

The Surge to Stabilize: Lessons for the UN from the AU's Experience in Somalia

WALTER LOTZE AND PAUL D. WILLIAMS



Cover Photo: AMISOM and the Somali National Army recapture Buur-Hakba from al-Shabaab, February 23, 2013. UN Photo/Stuart Price.

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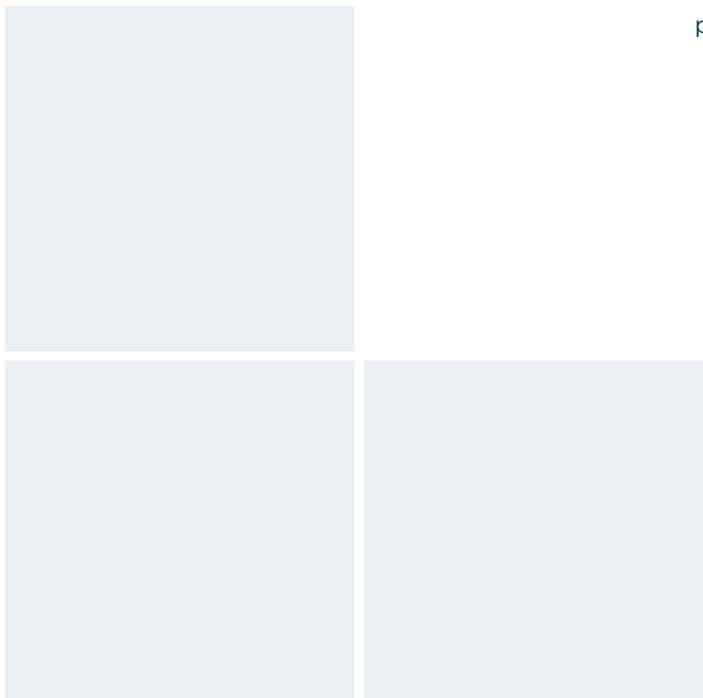
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Abbreviations

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
CIMIC	Civil-Military Cooperation
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
PCC	Police-Contributing Country
TCC	Troop-Contributing Country
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
UN	United Nations
UNPOS	UN Political Office for Somalia
UNSOA	UN Support Office for AMISOM
UNSOM	UN Assistance Mission in Somalia
UNSOS	UN Support Office in Somalia

Executive Summary

In recent years, a growing number of United Nations peacekeepers have been mandated to carry out “stabilization” tasks. This report investigates what lessons can be identified for UN peacekeepers from the African Union’s (AU) attempts to stabilize Somalia. We provide a critical analysis of how the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) evolved from principally a war-fighting operation to an operation focused on implementing a stabilization agenda.

Although AMISOM began to take on various stabilization tasks in late 2011, the mission did not develop a working definition of the term until 2013, at which point it defined stabilization as “any post-conflict/-combat activities undertaken in order to facilitate and promote early recovery of the population and institutions in a locality that has been recovered from Al Shabaab.”¹ This report focuses on the four major offensive and consolidation operations AMISOM conducted on the basis of that definition from early 2014 until the present day: Operations Eagle, Indian Ocean, Ocean Build, and Juba Corridor.

Overall, we argue that AMISOM’s attempts to implement an effective stabilization strategy across south-central Somalia suffered from a number of political and operational challenges:

- The Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and AU did not have a shared stabilization strategy in place when AMISOM and the Somali security forces launched their expansion operations.
- The speed of AMISOM’s military operations far outpaced the speed of the other stabilization responses.
- The security and political dimensions of the surge in AMISOM troop levels in January 2014 and the resultant stabilization operations were separated from one another.
- AMISOM was badly hampered by a fragmented system of command and control combined with weak multidimensionality.
- The expansion operations were not able to significantly degrade al-Shabaab’s key fighting capabilities

because the militants melted into the population, drew back, or redeployed in Somalia.

- The force enablers and multipliers that AMISOM desperately needed, including military helicopters, never arrived.
- The expansion operations did not always contribute to a tangible increase in security or perceptions of security for the Somali civilian population.
- Neither AMISOM nor the Somali government was able to consistently deliver significant peace dividends to the growing civilian population coming under their control.
- A key assumption underpinning the security strategy developed for the AMISOM surge proved faulty—namely, that the Somali National Army would play a supporting and then leading role in the fight against al-Shabaab.
- Providing logistical support to the expansion operations was very difficult.

On the basis of this analysis, we identify nine lessons that emerge from AMISOM’s ongoing attempts to stabilize Somalia:

1. Missions must be appropriately configured to fulfill their mandate.
2. The political and military elements of a stabilization strategy must be in sync.
3. Extending state authority is not synonymous with peacebuilding, at least in the short term.
4. Territorial expansion is less important than degrading the capabilities of spoilers.
5. Strategic coordination among relevant partners is a crucial, mainly political task.
6. Lack of coordination can have negative political and military effects.
7. Effective stabilization requires positive relationships between peacekeepers and the local population.
8. There can be no successful exit without building capable, legitimate, and inclusive national security forces.
9. UN organizational frameworks and bureaucratic culture are not suited to supporting war-fighting operations.

1 AMISOM, *Provisional Guidelines on Stabilisation Activities*, AMISOM internal document, 2013, p. 1.

Introduction

This report examines what lessons the AU's experience in Somalia might hold for the UN as more of its peacekeepers are given mandates involving "stabilization" tasks. Although the UN's missions in Haiti since 2004, the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 2010, Mali since 2013, and the Central African Republic since 2014 all have the word "stabilization" in their name, the UN still has no explicit definition of or framework for this concept.² When US-led multinational coalitions have undertaken stabilization operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, they have tended to fall back on definitions of stabilization found in the national doctrines of some of the key participants. But in both Afghanistan and Iraq, these operations occurred after an invasion by large numbers of modern forces with enormous budgets and dedicated stabilization programming. These are quite different circumstances from UN peacekeeping operations.

In that sense, the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) arguably offers a more useful point of comparison for several reasons. First, AMISOM has always operated with the consent of a host government that was weak and perceived as illegitimate by large segments of the local population. Second, AMISOM has always operated in parallel with both external militaries and the nascent Somali security forces. Third, AMISOM did not start out as a stabilization force; it was only after 2011 that it slowly took on an increasingly complex set of stabilization tasks, some of which resemble those mandated to the UN missions in the Central Africa Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mali.

Finally, as an African force, AMISOM's personnel bear much closer resemblance to many UN operations than the largely Western coalition forces assembled in Afghanistan and Iraq. Also like UN operations, AMISOM had to define its stabilization agenda on an ad hoc basis and learn on the job. Not only did the AU have no official doctrine on stabilization, but its doctrine on "peace support operations" also said nothing about the concept. Nor was the need for stabilization

operations foreseen in any of the roadmaps developed to guide the African Standby Force, which focused on more traditional conceptions of multidimensional peacekeeping and humanitarian military intervention. The AU has now recognized at a strategic level that it needs to address this deficit, but the deficit remains.

Given the many challenges AMISOM faces, the lessons it offers do not simply generate "best practice" that the UN might emulate. Rather, the lessons of AMISOM highlight the real dangers and challenges inherent in stabilization efforts that must be considered in planning, mandating, resourcing, implementing, and reviewing UN peace operations.

To address these issues, the report is organized into four sections. The first section provides an overview of AMISOM's evolution from a war-fighting to a stabilization agenda. The second section analyzes AMISOM's expansion operations in 2014 and 2015 and identifies ten challenges that bedeviled these efforts. The third section examines why the consolidation operations that followed this expansion achieved, at best, a mixed record. Finally, we identify nine lessons from AMISOM's experience in Somalia that might be of use to the UN as it clarifies its own approach to stabilization.

From War-Fighting to Stabilization: The AMISOM Approach

AMISOM first deployed to Mogadishu in March 2007. It was mandated by the AU and then the UN Security Council to provide protection to Somalia's fledgling Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and its institutions as they sought to establish themselves in Somalia (see Box 2 for AMISOM's current mandate as of July 2015). The TFG had emerged out of a peace process that took place largely in Kenya beginning in the early 2000s and that was heavily influenced by Somalia's large diaspora population.

