FTL Dhambaal Monthly

AMISOM: A rescue mission in need of rescue

This Dhambaal is in no way criticizing, blaming, or denying the efforts of the brave men and women who are serving or served in Somalia and those who paid the ultimate price in their attempt to bring peace and stability.

As the longest peacekeeping mission to date, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is entering its fifteenth year and on the receiving end of criticism from all corners.

That both the hosting country and the funders of AMISOM are dissatisfied with the mission's achievement and trajectory will be a gross understatement and an insult to both the Somali government and the EU political leaders in Brussels.

For a long time, the African Union (AU) decision makers in Addis Ababa enjoyed the position of an 'imposed' intermediary that both Mogadishu and Brussels could not reject, as there were no alternative options available. Playing a pivotal role in stabilizing Somalia, AMISOM continues to secure governmental institutions in the country and plays its part in keeping Al-Shabaab fighters at bay. As a vital member of this unique and complex international arrangement, to assist Somalia to recover from a 30-year conflict and lack of a functioning state, one of AMISOM's most important objectives was to reduce the threat posed by Al-Shabaab and enable Somalis to commence the political and socio-military process to re-establish a governance system and take over security responsibilities from the International Community.

In this Dhambaal, we shed light on why this initially well-scoped and time-bound military mission has grown into the current gargantuan mission involving 11 African countries sending soldiers and police to Somalia and the EU spending billions of Euros with no tangible achievements to show.

The Origin:

In March 2007, the first batch of AMISOM troops from Uganda arrived in the capital Mogadishu. With the envisioned total number of 8000 troops, only 1600 arrived. Based on the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1744, the duration of the mission was set and not to exceed six months. With the agreed monthly wage of $500 per soldier, the estimates were that this mission would not cost more than $4-5 million instead of the current estimates of $4-7 billion and still counting, excluding bilateral financial support from the UK, US, and the UN.

With every subsequent UNSC resolution to extend the mandate, the AU increased its budget request and mission objectives, resulting into the current convoluted mission mandate that includes soft components such as reconciliation, political mediation and huge civilian component that funds the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC). This entity has functioned as a 'retirement arrangement' for AMISOM and AU staff as it allows them to continue working on EU budget, while living and working in Addis Ababa or Nairobi.

After the initial success of the mission in ousting Al-Shabaab from the capital and the Indian Ocean military operation in 2014, AMISOM underwent a cosmic expansion-like transformation. The geographic cover of the mission is far beyond the agreed strategic locations in Mogadishu and now covers almost all Federal Member States while having more than 20,000 troops on the ground instead of the initial 8,000 as per the UNSC resolution. Similarly, the original idea of transitioning AMISOM into a UN peacekeeping operation in 2007 is abandoned and actively undermined by AU members who overtly benefit from a protracted AU mission and the status quo, both financially and politically.

Regional politics:

For many years, Ethiopia operated as the sole implementer of US interests in Somalia. Due to its appetite for high risks, Ethiopia's military interference in Somalia were successful and achieved its military triumph by ousting the locally popular Islamic Court Union from Mogadishu in early December 2006. Despite the previous UNSC interdiction of neighboring countries to partake in UN approved mission in Somalia, Ethiopia continues to be member of the Troop Contributing Countries (TCC) for AMISOM. Having troops under the AMISOM banner while also militarily operating in a bilateral capacity, Ethiopia garnered huge influence over all internal matters of the neighboring Somalia and its level of influence exceeds that of any other member of the International Community. The grip Addis has over Somali affairs became manifest during the 2018 election in Southwest State of Somalia. Ethiopia was able to implement the instructions of the then President of Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, and used military force to install Farmaajo's preferred candidate while kidnapping and transporting the popular and a former Al-Shabaab leader, presidential candidate Robow, to Mogadishu where he is still held without ever being brought in front of a competent court. The Head of the Mission, Francisco Caetano Jose Madeira, categorically rejected any responsibility in the kidnapping of presidential candidate Robow and pointed out that the Ethiopian troops responsible for the kidnapping are bilateral troops and not part of AMISOM. This contradicts the statement made by the victim, that he is kidnapped by AMSIOM soldiers.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to objectively assess when Ethiopian soldiers are operating under the AMISOM banner or as a bilateral force.

Ethiopia also has troops in the neighboring country of Sudan. And on August 23 this year, at the request of the Sudanese Foreign Minister Maryam Al-Sadiq, the United Nations decided to replace the Ethiopian force deployed in the Abyei Area, between South Sudan and Sudan. The minister argued that it was "not conceivable to accept Ethiopian forces deployed in the strategic depth of Sudan, (as part of the United Nations peacekeeping mission), while the Ethiopian troops are massing on the eastern borders of Sudan."

