

Issue #  
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**Security Dialogue for East Africa:**  
Insights & Perspectives

# Assessing the Viability of the Troop Drawdown in Somalia's Peacekeeping Mission

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Implications for Somalia and  
Troop Contributing Countries

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Source: <https://atmis-au.org>

# Summary

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The drawdown of troops in the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) is underway, where the last batch of the once 26,000 strong force will leave in December 2024. As a result, there is an ongoing debate on the viability of the drawdown, with constant questions on the readiness of the Somali National Army (SNA) and the unrelenting threat posed by the terrorist group Al-Shabaab. Uganda, the largest troop contributing country (TCC), is advising Somalia and other stakeholders to tread carefully because it has a unique appreciation of Somalia's security dynamics having set foot there in 2007 as the first troop contingent.

Somalia believes it is time to take charge of its own security and some international partners also agree. However, the memories of the Taliban taking over Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, days after US troops left the country, are still fresh in the minds of everyone involved in such missions. In the same vein, there is recognition that the peacekeeping mission has had its time, and it is now in order for a new dispensation as was seen through the recalibration of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) into one fostering a transition (ATMIS). In Uganda, the calls for troop withdrawal were

reinvigorated by the al-Shabaab attack on a Ugandan forward operating base (FOB) in May 2023 which claimed 54 soldiers. By the end of 2023, an estimated 9,000 troops had been dispatched from duty, and the drawdown is on course for the final withdrawal by December 2024. This paper is an assessment of the viability of the withdrawal of peacekeepers in Somalia and the readiness of the Somali National Army to independently manage the security affairs of Somalia.

# Acronyms

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|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>AU</b>        | Africa Union                                |
| <b>AMISOM</b>    | African Union Mission in Somalia            |
| <b>ATMIS</b>     | African Union Transition Mission in Somalia |
| <b>EU</b>        | European Union                              |
| <b>FGS</b>       | Federal Government of Somalia               |
| <b>FOB</b>       | Forward Operating Base                      |
| <b>RUSI</b>      | Royal United Services Institute             |
| <b>SNA</b>       | Somali National Army                        |
| <b>TCC</b>       | Troop Contributing Country                  |
| <b>UNSC</b>      | United Nations Security Council             |
| <b>UPDF</b>      | Uganda People's Defence Forces              |
| <b>USAFRICOM</b> | United States Africa Command                |



# Introduction

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At the end of June 2023, ATMIS withdrew 2,000 troops from Somalia as part of the troop drawdown stipulated in UN Security Council Resolutions number 2628, 2670 and 2687. By the end of December 2023, a total of 9,000 ATMIS troops had been withdrawn. The last batch of troops is scheduled to leave in December 2024. This would fulfil the objectives of the transition mission as it was envisioned on 1 April 2022. At its peak, the mission had 26,000 personnel, 6,223 of whom were Ugandan.

ATMIS took over from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) after authorisation by the African Union Peace and Security Council and mandated by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2628 (2022). AMISOM was set up in 2007 with Uganda and Burundi as the initial TCCs.<sup>1</sup> There was reckoning over time for AMISOM to let Somalia take up its own security responsibilities which laid out a path for a transition process named ATMIS. Since then, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), the African Union (AU) and international partners like the European Union (EU), and the United Nations have been working together in pursuit of this aim. The transition is happening in the backdrop of the ever-present al-Shabaab which poses a constant threat to the security and stability

of Somalia. This is the dilemma at the heart of the drawdown for ATMIS: to leave or not to leave Somalia.

In June 2023 as ATMIS was handing over some FOBs to the Somali Army, al-Shabaab was passing out a new generation of fighters; reinforcing the hard choices that the FGS and ATMIS have to make. At the end of July 2023, ATMIS military commanders held meetings to evaluate the first phase of the troop withdrawal. They discussed the general security situation; the transition impact, capacity, and capabilities for subsequent operations.<sup>2</sup>

This paper examines the viability of the troop drawdown amid the lingering weakness of Somali security forces and the general security landscape in the Horn of Africa. It unpacks why the FGS wants the drawdown to happen; the challenges faced and the readiness of the country to deal with what lies ahead. Whereas some members of ATMIS feel the transition process should proceed with caution because Somalia is not adequately prepared, other Somali government officials and international partners feel the time is up for the mission. In this, the centrality of Uganda to ATMIS, the drawdown and Somalia's security concerns are highlighted.