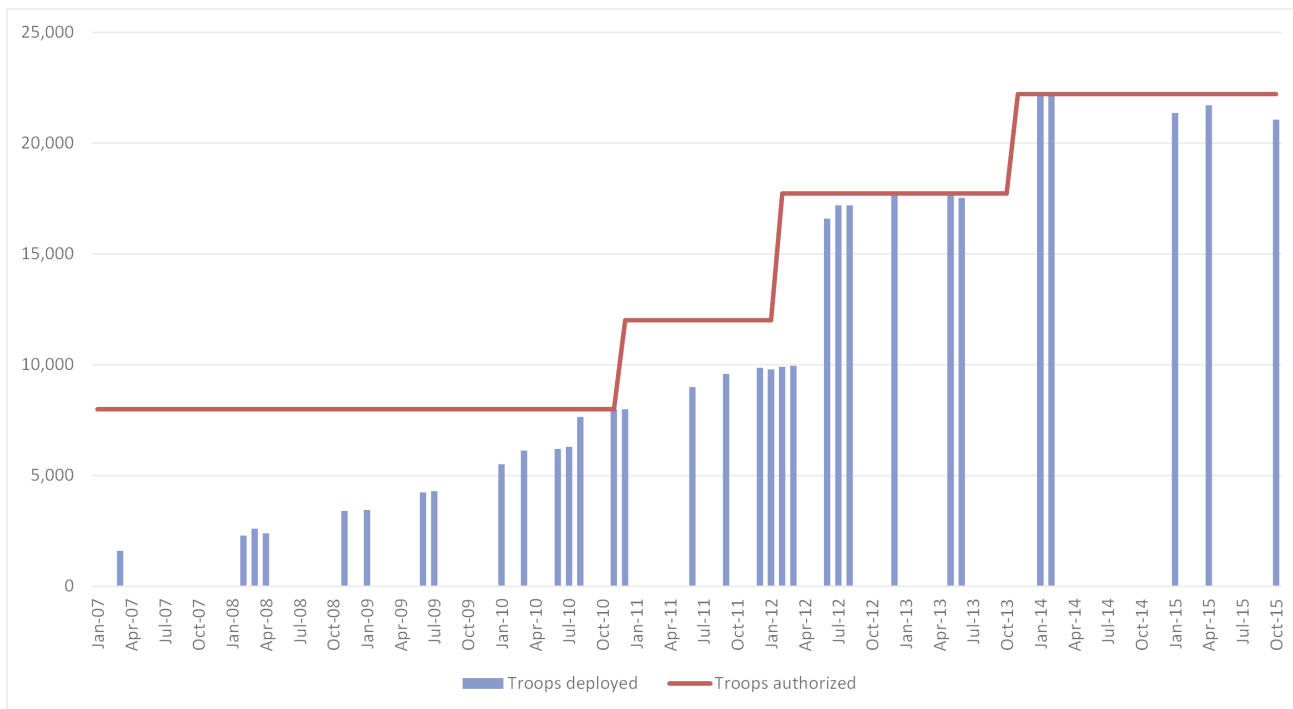
What began as a small protection contingent of 1,600 Ugandan troops deployed to enable the

² David Curran and Paul Holtom, "Resonating, Rejecting, Reinterpreting: Mapping the Stabilization Discourse in the United Nations Security Council, 2000–14," *Stability* 4, no. 1 (2015).

withdrawal of a much larger Ethiopian force also defending the TFG quickly turned into a war-fighting operation. By the time the Ethiopian forces left Mogadishu in January 2009, AMISOM was comprised of some 3,500 Ugandan and Burundian troops (see Figure 1 and Box 1). They fought alongside TFG forces in messy urban warfare that involved regular combat, street-by-street and district-by-district, to wrest control of Mogadishu from local strongmen and al-Shabaab fighters.³

After two years of bloody urban warfare, in August 2011 AMISOM and TFG forces succeeded in pushing the majority of al-Shabaab’s fighters out of Mogadishu. In October 2011 Kenyan forces launched Operation Linda Nchi (Swahili for “protect the nation”), crossing the border into southern Somalia.⁴ Two months later Ethiopian forces again entered Somalia to open up an additional front against al-Shabaab. By late 2012, Kenyan and Ethiopian forces had captured the

Figure 1. Number of AMISOM troops authorized and deployed, 2007–2015⁵



Box 1. AMISOM’s major troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and police-contributing countries (PCCs)

Major TCCs and date troops arrived:

- Uganda, March 2007
- Burundi, December 2007
- Djibouti, December 2011
- Kenya, June 2012
- Sierra Leone, April 2013 (withdrew December 2014)
- Ethiopia, January 2014

Major PCCs and date police arrived:

- Uganda, August 2012 (Formed Police Unit)
- Nigeria, September 2012 (Formed Police Unit)

³ For an overview up to January 2014, see Bronwyn E. Bruton and Paul D. Williams, *Counterinsurgency in Somalia: Lessons Learned from the African Union Mission in Somalia, 2007–2013* (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: JSOU Press, 2014).

⁴ For the official Kenyan government narrative of the campaign, see Pius T. Migue et al., *Operation Linda Nchi: Kenya’s Military Experience in Somalia* (Nairobi: Kenya Defence Force, 2014).

⁵ AMISOM has not provided a public monthly tally of its personnel. This figure therefore depicts multiple snapshots of the mission strength compiled by the authors from official AU and UN sources.

Box 2. AMISOM's mandate (July 2015)⁶

- a. Take all necessary measures, as appropriate, and in coordination with the Somalia National Defence and Public Safety Institutions, to reduce the threat posed by Al Shabaab and other armed opposition groups;
- b. Assist in consolidating and expanding the control of the [Federal Government of Somalia] over its national territory;
- c. Assist the [Federal Government of Somalia] in establishing conditions for effective and legitimate governance across Somalia, through support, as appropriate, in the areas of security, including the protection of Somali institutions and key infrastructure, governance, rule of law and delivery of basic services;
- d. Provide, within its capabilities and as appropriate, technical and other support for the enhancement of the capacity of the Somalia State institutions, particularly the National Defence, Public Safety and Public Service Institutions;
- e. Support the [Federal Government of Somalia] in establishing the required institutions and conducive conditions for the conduct of free, fair and transparent elections by 2016, in accordance with the Provisional Constitution;
- f. Liaise with humanitarian actors and facilitate, as may be required and within its capabilities, humanitarian assistance in Somalia, as well as the resettlement of internally displaced persons and the return of refugees;
- g. Facilitate coordinated support by relevant AU institutions and structures towards the stabilization and reconstruction of Somalia; and
- h. Provide protection to AU and UN personnel, installations and equipment, including the right of self-defence.

strategic towns of Kismayo, Belet Weyne, and Baidoa in south-central Somalia, and about 4,000 Kenyan forces had been integrated into AMISOM. Meanwhile, AMISOM forces consolidated their hold on central Mogadishu and pushed to the city's outer limits and beyond. It was at this stage that the AU decided it needed to support the stabilization of the capital city and address the security situation beyond Mogadishu, as well as to assist the TFG in consolidating political control in areas recovered from al-Shabaab.

PREPARING FOR STABILIZATION OPERATIONS

As military successes against al-Shabaab in Somalia continued, preparations were made to strengthen the police and civilian components of the mission and to relocate these to Mogadishu. This shift aimed to transform AMISOM from a purely military into a more multidimensional operation that could also support the stabilization of

Mogadishu, and potentially of south-central Somalia once the security situation permitted. In 2007, a small civilian team had already been established in Nairobi, mostly to engage with the TFG and coordinate with the UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) and the UN Country Team. In 2011, steps were taken to strengthen this team and construct facilities in Mogadishu in anticipation of a redeployment. That same year, planning also began for the redeployment of the small police component of AMISOM, which until then had primarily been training Somali police officers in northern Kenya.