Likewise, Kenya employs similar strategy. It succeeded in becoming member of the TCC while also having an unknown number of Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) illegally occupying parts of Somalia and disregarding international law and the basic principles of the sovereignty concept.

The KDF repeatedly committed questionable military actions in Somalia, and it is unclear if the troops in question are part of AMISOM. Furthermore, Kenya and Somalia are involved in a maritime border dispute. The Kenyan government rejected the decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that favours Somalia and announced in The Hague, in early October 2021. Using its troops in Somalia, Kenya tried to force the Somali government to drop its case on the maritime dispute and inform the 14-judge panel that it will seek bilateral mediation instead.

The tension between the two countries remains high and with the on-and-off diplomatic relations, experts don't expect the relation to normalize anytime soon.

Kenya is betting on the outcome of the ongoing and protracted election in Somalia and its ability to turn the page and start and constructively engage the new President of Somalia, assuming that President Farmaajo will not be re-elected.

As a neighboring country, Djibouti contributes troops to AMISOM but does not have similar level of political interest in Somalia compared to Kenya and Ethiopia. Under the presidency of Farmaajo and for the first time in history, Djibouti found itself on the receiving end of Somali government's verbal attack as Farmaajo decided to side with Ethiopia and Djibouti's nemesis Eritrea. Besides the seemingly personal attacks from Villa Somalia, the presence of soldiers from Djibouti has not led to hostilities; on the contrary, Somalis have welcomed them warmly due to their shared ethnicity, culture, religion, and language.

Lack of Central Command:

The mission patently suffers a complete and chronic lack of leadership and is currently composed of six sectors operating in Lower Shabelle (Ugandan contingent), Dhobley (Kenyan contingent), Bay & Bakool (Ethiopian contingent / troops), Middle Shabelle (Burundian contingent), Hiiraan (Djiboutian contingent) and Kismayo, where multinational forces are based.

Although there is a military structure in place (on paper) and Ambassador Francisco Caetano Jose Madeira, of Mozambique is the officially appointed Head of Mission as the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission to Somalia (SRCC) and the position of Force Commander rotates among the TCC, different sectors operate autonomously and are more susceptive to orders from their respective capitals and regional political sentiments.

The mission is also burdened by volatile office politics at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa and specifically, by individuals working at the Department for Political Affairs Peace and Security. The current SRCC, who was appointed on October 7, 2015, seems comfortable with the status quo, and actively maintains it by honouring questionable requests from Addis and Villa Somalia.

Walters, the Head of MISOM Analysis Cell, has levied a few accusations at the SRCC. He accused Francisco Madeira of "introducing an erratic management and leadership style, characterized by fear, suspicion, threats, corruption, favoritism, demeaning, bullying and intimidation." Furthermore, the SRCC is accused of showing a striking insensitivity to gender issues, in particular those affecting female peacekeepers and of hindering investigations into claims of sexual exploitation. In addition, the mission fortuitously got involved in a toxic competition for funding against the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM).

Scramble for Funding:

In the past eight years, one can argue that the mission has prioritized securing what it labeled 'reliable funding stream' referring to diversification of funding and increase of budget by finding additional donors.

AMISOM representatives in Mogadishu often employ an aggressive fundraising approach when meeting with Western diplomats. To make matters worse, the mission regularly emits passive aggressive signals towards UNSOM and the Somali authorities in a poor attempt to disqualify what it considers to be possible competitors for funding from the West. In 2009, and in its capacity as the imposed intermediary, AMISOM forced the EU to accept and align its payments with the standard UN reimbursement rate, increasing the allowances of the AU Peacekeeping soldiers in Somalia. Realizing the relentless effort of Addis to inflate the operation budget, in the year 2016, Brussels announced rounds of budget cuts, bringing the allowances of AMISOM soldiers down to $822 and bit closer to the average salaries of the Somali soldier, which is $230.

Cognizant of the EU determination to bring the extreme financial situation of AMISOM under control, AMISOM stepped-up its aggressive funding-raising tactics and is increasingly engaging non-traditional donors such as Turkey, Qatar, and China.

Despite the dire financial prospects, the men in suits in Addis still hold unhealthy ambition of expansion and paying the salary of more international staff by increasing its civilian component and adding more staff. The UN Security Council's rejection of the 'enhanced police component', that will add 1,120 police, trainers, advisers, and mentors to this already convoluted mission, has not deterred AU expansion drift, which is driven more by financial gain rather than security.