## Gains of ATMIS

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In the second year since its creation in April 2022, ATMIS has been able to register a number of accomplishments as it hands over the baton to Somalia. Key to that has been preserving the gains of AMISOM such as keeping the al-Shabaab's major operations out of Mogadishu and relegating them further to the southern part of Somalia akin to what the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) did to the Taliban in Afghanistan from 2001-2014.<sup>3</sup> However, this presents another challenge to Somalia because part of al-Shabaab is organised through cells where operatives and suicide bombers can easily embed themselves in civilian society as seen through attacks in hotels, markets, car bombs etc.

There are various training programmes conducted by the TCCs according to the command structure laid out by AMISOM where each TCC occupies different sectors from Sector 1-6. Uganda has occupied Sector 1 since 2007 which is in Mogadishu and Banadir, the metropolis surrounding the capital. It is the most critical in the ATMIS strategic command structure as it was in the AMISOM configuration. Other TCCs take up the rest. Uganda capitalised on this strategic positioning through fierce fighting that handed it tactical victories such as the famous battle at Bakara market in 2011 that effectively kicked al-Shabaab out of Mogadishu.

ATMIS was able to oversee a peaceful transition of power from President Mohamed Farmaajo to President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in May 2022 and maintain relative stability in the periods after the latter was sworn in.<sup>4</sup> Much as it was just a month old, ATMIS is still substantively the same force that took over from AMISOM.<sup>5</sup> The change happened, following a two-year delay of elections which caused national security threats to Somalia because of contested internal political processes. There has been relative stability in the areas under ATMIS control, save for the confrontations between rival clans, politicians, and militias. However, the withdrawal of ATMIS would significantly render these areas vulnerable.

The cohesion among TCCs has been a testament to the strength of the peacekeeping mission in its now 16 years. After Uganda and Burundi deployed, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya also joined the mission to push back on al-Shabaab in a peace enforcement mandate – a shift from the peacekeeping one. All these countries except Uganda and Burundi share a border with Somalia. The lack of significant turf wars among the TCCs most particularly between Uganda and any other TCC spilling out in the open has been acclaimed as a win for the mission as it winds down. All these countries have suffered losses in human and material terms but have maintained solidarity and



embodied the Pan-Africanism that was the *raison d'être* for the mission.

ATMIS was able to ingrain a degree of camaraderie among its TCCs as battle groups rotated on a one-year basis building a sense of shared purpose among the different armies. The rotational position of Force Commander of AMISOM and subsequently, ATMIS was key in leadership and capacity building for all the TCCs as they worked in tandem with police units, diplomats and ATMIS civilian staff for maintaining peace and security amidst almost insurmountable odds. The rotation boiling down to contingent commanders of TCCs on a one-year tour of duty worked to cultivate the same spirit.

As a result, tens of thousands of officers of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF) gained substantial experience in peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and urban warfare.<sup>6</sup> This was also important for the many foot soldiers of other TCCs who garnered similar experience on the battlefield and in the larger goal of providing a service for another African nation to experience peace and stability. Uganda has established itself as a reliable and trusted partner for Somalia and has been doing the heavy lifting for quite some time. The bulk of the security work ranging from reconnaissance, intelligence analysis, and diplomatic legwork are done in consultation with Uganda.



Source: <https://atmis-au.org>

# Strengths and Weakness of the Somali National Army (SNA)

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The SNA has received a series of trainings from the UPDF, other TCCs and partners like the United States (US) and the EU. These have been programmes in infantry tactics, handling explosives, infiltration, exfiltration, and other warfare aspects. The UPDF has been instrumental in these efforts in building Somalia's forces up from the ground amidst fundamental drawbacks. Some of the trainings provided by the UPDF include explosive ordinance devices courses, counter improvised explosive device training, route search courses and special operations courses.<sup>7</sup> Some of these exercises have been conducted in Uganda. Early on in the mission, Uganda had provided logistical and support personnel to aid the training of the SNA in the fight against al-Shabaab.