The idea that AMISOM could play a stabilization role also gained traction with the UN. In September 2011, the UN Security Council welcomed the improvement of security in Mogadishu and requested that AMISOM work with the Transitional Federal Institutions of Somalia to develop a stabilization plan for the capital city. The

⁶ AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué 356 (February 27, 2013), AU Doc. PSC/PR/COMM(CCCLVI); UN Security Council Resolution 2232 (July 28, 2015), UN Doc. S/RES/2232.

council also noted the important role an effective police presence could play in stabilizing Mogadishu and stressed the need to continue developing an effective Somali police force. In this regard, the council welcomed the AU's plans to develop a police component within AMISOM to that end.⁷

In February 2012, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2036, which, among other things, specified three dimensions of stabilization where AMISOM should take on more of a role. First, it called for AMISOM to support delivery of stabilization plans developed by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Somali TFG in areas already secured. Second, it called for AMISOM to establish an operational police component to help stabilize Mogadishu. Third, the council indicated that, in its future decision making, it would take into account how far Somali security forces and AMISOM had consolidated security and stability throughout south-central Somalia on the basis of clear military objectives integrated into a political strategy.⁸

AN EXPANDED MANDATE AND A NEW FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

By September 2012, a process of elite selection had replaced the TFG with a new Federal Government led by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. Officially, this brought to an end the political transition in Somalia that had started in 2004. Also in September, AMISOM and Somali security forces took control of Mogadishu and its outer suburbs. Less than a month later, the AU Peace and Security Council requested that the AU Commission undertake a strategic review of AMISOM operations to determine how best the mission could further contribute to stabilizing Somalia and successfully implement the priorities set by the new Somali government.⁹

Shortly thereafter, the UN Security Council also called for expanding the stabilization component of

AMISOM's mandate. Specifically, the council requested that AMISOM, within its capabilities, assist in the implementation of Somalia's newly developed National Security and Stabilization Plan. At the AU's request, the Security Council also extended logistical support for AMISOM's civilian component, underlining the importance of these civilians deploying swiftly to areas liberated from al-Shabaab to assist with stabilization efforts.¹⁰

The AU Commission delivered its strategic review of AMISOM in February 2013. This prompted the AU Peace and Security Council to comprehensively revise AMISOM's mandate for the first time since the mission had deployed nearly six years earlier. The revised mandate tasked AMISOM with facilitating and coordinating support from relevant AU institutions and structures for the stabilization and reconstruction of Somalia.¹¹

The AU recognized that the situation on the ground was rapidly evolving and that AMISOM operations needed to be adjusted accordingly. Not only had AMISOM swiftly expanded its presence beyond Mogadishu, but the Kenyan and Ethiopian forces that intervened in late 2011 had also driven al-Shabaab out of the strategic towns of Baidoa, Belet Weyne, and Kismayo. With the integration of Djiboutian troops into AMISOM in December 2011 and of Kenyan forces in mid-2012, the mission established sector headquarters in these towns and sought to build its military presence across a string of smaller settlements and strategic locations, forcing al-Shabaab to operate from different, often smaller towns.¹² Ethiopian forces continued supporting AMISOM while remaining outside of its command, especially in the areas around Baidoa and Belet Weyne (AMISOM's sectors 3 and 4; see Figure 2 for a map of AMISOM's sectors).

To support the Somali authorities in stabilizing

7 UN Security Council Resolution 2010 (September 30, 2011), UN Doc S/RES/2010. See also Yvonne Akpasom and Walter Lotze, "The Shift to Stabilisation Operations: Considerations for African Peace Support Operations," *Conflict Trends* 2 (2014).

8 UN Security Council Resolution 2036 (February 22, 2012), UN Doc. S/RES/2036.

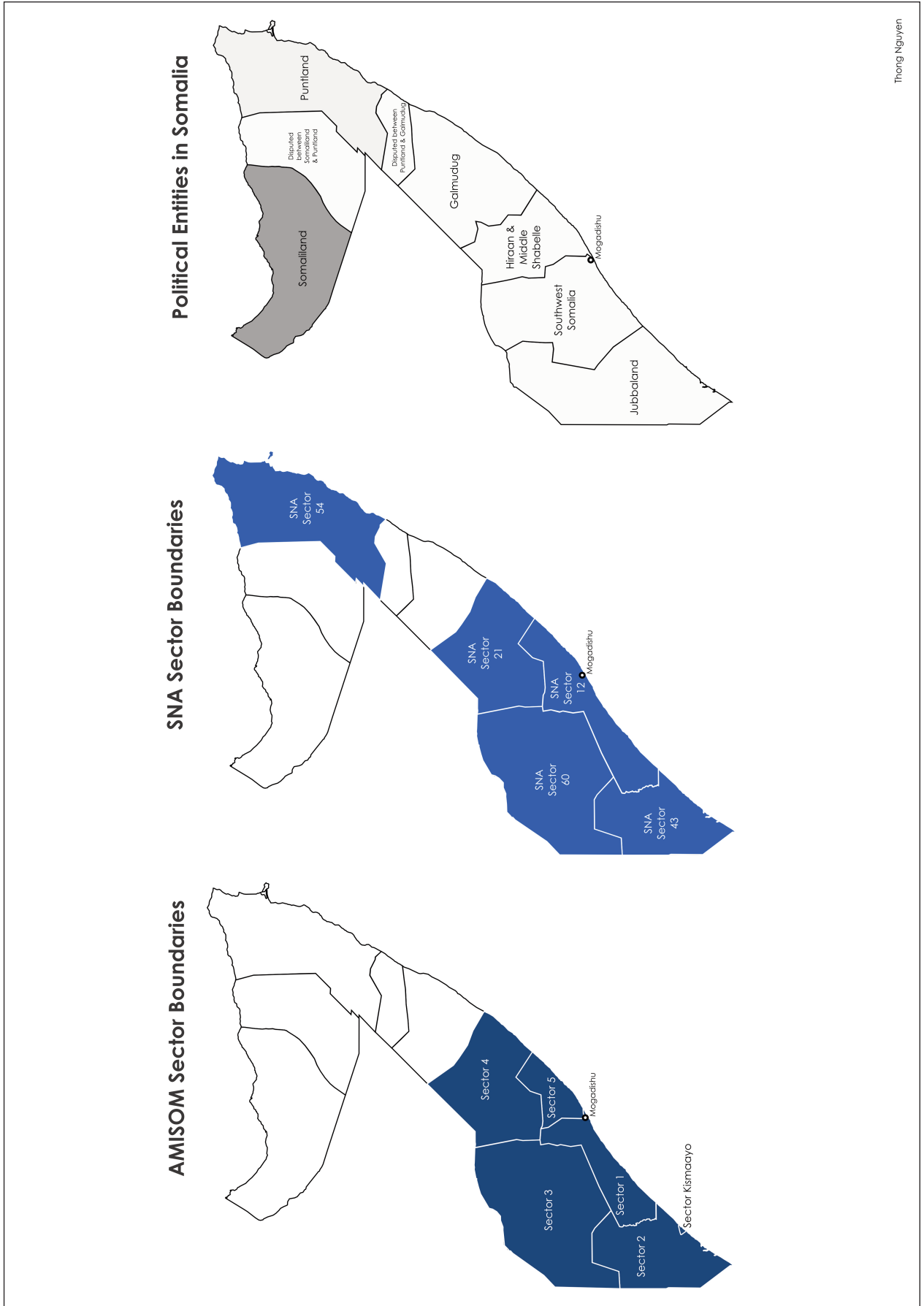
9 AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué 337 (October 11, 2012), AU Doc. PSC/PR/COMM(CCCXXXVII).

10 UN Security Council Resolution 2073 (November 7, 2012), UN Doc. S/RES/2073. Since 2009, the UN has provided a logistical support package to the AU mission via the UN Support Office to AMISOM (UNSOA). UNSOA covered the delivery of rations, fuel, general stores, and medical supplies; engineering and construction of important facilities; health and sanitation; medical evacuation and treatment services and medical equipment for AMISOM medical facilities; communications and information technology; information support services; aviation services for evacuations and troop rotations; vehicles and other equipment; and capacity building. UN support did not extend to the provision of ammunition, which continued to be arranged with bilateral partners.

11 AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué 356 (February 27, 2013), AU Doc. PSC/PR/COMM(CCCLVI).

12 At this stage, AMISOM had four sectors. Sector 1, centered on Mogadishu, was covered principally by troops from Uganda and Burundi. Sector 2 was headquartered in Kismayo in southwest Somalia and was principally covered by the re-hatted Kenyan force. Sector 3 centered on the town of Baidoa and comprised Ugandan and Burundian troops supported by Ethiopian forces operating outside of AMISOM. Sector 4 focused on the town of Belet Weyne northeast of Mogadishu and contained Djiboutian soldiers supported by Ethiopian forces operating outside of AMISOM.

Figure 2. Maps of Somalia



Mogadishu and to assist in developing the Somali Police Force, the AU Peace and Security Council also authorized AMISOM to deploy a 540-strong police component, primarily to Mogadishu but with a few individual police officers initially deployed to Belet Weyne and Baidoa. This move was also intended to signify and further promote a shift from military-security operations toward rule-of-law operations and to free up military personnel for redeployment to the sector locations.