African Solutions to African Problems:

Both the Somali authorities and the Western donors seem to have succumbed to this mantra, which will likely continue to echo in the corridors of the AU Headquarters for many years to come. Under this popular mantra that suggests promoting the utilization of local expertise and resources, the level of influence Mogadishu and Brussels have over the mission is kept to a minimum. Moreover, the TCCs abuse the status of fallen AMISOM soldiers to add more pressure to the EU. The Kenyan president is on the record stating that the continent is paying the bill for "stabilizing Somalia by blood and flesh." He added that it is "disheartening that the international community is even contemplating reduction of its support to AMISOM."

While processing the above statement, it is important to take note of the Kenyan Auditor-General Nancy Gathungu finding. Instead of the documented and expected KShs.8.5 billion at the end of June 2019, only KSh.6.5 billion has reached the Treasury as reimbursement from the EU, via AMISOM. Similar to other TCCs, the Kenyan government subtracts money from the allowances the EU pays its AMISOM soldiers. The EU's contribution is wired to the AU Bank account in Brussels, then onwards to the AU bank account in Addis Ababa, before being forwarded to TCC national accounts. From here, the calculated and adjusted allowance is sent to each soldier's account, as long as there aren't additional layers or middlemen mechanisms in place.

At one point, the Kenyan government was deducting $200 from the allowances the EU pays, while Uganda and Burundi deduct equal amount of $200 as Djibouti keeps $328 from the allowances its soldiers earn serving in Somalia but not as bad as Ethiopia that unilaterally decided to keep a whopping 50% of the allowances.

Reconfiguration options:

The EU finds itself in a difficult spot and is contemplating possible exit strategy and abandoning its failed strategy of trying to defend and justify the lack of effectiveness and achievements of the AU mission in Somalia that it has been bankrolling for 15 straight years.

Unfortunately, the EU's desire to make changes comes late as the AU has successfully implemented 'assembly-line' changes to the original mandate.

Between the years 2007 and 2011, virtually all AMISOM personnel were soldiers deployed exclusively in Mogadishu to 'rescue' and keep the Somali authorities out of the hands of Al-Shabaab. However, in the subsequent years, the mission expanded to include various sectors countrywide while handling both land and maritime tasks. The mission has grown and morphed into a gigantic entity with an internal dynamic and an orbit of its own, capable of fending off EU-imposed changes and in a good position to undermine the ongoing exercises to determine the future of AMISOM.

Following a UN Independent Assessment that provided options for possible reconfiguration of AMISOM mission post-2021, the AU issued an 'independent' report of its own. In it, the AU recommends a different option that aligns better with the preferred AU Mission parameters and has the potential to accommodate the long cherished broadened mandate and budget increase for the crippled and protracted peacekeeping mission in Somalia that covers an impressive and long period of three solar cycles (23 – 25).

Proposed options:

The UN assessment suggested a 'reconfigured AMISOM' as this is the most viable option and will also support Somali Security Forces (SSF) instead of leading the security efforts to protect the government and international partners. A reconfigured AMISOM will disrupt Al-Shabaab and other threats while adhering to the 2023 expiry date. Sensing the imminent change, the EU and the UN seem to be supporting, - the push to have a much smaller mission-, the AU commissioned its own 'independent' assessment with its logo on the cover page. This second assessment recommended a hybrid AU-UN Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Somalia, deployed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and covering the January 2022 – December 2026 period.

According to sources, experts in Brussels took note of the outcome of the 'independent' AU report and resumed its ongoing deliberation on the future of the Mission. The EU is very unlikely to accept and allow itself to be pinned down on a long-term commitment and give away the limited leverage it now has over the process and the future of the mission. According to sources close to the UN and the AU, this hybrid option is being proposed in order to rebrand and escape the longstanding negative reviews by using the UN reputation to convince policymakers in Brussels.

In the meantime, and as EU policymakers were debating the different options presented by the two reports, the AU took a preemptive action and organized an ad-hoc meeting with the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). On August 18th and 19th, the AU convinced two FGS ministries – Justice and Defense – to visit them at the Airport Hotel and have unstructured meetings after which an AU drafted joint statement was issued via social media. Stakeholders were informed that the AU and the FGS have reached an agreement. In a festive mood, one AMISOM senior staff took it to Twitter to celebrate this preemptive strike by stating: 'First step sealing the continued partnership between FGS and AU. No need to quibble over "options".'