In 2010, the European Union Training Mission in Somalia (EUTM Somalia) was created to train Somali forces and for the first four years it was conducted at Bihanga, Ibanda in western Uganda before it moved to Somalia. EUTM Somalia had trained 7,000 personnel by 2020: roughly half of these formed infantry units, with the rest being a mix of specialised units, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), officers and trainers,<sup>8</sup> in courses like reconnaissance, countering improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

In 2014, an elite SNA unit called the Danab (Lightning) Brigade was created to advance the fight against al-Shabaab. The Danab is trained by US Special Forces and funded by the US State Department. It is the face of Somalia's fight against al-Shabaab as it is better equipped and better armed with some of the latest techniques from one of the most powerful militaries. However, being a small component of the larger SNA is its limitation in the larger goal of creating a more capable force that can shoulder Somalia's security challenges after ATMIS has fully withdrawn. The United States spends an estimate of 80 million US dollars for training and maintaining the Somali force. This is supported by the 450 US troops that were deployed to Somalia in 2022 to bolster the fight against al-Shabaab.<sup>9</sup> These trainings have attempted to build the capacity of the SNA as a national army; a leap from the bare bones outfit that the FGS had in 2006 when Somalia was being routed by a coalition of terrorist groups.

Turkey has trained thousands of Somali military operatives known as Gorgor commandos. Turkey also set up a large military base in Somalia known as Camp TURKSOM where some of the commandos are trained. Some trainings are being conducted in Turkey and others at the camp,

creating a mass of Turkish-trained Somali units and adding to the pool of foreign trained Somali forces.

Despite all these trainings, there is an understanding that the SNA is not ready for its greatest mission: protecting the state of Somalia from al-Shabaab. It is important to note that being located in the Horn of Africa gives Somalia some geopolitical significance as multiple countries flex muscles in the Gulf of Aden over maritime security. All these factors mean the troop drawdown will present new scenarios and calculations.

One of the major issues that has dogged the peacekeeping mission in Somalia even before it acquired the transition mandate in 2022 is the inherent weakness of the SNA. The majority perception by experts and observers is that the SNA is a weak army that lacks *esprit de corps*. The SNA needs more time to build into a cohesive force in addition to getting more equipment. Besides, after the trainings, troops need time to bond: "It is not just a question of numbers, but units."<sup>10</sup> This has been one of the dilemmas of UPDF which has been involved in training the SNA. How to train the SNA into a capable fighting force that can hold ground, defend territory, expand recruitment, and build ideological clarity among its charges.<sup>11</sup>

Other TCCs are also involved in these trainings depending on their areas of specialty and on factors like troop numbers, combat readiness, and combat experience. Building a force that can take on al-Shabaab appears to currently be a tall order for the Somali forces although they have taken over from ATMIS a number of FOB in the country as the transition takes shape.

An assessment of the ongoing military strategy in this situation indicates that ATMIS is doing a job that it is not supposed to do, that is; holding ground.<sup>12</sup> This should be the job of the indigenous force, the SNA, however, there are legitimate concerns that the latter does not have this capability. ATMIS should strictly be a mobile force as the SNA builds capacity where it can hold ground. This has proved to be a monumental task for the SNA as it has lacked this capacity for years even before ATMIS was conceptualised.

The al-Shabaab attack on the Buulo Mareer FOB in May 2023 where 54 Uganda troops were killed, has been blamed on this shortcoming. Ugandan troops at Buulo Mareer were holding ground – a role meant for the SNA – raising questions about the viability of the drawdown once it is fully implemented. As a result of SNA's weaknesses, ATMIS has been somewhat involved in governance because of its operational reach – work, military and political analysts believe – should be done by the SNA. The advice for the SNA therefore is to build local defence forces to protect communities in Somalia akin to the one that was adopted by Uganda in the 1990s for guarding against surging urban crime. The idea of defence units in communities was reintroduced in 2019 in Uganda for the same reason.

There is also a need to fix the governance and social services gaps that exist in Somalia ranging from organising local village meetings, training residents on self defence mechanisms, providing healthcare such as treating the cleft lip epidemic in Somalia among others. The view is that once an army can hold ground then it can set up

structures to carry out quasi-governance work like UPDF does in Uganda. Due to its weak hand in areas like rural south-central Somalia, the FGS has not been able to hold local elections outside Mogadishu creating an administrative and political vacuum with far reaching implications.<sup>13</sup> This vacuum has security implications in that al-Shabaab retains control of swathes of territory.