To this end, AMISOM deployed two Formed Police Units from Uganda and Nigeria to Mogadishu in August and September 2012, respectively. They were intended to increase the prominence of public policing efforts and to partner with the Somali Police Force on routine patrols, cordon and search operations, roadblocks, and other measures designed to instill public confidence and empower policing efforts in the Somali capital. In addition, AMISOM slowly began relocating its civilian personnel from Nairobi to a small mission headquarters in Mogadishu, providing limited political affairs, civil affairs, humanitarian liaison, and public information capabilities. The AU intended to slowly transform AMISOM from a military fighting machine into a multidimensional peace support operation focused on supporting the stabilization efforts of the Somali authorities and providing much-needed support to the Somali security forces.

With the selection of a new Federal Government of Somalia, numerous international actors changed the optics of their approach, inasmuch as they were no longer dealing with a transitional government. Therefore, when the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2093 in March 2013, it gave the new Somali government more responsibility for the security and stabilization of areas recovered from al-Shabaab and moved AMISOM into more of a supporting role.¹³ A few months later, the UN also adjusted its approach to Somalia to take account of the new circumstances: it replaced UNPOS, which had primarily operated from Nairobi, with the larger UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), based in Mogadishu. UNSOM's

mandate was to provide good offices and support to the Somali government's peace and reconciliation efforts and to coordinate international support to the development of the Somali security sector.¹⁴

AL-SHABAAB'S SHIFTING STRATEGY

But the AU and the UN were not the only actors to adjust their strategies in line with the new political dispensation; al-Shabaab adapted too, and faster. Whereas al-Shabaab had engaged the TFG and AMISOM forces in conventional and urban combat operations in Mogadishu for almost five years, the loss of Mogadishu and the strategic towns of Baidoa, Belet Weyne, and Kismayo in 2011 and 2012 led it to swiftly change tactics. Rather than engage AMISOM and Somali National Army (SNA) forces directly, al-Shabaab switched to fighting a war of destabilization using principally asymmetric tactics. These tactics included hit-and-run and harassment attacks against the SNA, the Somali Police Force, and AMISOM bases and supply routes; assassinations; suicide bombings; improvised explosive devices (IEDs); grenade, mortar, and rocket attacks; and sniping. Al-Shabaab also stepped up its intimidation of government officials, security personnel, and, increasingly, the civilian population in areas under government control. Its ability to infiltrate the Somali security forces and intelligence services enabled it to be particularly effective.

In addition, while most al-Shabaab fighters had been expelled from the larger urban centers by mid-2013, the group often left behind sleeper cells (usually formed of personnel from its clandestine intelligence wing, Amniyat) and was still able to move freely across large swathes of south-central Somalia. This meant it could still exercise significant influence over local populations living in these areas and extract sufficient resources from them through taxation and other revenue streams—notably, illicit forms of commerce—to maintain highly effective operations against the Federal Government and AMISOM.¹⁵

The net result was that AMISOM and SNA forces became stretched across their area of operations, with vulnerable supply routes and remote forward

13 UN Security Council Resolution 2093 (March 6, 2013), UN Doc. S/RES/2093.

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

15 See, for example, Matt Bryden, "The Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab? Think Again," *Sahan Report*, April 2015, available at www.sahan.eu/wp-content/uploads/Bryden-Decline-and-Fall-of-Al-Shabaab.pdf.

operating bases, while al-Shabaab forces were displaced but not significantly degraded. By April 2013, shortly after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2093, AMISOM's Military Operations Coordination Committee had already recommended that the mission should not undertake any further expansion operations, as it had reached its operational limits and its capacity was overstretched.¹⁶

That same month, AMISOM issued its first mission-wide guidance on stabilization in the form of the *AMISOM Provisional Guidelines on Stabilisation*. These guidelines provided the mission's first definition of stabilization efforts as "any post-conflict/-combat activities undertaken in order to facilitate and promote early recovery of the population and institutions in a locality that has been recovered from Al Shabaab."¹⁷ Based on this definition, all mission components would be engaged in stabilization activities, with the military focused on securing areas under the control of al-Shabaab, the police working to enhance the rule of law and public order, and the civilian component undertaking activities "in support of the military gains in Somalia."¹⁸ The overall aim of the stabilization efforts was to support the Federal Government in promoting safety, security, reconciliation, and development of local governance to foster "normalcy" in the areas secured from al-Shabaab.

While the guidelines provided a useful definition and overall strategic direction for the mission, they did not provide guidance on how to implement these tasks. By default, this was left to a working group within AMISOM, which was tasked with initiating quick impact projects with a ceiling of \$10,000 each.

As AMISOM struggled to implement its stabilization agenda, a stalemate quickly developed: the Federal Government, with AMISOM support, controlled Mogadishu, Baidoa, Belet Weyne, Kismayo, and a few other strategic locations, while al-Shabaab controlled, and could move freely throughout, most of the remainder of south-central Somalia. While the government worked to deploy administrations and its own security forces to the

towns under its control, it was not able to access the majority of the Somali population, which remained under al-Shabaab control.

Al-Shabaab remained an active force capable of derailing efforts to forge a political agreement between the Federal Government and the newly emerging interim regional administrations, the regional units in Somalia's move toward federalism. Indeed, from early 2013, al-Shabaab's deliberate shift toward asymmetric warfare resulted in a significant deterioration of the security situation in south-central Somalia.

Al-Shabaab's income had initially dropped after it lost Bakara Market in Mogadishu in May 2011 and the strategic port of Kismayo in October 2012. Nonetheless, the militants retained control of a number of ports, their ability to tax the civilian population on their farms and along strategic transportation routes, and control of illicit trade in charcoal and sugar. Combined, these generated more than enough money to finance the group's activities. It was also enough to prevent the Federal Government from exerting its authority across Somalia and to frustrate most of AMISOM's initiatives to facilitate this authority.

A SURGE TO BREAK THE STALEMATE

To reduce the threat posed by al-Shabaab, and in line with the recommendations of a joint AU-UN benchmarking process, in late 2013 the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council authorized a temporary surge in the AMISOM force from 17,731 to 22,126 uniformed personnel for a period of 18–24 months.¹⁹ A new Concept of Operations (CONOPS) was developed for AMISOM on the assumption that the surge would enable it to expel al-Shabaab from its remaining strongholds, which, in turn, would enable stabilization programs to be implemented. The AU Peace and Security Council endorsed this CONOPS on January 23, 2014.

The new CONOPS envisaged a strategic end-state where a significantly weakened al-Shabaab would enable the Federal Government to expand its authority across the country and create a stable

16 Authors' confidential interviews, October 2013.

17 AMISOM, *Provisional Guidelines on Stabilisation Activities*, AMISOM internal document, 2013, p. 1.

18 Ibid., p. 1.

19 UN Security Council Resolution 2124 (November 12, 2013), UN Doc. S/RES/2124.

and secure Somalia whose citizens enjoyed access to justice and the rule of law.²⁰ To achieve this, AMISOM would pursue four strategic objectives:

1. Secure the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia by supporting the government's efforts to neutralize and weaken al-Shabaab and gradually expand its territorial control;
2. Enhance the capacity of defense and public safety institutions, enabling the Somali national security forces to develop the required capacity to take full responsibility for Somali security by 2020;
3. Support the establishment of effective governance by assisting existing institutions and establishing new ones in areas recovered from al-Shabaab; and
4. Facilitate the conduct of general elections scheduled for late 2016.²¹

The implementation of this strategy hinged on AMISOM and the SNA working side by side in joint operations to expand territorial control and then to provide security in these newly recovered areas. With the SNA still embryonic, this required AMISOM to place more emphasis on training and mentoring SNA forces in the initial phases so they could develop the necessary capabilities to conduct the expansion operations.

Accordingly, this strategy was to be implemented in four phases: (1) continuation of current operations while the surge capabilities were developed, the mission was reconfigured, and the SNA was trained; (2) expansion operations; (3) stabilization; and (4) handover of security responsibilities to Somali actors and drawdown.²² In effect, AMISOM's approach to stabilizing south-central Somalia strongly reflected the "clear-hold-build" counterinsurgency strategy developed by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, probably at least in part due to the role played by American and British advisers working closely with AMISOM and its troop-contributing countries (TCCs).

The assumptions were clear: AMISOM would work with the SNA to enhance its capacity and jointly conduct clearing operations in areas held by

al-Shabaab. The SNA and Somali Police Force, with AMISOM support, would then hold these areas while the government and other actors came in, established governance structures, and delivered tangible peace dividends. As the Somali security forces improved, AMISOM would hand over security responsibilities, freeing up forces for other activities as the mission increasingly slipped from a frontline into a supporting role. By January 2014, the surge forces had arrived, principally by officially integrating Ethiopian soldiers who were already deployed in Somalia (in AMISOM's sectors 3 and 4) into the mission. Now, the expansion operations could begin.