A premature celebration, as the quickly compiled and never published agreement backfired on the AU. On October 7, the Peace and Security Council of the AU endorsed the hybrid AU-UN option. Five days later, on October 12, the FGS strongly rejected this option by pointing out that it already opposed the AU independent assessment report in July 2021 and expressed grave concern at what it called "the AU-PSC continued disregard of Somalia's sovereignty, territorial integrity and it's political independence."

Based on information received from FGS sources, the AU fell victim to its own sophistry. It attempted to outmaneuver the EU and benefit from the transitional period and the ongoing elections in Somalia by quickly putting something together and securing the signatures of two caretaker ministers who did not have the authority to engage in any long-term (international) commitment during election times.

It seems that the 'African solutions to African Problems' narrative is crippled and that the AU found itself in a situation where it now has to deal with assertive Somali government, EU and UN officials who are talking without intermediaries.

FGS officials such as the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Abdirizak Mohamud, who was heavily involved in the post-2021 AMISOM discussion, was not consulted by the AU, in the run-up to the FGS-AU agreement. The same sources confirmed that the foreign affairs minister was very upset and felt that AU-PSC was trying to sideline him and wanted to do business with the federal ministers of Justice and Defense. PSC considered these ministers more manageable than Abdirizak. After realizing how the AU-PSC outsmarted him and what this could mean for his future political career, the minister mobilized political forces and convinced the Prime Minister, to unequivocally reject the AU proposal and to approve the October 12th FGS letter that exposed the otherwise hidden AU-FGS competing views.

The Victims:

In the past 15 years, the AMISOM mission caused a high number of both civilian and political casualties unrelated to its mandate or military operation.

The latest incident that occurred on 10 August 2021 is emblematic of the views that Somali people harbor with regard to AMISOM. On that fateful day, Ugandan troops patrolling the Golweyn area opened fire on civilians at a farm and killed seven innocent farmers. To hide their crimes, AMISOM soldiers placed remotely controlled mines on the bodies of these victims before detonating. They also put firearms on some of the other bodies in an attempt to make it appear that they were Al-Shabaab fighters.

On November 13, Ugandan Military Tribunal convened in Mogadishu found two officers guilty of intentionally killing civilians and sentenced them to death while three others were sentenced to 39 years in jail for their role in killing innocent Somali farmers.

In this section, we will shed light on the political victims of AMISOM while focusing on the recent and top three names on this otherwise long list.

Although AMISOM is not to blame for this, Abdirizak however, lost his job as Minister of Foreign Affairs, partly because of how he mismanaged the AMISOM post-2021 discussion. When President Farmaajo found out that his trusted friend was using the AMISOM dossier to engineer his own political return and to support his hidden desire to compete for the highest seat once again in the land, Farmaajo felt betrayed and instructed Prime Minister Roble to fire the minister. He was sacked on November 20 and is likely to now transition from covert to an overt campaigning mode as he hopes to be more successful this time around and secure more than the disappointing number of votes (one) that he got in the 2017 presidential elections.

The second victim on the list is Dr. Walters Samah, who works for AMISOM as a Head of Mission Analysis. Walter suffered under the joint bullying force of Villa Somalia and the SRCC, for one of his online comments that failed to please an unnamed official in the State House. This unnamed official that allegedly complained to the SRCC about Walter is believed to be none other than the former National Security Adviser to the President who recently was appointed to replace Abdirizak as the new Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Abdisaid Muse Ali.

The latest name to be added to the list is Simon Mulongo, the Deputy Special Representative of AMISOM. The then foreign affairs minister Abdirizak declared him persona non grata on November 4. The minister gave him seven days to leave the country. Simon is a Ugandan diplomat who served in this capacity for the past four years and had more power over the AMISOM troops than the SRCC due to his good relationship

with his former boss, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda. The MFA accused Simon of conducting activities that are "incompatible and contrary to the strategy of AMISOM and that of Somalia". In subsequent tweets and televised interview, the minister hinted that Simon was pushing for the AU-UN hybrid option and a possible inappropriate sexual conduct.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time the mission is accused of sexual exploitation and abuse. As time passed, AMISOM learned to cope well with the stream of accusations that emerged after conducting military operations and put in place procedures for its victims to seek financial compensation, which have proven to be inadequate in most cases.