Despite some of these major shortcomings, the peacekeeping mission in Somalia has had one fundamental fallback: funding from the EU. The 27-member bloc is the main funder of the peacekeeping mission and has contributed 2.5 billion euros since the inception of the mission. But the funding gap increases every year. The EU's contribution in support to ATMIS military component was reduced from 140 million euros for 2022 to 85 million euros for 2023 with additional 33 million euros for civilian and police components for 2023 and 2024. The bloc has supported a troop drawdown and encouraged long-term planning for a post-ATMIS security architecture.<sup>14</sup> The drawdown is getting a lot of push from the EU who seem to be in sync with the Somalia government.

There is belief among some Somali government officials that the funding that has been going to the mission will be channelled to the government and the same is believed about the mission-owned military equipment and it being handed over to the FGS. This has fed into the debate on the intrigue surrounding the entire process. Who will gain from withdrawal of TCCs? Who will take over the equipment of all the TCCs? How will the fight against al-Shabaab be organised in terms of structure, strategy, and tactics? A lot of questions have lingered in the minds of many watching the events in Mogadishu.

The drawdown appears unrealistic to some stakeholders because of how overstretched ATMIS already is. The ATMIS force could be retained, or the drawdown could even take a longer period based on some of these considerations. The action of merging FOBs has its complications because of the security void left behind leaving nearby communities exposed.<sup>15</sup> There is notable dependence on these FOBs for security for communities outside of Mogadishu. UPDF had made plans to merge its twenty-five FOBs to beef up security as some of these bases were thin and overstretched.

In 2019, the peacekeeping force reduced its troops by 1,000 mostly from the Burundian contingent.<sup>16</sup> This frailty subsequently led to a worse attack for Burundian troops than the ones their Ugandan counterparts suffered at Buulo Mareer. The attack 200 kilometres from Mogadishu where 54 Ugandan soldiers were killed by al-Shabaab renewed calls for Uganda, the largest TCC originally at 6,000, to wind up its mission in Somalia.<sup>17</sup> The consensus among Ugandan senior military figures is that the drawdown may remain in word, but it will have a bearing on TCCs because the funding for the mission will inevitably be reduced. There are persistent questions over whom ATMIS would hand over, and the capacity of the recipient force. There is no equivalent force in terms of numbers and capability as the SNA is still building itself up from the ground. Uganda, which occupies Sector 1, the most critical area in Mogadishu and Banadir, has borne the burden of holding the SNA's back since UPDF remain in the area regarded as Somalia's centre of gravity.

Due to this positioning, the UPDF is the most strategic player in the fight against al-



Shabaab and by extension, Somali's security dynamics. The other TCCs occupy sector 2 up to 6. During the formulation of AMISOM and its initial years, no other country was deemed fit to occupy Sector 1 due to a host of complex geopolitical puzzles. Ethiopia could not because of its bitter history with Somalia based on past clashes, Kenya was considered inexperienced militarily and Djibouti being neighbours to Somalia was ruled out because of the shared ethnicity in the Ogaden region.

The hurdles aside, ATMIS and its partners continue to deliberate on ways in which to implement the drawdown and transfer the mandate to SNA. Somalia has made efforts

at shoring up its military leadership. In June, the FGS appointed General Ibrahim Sheikh Muhyadin Adow as the new Chief of Defence Forces. General Adow was previously a commander in the Presidential Guard and is expected to create a strategic overhaul in the fight against al-Shabaab. Military analysts say his main role is cutting the umbilical cord between the SNA and its special forces like Danab and the Gorgor. Adow took over as the SNA was taking command of a number of FOBs; a critical time as adversaries are known for striking during such transition phases.



Source: <https://atmis-au.org>

## Diplomatic Outlook

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Somalia and the ATMIS have been working on the drawdown process for more than five years and the UN holds many cards over the Horn of Africa country. Much earlier, UN's intervention in Somali internal politics caused friction as it sought to end the clan-based system that has been the foundation of Somalia's democracy. Members of parliament in Somalia are elected to represent their clans and many foreign entities like the UN, acting on the templates of their home countries always express opposition to this dynamic to the chagrin of Somali natives and authorities.

The immense power of the UNSC has been cited as a complication in Somalia's drawdown process. Somali officials experienced a hiccup while dealing with the fine print of Somalia's drawdown plan. The document that was sent by Somalia's Ministry of Defence and approved by the UNSC regarding drawdown modalities and agreed by the FGS, AU, and the UN, was "heavily altered".<sup>18</sup> At the UNSC, the United Kingdom, one of the permanent members, is the pen holder for Somalia. This hands the country power of making major decision on issues like welfare and development and trumping many views and organically driven efforts from Somalia.