AMISOM's Expansion Operations: Ten Challenges

AMISOM's first expansion operation, Operation Eagle, commenced in March 2014, followed by a second wave of expansion under Operation Indian Ocean in August 2014. Combined, these operations drove al-Shabaab forces out of more than twenty towns across ten districts in south-central Somalia—an estimated 68 percent of the strategic locations al-Shabaab had controlled at the start of 2014.

Once again, al-Shabaab forces withdrew from most towns before the SNA and AMISOM arrived, nominally placing the newly secured districts under the control of the Federal Government. However, al-Shabaab often deliberately ransacked and booby-trapped the towns before leaving and retreated only so far as to be able to mount nightly raids, harass the main transportation routes, or blockade the towns entirely. As the expansion and stabilization operations continued, and as al-Shabaab continued to adapt and respond to them, ten major challenges quickly emerged. Combined, they severely undermined the military gains.

LACK OF A SHARED STABILIZATION STRATEGY

First, the Federal Government and AU did not have a shared stabilization strategy when AMISOM and the SNA launched their expansion opera-

20 AMISOM, *Revised Concept of Operations [CONOPS] for the African Union Mission in Somalia*, AU internal document, January 23, 2014, p. 4.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

tions.²³ Moreover, military priorities generally dictated other actions. The Federal Government, in anticipation of the expansion operations, had developed a stabilization plan by February 2014, one month before the start of Operation Eagle.²⁴ This plan was to be coordinated by Somalia's Ministry of the Interior and Federal Affairs. However, it was not effectively factored into the planning of military operations.²⁵ Military planning was thus undertaken largely in isolation from the stabilization planning undertaken by the Federal Government, the Somali Police Force, the AMISOM civilian and police components, UNSOM, the UN Country Team, and donors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Complicating matters further, many actors crucial to the stabilization efforts, in particular the UN Country Team, NGOs, and donors, were reluctant to be too closely associated with AMISOM. AMISOM was also reluctant to share its military planning with other actors, given the need to maintain operational security. As such, joint planning both within AMISOM and between AMISOM and other actors proved very difficult. Communication and coordination were often weak, and establishing priorities and delivering support to areas recovered from al-Shabaab proved challenging. This combination of factors left all other actors scrambling to coordinate their stabilization plans and responses after the military campaign had started.

LAG IN NON-MILITARY RESPONSES

Second, the speed of military operations far outpaced the speed of other stabilization responses. The Federal Government's stabilization plan, for instance, provided for the immediate deployment of caretaker administrations in recovered districts, followed by an inclusive local process to agree on interim administrations, which in turn would prepare and facilitate agreement on permanent administrations. The plan also called for support to local-level social and political reconciliation processes and peace dividend projects. In terms of local-level security, the plan called for the recruitment of community volunteers to work with a

limited number of trained police.

However, when the first towns were secured, the caretaker administrations had not even been selected or trained, and they were generally deployed several weeks or months after locations had been secured. In some cases, this raised serious tensions between local communities that had appointed their own interim administrations and the government-appointed administrations. In addition, when government security forces did deploy, their arrival sometimes raised tensions with local populations and militias and, in several instances, resulted in the outbreak of new conflicts. Thus, as the expansion operations ended, they left a very unequal degree of governance and security in the locations recovered from al-Shabaab.

SEPARATION OF SECURITY AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

A third challenge was that the security and political dimensions of the surge and the resultant stabilization operations were separated from one another. Since AMISOM's initial deployment, the division of labor between the AU and the UN had been clear. The AU, through AMISOM, was to take the lead on security operations—protecting the TFG and then the Federal Government, enhancing the capabilities of the Somali security forces, and undertaking joint operations with them against al-Shabaab. The UN, working first through UNPOS and then through UNSOM, was to lead on the political side—providing good offices and engaging with the TFG to support the transition to the Federal Government, supporting the development of regional and local authorities, supporting the consolidation of the state and state authority, and coordinating international assistance to the Somali security sector. This division of labor—at times explicit, sometimes less so—was based on an understanding of comparative advantage: it was thought that the AU was best placed to conduct enforcement operations in a highly volatile and dangerous context, while the UN was best placed to act as guarantor of the political process (i.e., supporting implementation of federalism as set out in Somalia's provisional constitution and encour-

23 It is important to note that, throughout the subsequent expansion operations, the SNA had no troops in AMISOM's sector 2 because of disputes with the leadership over what in 2013 became the Jubaland Interim Administration.

24 Federal Government of Somalia, *Stabilization Project Strategy*, version 30, August 2014.

25 AMISOM, *Operation Eagle after Action Review Workshop: Stabilisation of Recovered Areas, Gender and Human Rights. Report of Working Group 4*, AMISOM internal document, May 30, 2015.

aging reconciliation).

While this approach proved quite successful in the initial years of engagement in Somalia, it was highly problematic during the expansion and stabilization phase after late 2013. AMISOM and the SNA were rapidly expanding their military operations across south-central Somalia, while the UN focused its political engagement primarily on the Federal Government in Mogadishu and the regional administrations emerging around Baidoa, Belet Weyne, and Kismayo. Thus, while the UN remained engaged at the federal and regional levels, AMISOM military operations were increasingly engaging at the local level without the necessary linkages to the regional and federal political processes.

In addition, while the UN also worked in Puntland and Somaliland, AMISOM's engagement was limited to south-central Somalia, which caused significant challenges when al-Shabaab started moving forces into Puntland while developing a strong presence in Kenya. Thus, while the UN was able to operate politically in Puntland, there was no equivalent security cooperation to address the expanding threat posed by al-Shabaab. As both the security and the political operations in Somalia evolved along different trajectories, significant gaps arose and became increasingly difficult to bridge.

FRAGMENTED COMMAND AND CONTROL

A fragmented system of command and control, combined with weak multidimensionality, was AMISOM's fourth major challenge. As AMISOM was a war-fighting operation, it was not surprising that its multinational Force Headquarters would not exercise real operational control over the TCCs; this is to be expected in war-fighting coalitions where force headquarters focus on providing overall strategic command and direction and facilitating effective coordination between the national contingents.

In AMISOM's case, however, even these functions were limited, with the Force Headquarters in Mogadishu having limited influence on the actions of the TCCs in their respective sectors. During AMISOM's early years, this limited influence was exacerbated by the weak political leadership demonstrated by successive heads of the mission (the AU special representa-

tives of the chairperson of the Commission. This left a succession of AMISOM force commanders as the primary political points of contact with the TFG and then the Federal Government in Mogadishu. Nevertheless, AMISOM's military leadership in Mogadishu only ever held a coordinating, as opposed to a commanding, role over the operation after it expanded beyond the city.

Accordingly, the pace of operations, and the actions of the individual TCCs within their respective sectors, proved challenging to coordinate, let alone control. This had a particularly direct and counterproductive military effect by offering al-Shabaab relative sanctuary in the frontier areas between AMISOM's sector boundaries. Al-Shabaab quickly exploited the inability of AMISOM's different TCCs to coordinate cross-sector operations, with a legacy that lingers to this day.

With regard to AMISOM's stabilization agenda, the fragmented command-and-control system was compounded by the military-heavy nature of the mission; it had a relatively small police component of 540 officers and an even smaller civilian component of fewer than 100 international and national staff. Setting up a multidimensional mission headquarters following five years of an exclusively military presence in Mogadishu proved challenging. Integrating civilian and police personnel into AMISOM operations proved equally daunting. As such, the civilian and police components of AMISOM, more often than not, either worked in isolation from their military counterparts or scrambled to respond to the outcomes of the military operations. Effectively cooperating and coordinating with the Federal Government, UNSOM, and the UN Country Team on stabilization programs thus became even more challenging as well.

RESILIENCE OF AL-SHABAAB

Fifth, the expansion operations were not able to significantly degrade al-Shabaab's key fighting capabilities. Instead of engaging the advancing SNA and AMISOM forces, al-Shabaab fighters melted into the population, drew back, or redeployed elsewhere in Somalia, heading as far north as the Galgala mountains in Puntland, where they established new bases and training camps. The number of al-Shabaab fighters captured or killed

remained low, and al-Shabaab military equipment was rarely seized or destroyed. Having retreated, al-Shabaab fighters often set up camp several kilometers outside the recovered towns, then returned to harass them with raids and set up roadblocks and taxation points along the entry routes to continue controlling the local population. Al-Shabaab was also able to harass AMISOM's supply routes, using a combination of IEDs and ambush attacks. When Operations Eagle and Indian Ocean concluded in late 2014, al-Shabaab's fighting capabilities had barely been degraded. Moreover, al-Shabaab continued to recruit and train new fighters, increasingly from Kenya.