Recommendations:

With the current AMISOM mandate ending in few days' time, the ongoing national elections, and a caretaker cabinet in place, the AMISOM mandate deliberation could have not come at a worse time. What's more, the mission that was supposed to 'rescue' the Somali government from the hands of Al-Shabaab is now in dire need of a rescue. While President Farmaajo, whose term in office ended a year ago, is trying to utilize any opportunity he gets to prolong his stay in Villa Somalia, the politically inexperienced Prime Minister Roble seems to have accepted that delivering a fair, transparent, and credible electoral process is a mission impossible. The fact that a Farmaajo loyalist, Abdisaid Muse, has taken over as the new MFA, who, according to insiders, has a personal score to settle with AMISOM, is unlikely to contribute to a healthy and constructive deliberation on AMISOM. Abdisaid is already seen meeting with AMISOM commander, Lt-Gen Diomede Ndegeye, discussing security operations and pushing for handover of responsibility as he argued that the mandate of AMISOM is about to expire.

The Office of the Prime Minister failed to explain why Abdisaid is allowed to combine different roles (Security, Foreign and Internal Affairs) while also dominating all AMISOM and elections related meetings.

It seems that the new MFA is determined to continue serving his boss Farmaajo and is willing to undermine AMISOM, if this will help boost the low popularity of Farmaajo. Sources close to Villa Somalia confirmed that sudden and forced AMISOM exit is considered to be the ultimate political act that will help Farmaajo secure his desire for term extension and longer stay in the State House.

Abdisaid, recently established a committee called the STP SSC, composed of FGS Ministers of Defence, Internal Security, and security officials representing the Somali army and police forces.

Because of the protracted electoral process, the country is experiencing heightened political instability. Possible disruption of the fragile security apparatus, as result of mandate negotiation turning sour, is too high of a risk.

Endorsing the FGS-favored Somalia Transition Plan (STP) could now prove to be problematic because of the escalating political situation in the country.

Endorsing the AU-preferred hybrid model of an AU-UN and under UN Chapter VII, is certain to cause irreparable damage and reverse the hard-won gains. The FGS will reject this and is likely to demand immediate AMISOM exit.

Instead, interested donors should consider the middle road. Since the two competing proposals contain some form of transition aimed at handing over responsibilities to the Somali security apparatus, this could serve as a starting point for finding a way out of this diplomatic and security minefield.

In this context, the UNSC, the EU and others could consider extending the mandate of AMISOM by 10 months technical roll-over, as this will help bridge the current political uncertainty and the ongoing elections.

This, however, might not align well with the UK position. The Post Brexit diplomacy in Somalia is characterized by random budget cuts and breach of non-legal binding contracts. By prematurely ending the otherwise successful multi-donor Somalia Stability Fund (SSF) Programme, the UK burdened six western donors to find a new Programme through which they can fund security, governance, and development projects in Somalia and with only few weeks' notice. As result of this, Hirshabelle State is unlikely to see the completion of the commenced construction work in Jowhar and the court building that was demolished to allow the UK build governmental buildings, is not going to be rebuild and the state is about to inherit an incomplete building that is structurally not sound and for safety reasons cannot be used. Similarly, the UK left the Hobyo community stunned, after it pulled out from the joint Community Driven Development Project to rehabilitated and important Main Supply Route, without a prior notice. What's more, the UK is conducting a rigorous exercise to cut the budget of number of projects in Somalia that are currently funded by the cross-government Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) in Baidoa and the AMISOM bilateral support.

The UK's deprived financial-bargaining based diplomacy, could further cripple the fragile security structure of Somalia since the UK, as a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council, is currently the penholder on all issues relating to Somalia and has already rejected a technical roll-over of six months and seems to prefer a period of not more than three months.

The strained relationship between the AU-PAPS Commissioner, Ambassador Bankole Adeoye and the UK representatives does not bode well for Somalia.

A possible technical roll-over will not negatively affect the competing proposals of Addis and Mogadishu, but rather provide a breather and enable policymakers to objectively compare and select the options that are likely to foster the long-term security objectives.

Notwithstanding the pity and financially driven push from Addis and the politics-dominated security structure of Somalia, the donors are presented with an excellent opportunity to incorporate possible lessons learned from Afghanistan and bring about a situation in which the Somali government is able to take full responsibility for the security of its country and people.

Therefore, a technical roll-over of ten months appears to be most reasonable option and will help rescue this rescue mission.

This will also allow the EU and others to prepare for the upcoming transition while resisting the financial push and bullying from Addis Ababa. Considering the alternative, -the mission coming to 'a premature end'-, the African Union is very likely to accept a conditional 10-months technical roll-over.

Learning from the previous version of the Somalia Transition Plan (STP) and lack of delivery, the EU can use the period to discuss the updated version of this document with the new Somali government, assuming that ongoing elections can be concluded in the coming months.