This power imbalance goes back in time. The United Kingdom contributed to a series of these internationally brokered deals such as the Somali Compact of 2013 and the Somalia Security Pact of 2017.<sup>19</sup> These were meant to

support elections in 2012, 2017 and 2022. However, these agreements later fell apart due to the non-inclusion of Somali players in the country's politics.<sup>20</sup> There were also internal disagreements within the Somali government. The current Somali government of President Sheikh Mohamud was apparently against ATMIS and tried to come up with an alternative plan that it designated as the "new security architecture."<sup>21</sup> It turned out that this was no more than just a high-sounding plan for Somalia taking over.

However, the complex nature of operations such as a peacekeeping exit cannot be underestimated. Just at the time of the second phase of the ATMIS drawdown in September 2023, Somali National Security Advisor Hussein Sheikh Ali wrote to the UNSC calling for a pause and citing a need to address significant challenges after an al-Shabaab attack.<sup>22</sup> Some figures in Somalia's military establishment state that the drawdown did not follow what was agreed, and timelines were not condition based. Part of what was altered, according to a former Ministry of Defence official, were agreements that included distribution of military forces which is key for the drawdown process. In the end, the subterfuge and intrigue orchestrated by high power players triggered the decision to go ahead with the drawdown despite Somalia's unpreparedness.

Worth mentioning as a factor that influenced the drawdown is that the pressure by the donors, in particular the EU.<sup>23</sup> Economic



difficulties faced by the EU, borne from aiding Ukraine's war efforts means that funding going to other areas like ATMIS had to be reviewed hence the pressure on AU to wind down the mission. This fog of various decision makers stirring the pot is possibly what led to a UNSC resolution that renewed the authorisation of ATMIS for six months – running till December 2023.<sup>24</sup> This interplay brings to the fore the larger issue of Somalia's sovereignty amidst great power politics where major countries are vying for its control.

Turkey and the UAE are in some form of competition as both countries have ramped up investment in the country and have Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with Somalia in a range of sectors. Turkey prefers this approach while the UAE prefers the American one: big publicity drives for its businesses and projects. Turkey retains a lot of sway in the country as it has built Aden Adde Airport, launched construction works, factories and other facilities. Turkish defence agreements and the military trainings of the Gorgor also accord it diplomatic heft. There is also the belief that Turkey would take over the "Green Zone" after all ATMIS troops leave by end of 2024.<sup>25</sup> The UAE has made investments worth over 400 million US dollars in Somali port facilities – which has stoked tensions between Somalia's federal and regional governments – as the UAE directly negotiates with the regional governments where the ports are located.<sup>26</sup> The Emiratis who have also sunk capital in Somalia's manufacturing, tourism and infrastructural development have found renewed influence with President Mohamud as his predecessor President Mohamed Farmaajo had blocked them and embraced

the Turkish.<sup>27</sup> The troop drawdown in Somalia is likely to result into aggressive influence peddling by moneyed players like Turkey and the UAE seeking to snap up business deals and investment opportunities in a country hankering for them.

On the other hand, countries like the United Kingdom manifest their influence differently. As a penholder, it casts an overbearing shadow over Somalia exerting its influence as a former colonial power and as a permanent member of the UNSC. "The United Kingdom also mediated debate over ATMIS, negotiating language around the new mission's budget, scope, aims and complexion" in the paper published by RUSI, the world's oldest defence and security think tank.<sup>28</sup> This was noted as an example of how the United Kingdom uses its convening power at the UNSC to enable, expedite and champion proceedings. The United Kingdom, as a strategic measure, has its officials in Somali institutions like the Ministry of Defence and Internal Security to improve "bureaucratic bandwidth, policy development and coordination".<sup>29</sup> It was also noted that the United Kingdom leverages its diplomatic presence and comprehensive programmatic work to position its embassy as a hub for other embassies.<sup>30</sup> In the end, the drawdown has come to symbolise an attempt by Somalia to assert its sovereignty from all the powers jostling for its control including African nations that may not be seeking control as such but do so by default through their troop presence. All these power dynamics mean that the drawdown process has a substantial part of foreign influence that excludes local dynamics which will ultimately bear in the aftermath of the ATMIS troop drawdown.