NON-ARRIVAL OF FORCE ENABLERS

Sixth, the force enablers and multipliers that AMISOM desperately needed never arrived. Based on plans for the surge and the 2014 CONOPS, AMISOM's military strength would rise to 21,586 personnel (an increase of 4,395), while its police component would remain at 540 personnel, including 120 individual police officers and three 140-person Formed Police Units. In addition to 2,550 additional combat troops, the surge of military personnel was authorized to include critical enablers: a 220-person training team, a 190-person engineering unit, a 117-person signals unit, a 312-person port security unit, a 1,000-person logistics unit, and a 6-person civilian casualty tracking, analysis, and response cell. However, while Ethiopia provided three additional 2,550-person infantry battalions and a 220-person training team, the remaining enablers either were not deployed or were deployed as TCC assets rather than mission assets.

Regarding the police, the number of individual police officers was reduced in preparation for the deployment of a third Formed Police Unit to further support the transition to policing operations in either Mogadishu or Kismayo. This unit did not arrive as planned, however, temporarily reducing AMISOM's overall policing capacity. Regarding civilian capacity, the AU struggled to recruit the additional civilian personnel authorized in 2013 to reinforce the mission headquarters in Mogadishu and deploy to

the sector headquarters and areas recently recovered from al-Shabaab. In effect, between 2014 and 2015, there was no tangible increase of civilian personnel in AMISOM. As such, even after the surge, AMISOM was configured neither for conducting expansion operations nor for undertaking or supporting the planned stabilization tasks.

It is important to note that AMISOM had to conduct these offensive operations without a single military attack helicopter. In 2012, UN Security Council Resolution 2036 had authorized an aviation component of twelve military helicopters for AMISOM.²⁶ AMISOM lost the scheduled provision of six Ugandan military helicopters when, in August 2012, three of them crashed on the slopes of Mount Kenya while en route to Somalia.²⁷ These helicopters would have been incredibly useful, including by offering a means to rapidly strike al-Shabaab (and hence degrade some of its key combat capabilities), providing air cover for troops, escorting convoys, enabling rapid response to attacks, flying rescue/evacuation missions, and airdropping forces. Without them, AMISOM was badly under-resourced, especially in the context of al-Shabaab's shift to asymmetric operations.

CONTINUED INSECURITY OF THE SOMALI POPULATION

These challenges also led to a seventh major problem: the expansion operations did not tangibly increase security, or perceptions of security, for the Somali civilian population. Indeed, the joint SNA and AMISOM offensives indirectly increased the level of violence in several locations by pushing out al-Shabaab and leaving a power vacuum in its wake. Such situations were worsened by central and regional authorities failing to match the military effort with rapid deployment of interim administrations that could deliver basic services to the local populations. Clan violence, largely over leadership and resources, often reemerged as a significant threat, particularly in the newly recovered areas. The beginning of 2015 saw consistently high rates of clan violence, increased humanitarian challenges, political marginalization of less powerful clans, and clan-related conflict

²⁶ UN Security Council Resolution 2036 (February 22, 2012), UN Doc. S/RES/2036, OP para. 6.

²⁷ Uganda had signed a letter of assist with the AU and UN to deploy three attack/tactical helicopters, two utility helicopters, and one medevac helicopter to AMISOM.

over power and resources.

Throughout these areas, Somali civilians continued to bear the brunt of the violence. In 2014, for example, an estimated two-thirds of all casualties from IED incidents were civilians.²⁸ Civilians also suffered from predatory behavior by al-Shabaab, the SNA, and clan militias, ranging from illegal taxation and checkpoints to criminality to increased human rights abuses. In perhaps the worst-case scenario, AMISOM and the SNA sometimes vacated towns they had recovered from al-Shabaab, leaving civil administrators and ordinary citizens who had cooperated with them particularly vulnerable to reprisals.

DIFFICULTY BRINGING PEACE DIVIDENDS

This continued insecurity was compounded by an eighth challenge: the Federal Government and AMISOM's struggle to bring peace dividends to the growing civilian population coming under their control. Al-Shabaab increasingly resorted to destroying critical infrastructure when abandoning towns, taking generators and water pumps with them, blowing up wells, destroying bridges, ransacking medical facilities and schools, and even removing doors from prison cells. In al-Shabaab's former headquarters of Barawe, militants completely gutted the hospital of its equipment, leaving a single SNA mobile clinic as the only medical facility available to the local population.²⁹

Once AMISOM and government forces had entered a town, al-Shabaab worked to blockade it, preventing all access by road and ensuring that goods could not enter and people could not exit. AMISOM did not have the necessary forces to picket the roads or conduct regular convoys, and thus in many instances the only option was to deliver supplies for the mission and humanitarian assistance by air. This made humanitarian operations very costly and slow, given the small number of helicopters operated by the UN. In many locations, al-Shabaab also cut off farmers' access to their fields. As shortages of food and medical supplies rose, so too did the frustration of the civilian population.

The conduct of hearts-and-minds activities was

also constrained by three factors. First, AMISOM had very limited civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) capacity, with only a small CIMIC office at the Force Headquarters in Mogadishu and a handful of CIMIC officers in each sector. Second, the mission had a tiny budget for CIMIC and hearts-and-minds activities. Third, the AU did not have adequate systems and procedures in place for AMISOM to assess local needs, identify relevant quick impact projects, and deliver those projects on the ground. Projects were slow to be implemented, in some cases taking well over two years to complete, leading to frustration on all sides. Numerous attempts to streamline projects, work directly with bilateral donors, and work through the UN procurement system led to marginal improvements. However, AMISOM's ability to conduct hearts-and-minds operations was not commensurate with the pace and scale of its military operations, especially in a context where it was recovering areas that had been under al-Shabaab control for a relatively long period, in some cases almost ten years.

RIFTS BETWEEN ASSUMPTIONS AND REALITY

A ninth challenge was that a key assumption underpinning the security strategy developed for the surge proved faulty. The temporary AMISOM surge endorsed by the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council assumed that the SNA would be able to play a supporting and then leading role in the fight against al-Shabaab. As Somali forces assumed greater responsibility in the recovered areas, so the thinking went, AMISOM could move into a supporting role that would free up AU forces for other tasks.

In reality, training, arming, and supporting the SNA forces proved challenging, which limited their operational capabilities. Often, AMISOM operations had to be slowed down or scrapped altogether when the SNA could not match their pace. The SNA's weaknesses stemmed from technical and infrastructural gaps and problems related to command and control, clan dynamics, and political leadership, which further eroded AMISOM's effectiveness.³⁰

28 Author's confidential interview, April 2015.

29 Author's confidential interview, November 2014.

30 For more details, see Paul D. Williams, "AMISOM under Review," *RUSI Journal* 161, no. 1 (2016).

DIFFICULTY PROVIDING LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

Finally, providing logistical support to the expansion operations was very difficult. The logistical support package for AMISOM and, later, for SNA forces working directly with AMISOM was the responsibility of the UN Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA). The mutually agreed concept of joint AU-UN logistical support had been based on an integrated civilian and military supply chain; UNSOA would be responsible for delivering to AMISOM sector headquarters, and AMISOM would be responsible for first-line support from the sector headquarters to forward operating bases. To facilitate this support, UN Security Council Resolution 2124 had authorized the deployment of critical enabling units as part of the temporary surge, including aviation assets and a transportation company. However, critical shortfalls quickly arose when these enablers never arrived, al-Shabaab consistently attacked the main supply routes, and UNSOA's own budget constraints led to gaps in the logistics chain.

As a result, logistical support could not keep pace with the expansion operations. This was entirely predictable, given that UNSOA had always struggled to apply UN rules, regulations, and ratios designed for standard UN peacekeeping operations to a rapidly expanding offensive campaign in an extremely hostile environment. In its war-fighting and stabilization mode, AMISOM's consumption rate of everything from tires for armored vehicles to blood supplies and coffins far surpassed that of any mission the UN had ever before supported. Moreover, UNSOA had a budget approximately one-third of that typically authorized for a UN peacekeeping operation of equivalent size. Critically, when the AMISOM surge and a support package for the SNA were authorized, the support package for UNSOA, which was designed to provide the logistical support to these operations, was left unchanged.³¹

As the expansion operations drew to a close in late 2014, three facts became increasingly evident. First, while the military operations against al-Shabaab had displaced most of its fighters from numerous

urban centers and enabled the Federal Government to expand its geographic reach, they had not sufficiently diminished the threat posed by al-Shabaab. Consequently, security—and public perceptions of security—had not improved significantly, and levels of violence in south-central Somalia as a whole had increased during this period. Second, the military gains could not be significantly consolidated due to the challenges highlighted above. This undermined the progress achieved through expansion operations. Third, AMISOM had once again reached its operational limits. Having rapidly expanded its number of small forward operating bases throughout 2014, the mission (and UNSOA) now struggled to support its sprawling presence across south-central Somalia.

