and UNSOS would be entirely covered by UN assessed contributions (Anon, 2024).

10 Diplomats argued that no TCC could replace an Ethiopian military with extensive experience working in Somalia and straightforward re-supply routes from across the Ethiopian border; Interview, Diplomatic source, Mogadishu, February 2025; Interview, Diplomatic source, Addis Ababa, March 2025.

11 Interview, AU official, Mogadishu, February 2025.

12 Interview, Security expert with knowledge of negotiations, Nairobi, March 2025.

13 Interview, FGS security official, Mogadishu, February 2025.

14 Interview, FGS security official, Mogadishu, January 2025.

15 Interview, AU military official, Mogadishu, February 2025.

16 Interview, Diplomatic source, Addis Ababa, March 2025.

17 Telephone interview, Diplomatic source, New York, May 2025.

18 Interview, Diplomatic Source, Addis Ababa, March 2025; Telephone Interview, Diplomatic source, New York, May 2025.

19 Interview, Ethiopian military official, Mogadishu, February 2025.

20 Interview, Ethiopian military official, Addis Ababa, March 2025.

21 Interview, Kenyan official, Mogadishu, February 2025.

22 Interview, Kenyan politician, Nairobi, February 2025.

23 Interview, AU official, Addis Ababa, March 2025.

24 Telephone interview, Diplomatic source, Mogadishu, 25 March 2025.

LSE IDEAS is the LSE's foreign policy think tank. Through sustained engagement with policymakers and opinion-formers, IDEAS provides a forum that informs policy debate and connects academic research with the practice of diplomacy and strategy.

LSE IDEAS
Floor 9, Pankhurst House
1 Clement's Inn, London
WC2A 2AZ

+44 (0)20 7107 5619
ideas@lse.ac.uk
lse.ac.uk/ideas