AMISOM's Consolidation Operations: From “Clear-Hold-Build” to “Hold-Protect-Stabilize”

A NEW STRATEGY FOR AMISOM

In November 2014, AMISOM temporarily halted expansion operations and moved into consolidation mode with Operation Ocean Build. Through this operation, AMISOM aimed to maintain and build upon the successes of earlier expansion operations by focusing on stabilization, particularly in areas recently recovered from al-Shabaab. The plan was for stabilization to occur before any further offensive operations in order to relieve suffering, win the consent of the local population, and extend the authority of the Federal Government.³²

With Operation Ocean Build, AMISOM's strategy shifted from a “clear-hold-build” approach to a “hold-protect-build” approach. This new approach more strongly emphasized consolidating and stabilizing the areas now under the mission's control. The intent was to promote stabilization by holding the key population centers and protecting their inhabitants, as well as by enhancing security of movement along the main supply routes. This would enable the Federal Government, the UN,

31 For additional details, see United Nations, Letter from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council, UN Doc. S/2015/762, October 7, 2015.

32 AMISOM Operations Order 08/2014, *Operation Ocean Build*, November 2014, p. 4.

and NGOs to project security, governance, and humanitarian assistance and the subsequent peace dividends. AMISOM was also to devote more attention to improving the SNA's ability to support the Federal Government and contribute to joint operations with AMISOM. Importantly, the approach also emphasized monitoring clan conflicts, which had sometimes erupted after al-Shabaab forces withdrew. In the event of clan conflict, the Federal Government was to mediate and attempt to resolve tensions as quickly as possible. Operation Ocean Build envisaged an end-state where the newly recovered areas were stabilized and their local populations protected, thus paving the way for further offensive operations against al-Shabaab.³³

While Operation Ocean Build was underway, the AU and UN conducted a second joint benchmarking exercise in April 2015. This exercise was tasked with assessing the progress made during AMISOM's expansion operations and recommending options for the way forward to the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council. The AU-UN team recommended to both councils that they extend the surge period based on a strategy of three interlocking objectives:

1. Enabling the political process to move at varying speeds at the national, regional, and local levels;
2. Restarting offensive operations against al-Shabaab as soon as possible, while maintaining flexible offensive capabilities; and
3. Enabling consolidation efforts.

To achieve these objectives, the AU-UN team recommended making AMISOM more efficient, including by bringing in the already authorized but absent enablers and multipliers, placing greater attention on developing the SNA's capacity, and better supporting the Federal Government to extend its authority through regional and local administrations. It also recommended securing the main supply routes, both to better facilitate logistical support to AMISOM and the SNA and to enhance access by the civilian population, the

government, humanitarian actors, and others to the areas recovered from al-Shabaab. Moreover, the team recommended supporting this agenda by making UNSOA's support package more efficient.³⁴

Both the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council endorsed this new strategy for AMISOM in mid-2015.³⁵ Preparations for launching the next wave of offensive operations were then set in motion. These partly involved enhancing support to the SNA. After March 2015, this meant supporting the Federal Government's Guulwade [Victory] Plan—a roadmap to a better trained, equipped, and supported SNA.³⁶

Efforts were also put in place to enhance the Somali Police Force through the Federal Government's Heegan [Readiness] Plan, launched in June 2015. The initial focus was on developing police forces in Southwest and Jubaland States with AMISOM and UNSOM support. AMISOM and UNSOM also commenced planning for the establishment of joint civilian teams in sector locations to better leverage their respective comparative advantages and better align support to the government's stabilization plan and the New Deal Compact for Somalia. At the same time, a process to review UNSOA was initiated to assess options for strengthening its support to AMISOM, UNSOM, and parts of the SNA.

AL-SHABAAB STRIKES

Before these efforts could gain much traction and the renewed offensive could be initiated, al-Shabaab struck. On June 25, 2015, its forces overran an AMISOM forward operating base in Leego, killing fifty-four (mostly Burundian) soldiers and taking equipment, arms, and ammunition. One month later, the Ethiopian and Kenyan contingents of AMISOM, working jointly with their SNA counterparts, launched Operation Juba Corridor, designed to push al-Shabaab out of its remaining strongholds in the Gedo, Bakool, and Bay regions of Somalia between the Ethiopian and Kenyan borders. This operation's official objectives were to “destroy, secure, consolidate and enhance the stabilization process.”³⁷

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Authors' communications with members of the AU-UN benchmarking team.

³⁵ AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué 521 (June 30, 2015), AU Doc. PSC/PR/COMM(DXXI); UN Security Council Resolution 2232 (July 28, 2015), UN Doc. S/RES/2232.

³⁶ The plan was endorsed by Somalia's National Security Council on March 31, 2015.

³⁷ AMISOM Operations Order 01/2015, Operation Juba Corridor, June 2015, pp. 8–10.

While initially suffering heavy casualties and loss of territory, al-Shabaab quickly regrouped, increasing its attacks on government installations and public venues such as hotels and cafés in Mogadishu. On September 1st, the anniversary of the death of former al-Shabaab Emir Ahmed Godane in a US missile strike, al-Shabaab overran another AMISOM forward operating base in Janaale, killing an estimated nineteen Ugandan soldiers and taking an unknown number of hostages.

SHIFTING THE AMISOM STRATEGY AGAIN

In October 2015, a new CONOPS for AMISOM once again adjusted the mission's strategic objectives. First, AMISOM would continue offensive operations against remaining al-Shabaab strongholds. Second, it would work to enable political processes at all levels, including by providing security to these processes. And third, AMISOM would enable stabilization efforts and deliver programs to the Somali population to facilitate wider peacebuilding and reconciliation, including by gradually handing over security responsibilities to the SNA and, subsequently, to the Somali Police Force.³⁸

AMISOM was to achieve these objectives in four phases. First, until the end of 2015, it would continue its current operations while simultaneously generating the critical missing enablers and multipliers and reconfiguring the mission. Second, AMISOM would wind down its expansion operations. Third, it would launch a new phase of stabilization and consolidation. Finally, it would gradually hand over security responsibilities to Somali forces in preparation for the elections planned for late 2016.³⁹

AMISOM also revised its mission support structures. The review of UNSOA had concluded that it was chronically under-resourced. Despite having pioneered innovative mechanisms that had significantly improved the effectiveness of AMISOM and UNSOM, UNSOA could not deliver on all the demands made of it.⁴⁰ In line with the review's findings, the UN Security Council adopted

Resolution 2245 in November 2015, transforming UNSOA into the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS). Under its new mandate, UNSOS would provide more targeted support to AMISOM and bridge gaps left by the TCCs in limited areas.

The Security Council also noted that the delivery of supplies and services should take into account the tempo of AMISOM's operations and other relevant factors that made the AU mission unlike any "blue helmet" UN peacekeeping operation. The council further agreed with the UN secretary-general's assessment that, although the SNA and Somali Police Force needed more support, and support should also be provided to security forces in Puntland (where al-Shabaab was now operating), the UN was not the correct entity to provide such support.⁴¹

By the end of 2015, AMISOM was simultaneously continuing its expansion operations in the Bay, Bakool, and Gedo regions of south-central Somalia and attempting to mobilize the enablers and multipliers that had been authorized years earlier. It was also trying to reconfigure itself from a war-fighting to a stabilization force. Moreover, AMISOM, the UN, and donors were trying to boost the SNA's ability to play the role envisaged for it (i.e., taking the lead in securing Somalia within the framework of the Gulwaade Plan). AMISOM and UNSOM were also working to enhance the capacity of the Somali Police Force in Mogadishu and to support the development of local policing capabilities in Southwest and Jubaland States. The civilian components of AMISOM and UNSOM also continued to support the Federal Government's stabilization plan, though resources and capacity to do so were limited.

AMISOM also worked to provide better security along its main supply routes to improve access to the areas recovered from al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab continued to pose a serious threat to the civilian population, the government, and the international presence in Somalia. Clan conflicts, violent disputes over resources, and predatory behavior by many armed actors all contributed to a highly

38 AMISOM, *Harmonised Strategic Concept of Operations [CONOPS] for the African Union Mission in Somalia*, AU internal document, October 2015, p. 6.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

40 United Nations, Letter from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council, UN Doc. S/2015/762, October 7, 2015, p. 4.

41 UN Security Council Resolution 2245 (November 9, 2015), UN Doc. S/RES/2245.

insecure environment in Somalia and, in some instances, to an escalation of conflict. Increasingly, AMISOM struggled to conduct effective offensive operations against al-Shabaab, which expanded its area of geographic control, and to provide security and support to stabilization programs in recovered areas while securing and supporting its own forces.

This was demonstrated most tragically on January 15, 2016, when al-Shabaab overran a third AMISOM forward operating base at El Adde in Somalia's Gedo region near the Kenyan border.⁴² More than 100 Kenyan soldiers were killed in probably the deadliest day for AMISOM since its deployment in 2007. This and other al-Shabaab attacks highlight that, although the militants are no longer a major political force in debates about Somalia's process of federal governance, they remain capable of waging a deadly war of destabilization and harassment in both Somalia and Kenya and of destabilizing political and security processes.

At the start of 2016, AMISOM was simultaneously working to expand, strike al-Shabaab, reconfigure, hold recovered towns, and stabilize these towns, despite not being configured, equipped, financed, or supported to carry out any of these tasks fully. Whether AMISOM can diminish the threat posed by al-Shabaab and deliver stabilization dividends in preparation for the selection of a new government planned for late 2016 will prove to be a major test of the mission's credibility.

Lessons Learned from AMISOM's Experience

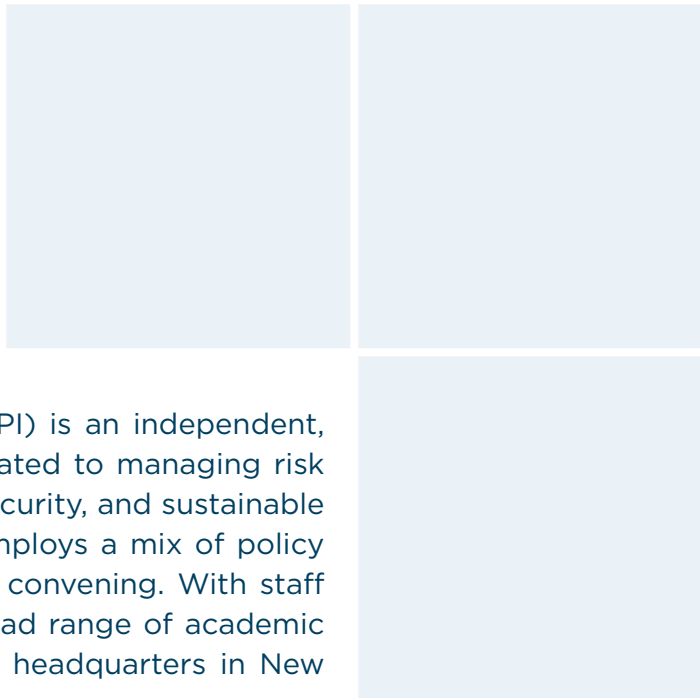
1. **Missions must be appropriately configured to fulfill their mandate:** A military-heavy mission cannot be expected to deliver stabilization, which requires significant police and civilian capabilities. Moreover, a mission configured to undertake offensive operations and counter-terrorism tasks will not be well suited to implementing stabilization programs. Peace operations will struggle to fully succeed if they are not given appropriate means to achieve their mandated tasks. AMISOM was forced to
- operate for years without some critical enablers and multipliers that rendered it almost impossible to significantly degrade al-Shabaab's main combat forces.
2. **The political and military elements of a stabilization strategy must be in sync:** Successful stabilization requires military actions that support a viable political strategy. This will be very difficult to achieve if the military and the political dimensions of stabilization are separated from one another and carried out by different, uncoordinated actors. Developing the security sector is not an apolitical task, and ensuring nonviolent political processes requires a degree of security engagement.
3. **Extending state authority is not synonymous with peacebuilding, at least in the short term:** A peace operation mandated to extend state authority in a context where the state is not widely accepted as legitimate will not always be viewed as an impartial force. In such circumstances, extending state authority is likely to generate conflict. Success will therefore depend on the ability to conduct effective reconciliation and peacebuilding processes with aggrieved actors at the same time as extending state authority.
4. **Territorial expansion is less important than degrading the capabilities of spoilers:** Stabilization efforts focused on expanding territory and denying the opponent territorial control are unlikely to work where the opponent adopts asymmetric tactics. Extending a mission's responsibilities over new territory without degrading the opponent's combat capabilities risks overextending mission forces and leaving supply routes increasingly vulnerable. The opponent may simply adapt to losing territory by becoming more mobile and flexible. Mission planning and resource allocation should therefore focus on separating opponents from the local population and degrading their combat capabilities rather than traditional objectives of territorial control.
5. **Strategic coordination among relevant partners is a crucial, mainly political task:** Implementing complex stabilization agendas

⁴² Paul D. Williams, "Three Things We Learned from Last Week's al-Shabaab Attack in Somalia," *Washington Post*, January 19, 2016, available at www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/01/19/three-things-we-learned-from-last-weeks-al-shabaab-attack-in-somalia/.

involving numerous partners in the face of concerted hostility from some local actors requires strategic coordination. This coordination is principally a political question of developing shared planning assumptions, threat analysis, and operational responses. Moreover, where missions engage in essentially war-fighting activities, the headquarters of multinational forces are unlikely to exercise real command and control over TCCs. Instead, their principal function should be ensuring unified political leadership and strategic coordination among the TCCs.

6. **Lack of coordination can have negative political and military effects:** The lack of coordination between some of AMISOM's TCCs had significant negative political and military effects. The inability of the Force Headquarters to ensure that all of AMISOM's TCCs followed the mission's mandate led many Somalis to view the mission in a negative light as providing cover for rogue TCCs. In military terms, when a mission loses local support, its personnel, particularly those in exposed forward operating bases, become especially vulnerable to attack. Moreover, lack of coordination between some of AMISOM's TCCs prevented the execution of cross-sector operations, which enabled al-Shabaab fighters to find sanctuary in the boundaries between AMISOM's sectors.
7. **Effective stabilization requires positive relationships between the peacekeepers and the local population:** Implementing complex stabilization agendas requires the support of local populations. Locals are best placed to identify insurgents and inform a peace operation of militants' movements and routines. Peacekeepers who do not develop positive relationships with local populations risk, at best, operating without optimal information and, at worst, driving locals to collaborate with the insurgents. To date, AMISOM's experience with small forward operating bases has not always provided a good model for forging positive ties with the local populations—nor has its decision to withdraw from some settlements recently recovered from al-Shabaab. The role of effective and trusted public communications also cannot be underestimated.
8. **There can be no successful exit without building capable, legitimate, and inclusive national security forces:**⁴³ For too long, AMISOM's international partners put too little emphasis on building effective Somali national security forces. Sometimes donors were reluctant to invest much money, and sometimes the UN Security Council was unwilling to authorize UN support where it was needed most. Furthermore, when mechanisms were developed to build local security forces, they tended to put technical aspects above the need to forge a political settlement between the Federal Government and the interim regional administrations about how best to build a legitimate and inclusive national army out of the many armed groups scattered across Somalia. Without consensus on a national security strategy or a shared vision for how to undertake the required military integration, Somalia cannot build multi-clan units and generate multi-clan support—it can only build multiple regional or clan-based armies.
9. **UN organizational frameworks and bureaucratic culture are not suited to supporting war-fighting operations:** It is never ideal to separate military commanders from their logistical support, as has been the case in AMISOM. The establishment of UNSOA had a major positive impact on AMISOM's logistical capabilities, but it was always apparent that the UN's organizational culture, technical frameworks, and procurement rules would be insufficient to meet all of AMISOM's needs. This put UNSOA personnel in an impossible situation. When AMISOM operated in just one city (until early 2012), UNSOA could just about cover over most of the cracks. But when AMISOM's area of operations was extended across the whole of south-central Somalia, UNSOA was exposed as a chronically under-resourced mission that was not suited to operating in such an insecure environment. If peace operations are given war-fighting mandates, their personnel should rightly expect appropriate logistical support.

⁴³ For details, see Paul D. Williams with Abdirashid Hashi, *Exit Strategy Challenges for the AU Mission in Somalia*, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, February 2016, available at www.heritageinstitute.org/exit-strategy-challenges-for-the-au-mission-in-somalia/.



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