## External Partner Support

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The United States has extended far-reaching support to Somalia, from training elite forces, military aid to logistics and personnel support. Some accounts have described Somalia as the most active front in America's forever wars. The ATMIS drawdown may be a point of reflection for the United States going forward. The US State Department supports a conditions-based transition of security responsibility from ATMIS to Somali security forces. Together with Somalia, ATMIS, and other international partners, the aim is to build Somali security force capabilities and to meet the transition timeline and objectives.<sup>31</sup> In short, the United States believes the Somali state is not ready to go it alone in the complexities of fighting al-Shabaab.

In its security assistance to Somalia, the US State Department is in charge of the training of the Danab, Somalia's Special Forces — a scenario that will ensure US troops remain on the ground — as African forces like Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, sharing a border with Somalia, get in a frenzy to leave. This notwithstanding, the United States has been a critical source of support to Somalia through Danab which has eliminated a number of al-Shabaab fighters. The unit has received substantial tonnes of arms and ammunition. Washington's financial support to Somalia's counterterrorism operations has also been hailed both in Somalia and in the AU. The United States carries out intense

aerial surveillance to aid Somalia's war on al-Shabaab. The drone warfare targeting al-Shabaab with a high civilian death toll among innocent Somalis has caused a lot of angst and disarray over US military policy. However, President Hassan Sheikh has asked for more drone air support from the United States for the war on the Islamist fighters. A meeting he had with US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin in Djibouti in late September 2023 seemed to boost his government's relationship with Washington.

The stay of US marines in Somalia also presents some striking irony. EU bureaucrats in Brussels back the ATMIS drawdown oblivious to the US strategic foothold in Somalia. In other words, the Europeans are kicking out African troops while staying mum on the presence of their American counterparts on the ground. For its part, the EU increased its spending to the SNA in 2023 giving up to 25 million euros. This is in addition to the EUTM Somalia where trainees have undergone field training exercises for offensive, defensive and delay operations. Since the EUTM Somalia was created in 2010, over 10,000 SNA trainees have been beneficiaries. In May 2023, the EUTM Somalia Commander attended a closing ceremony of one of the trainings held in Djibouti.

Since the 450 US troops were re-deployed to Somalia last year, their role has not been clear. Usually, such deployments are

described as “advise-and-assist” missions, but the US military is known to be actively involved in operations as seen through other engagements on the continent like in Niger where it has a large surveillance base for its counterterror operations.

As the curtains draw on ATMIS, it leaves the United States in a grey area. US AFRICOM, in charge of US military operations in Africa, defers to the US State Department when it comes to the troop drawdown. US AFRICOM restricts itself to providing military assistance to the FGS and leaves operational intricacies to the State Department.<sup>32</sup> It is an indication of how complicated the drawdown process can be even for a key partner like the United States. Granted, it is a military operation as much as it is a diplomatic one. For Somalia

however, it shows the trap the country may fall in a situation where African troops exit, and US commandos stay put.

The common narrative of intruders levelled against African countries carries more weight against the United States which has multiple military bases around the world including next door Djibouti. Besides, studies have shown that US military trainings of Somali special forces perpetuates conflict because political elites in Mogadishu use the units to settle political scores not to mention the enormous US spending on Somalia's al-Shabaab onslaught making the country an external actor in the war.<sup>33</sup> The presence of US military long after the ATMIS mandate will present an elephant in the room scenario.

## Conclusion

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With the drawdown beckoning, the Somali government and the SNA are on high alert as the country enters into uncharted territory. AMISOM was in the country for fifteen years where it was firmly in charge of the country's security. The name change to ATMIS was indeed in name as the country still faces the same challenges more than a year in the ATMIS mandate. The SNA remains inadequately prepared for the role it is being primed for although it is acutely aware that ATMIS cannot be in Somalia forever. That the constant trainings SNA has received have not turned into a capable fighting force ready to

take on al-Shabaab remains an overarching concern. The UPDF have reservations about the troop drawdown because it believes the SNA lacks cohesion to maintain security in Somalia. The UPDF also harbour fears over the gains registered over the years being reversed in a hastily conducted withdrawal process. Top of this list of fears is al-Shabaab sweeping through Mogadishu which is not farfetched even among ordinary Somalis. The EU, holding the chequebook for ATMIS, appears to have given a go-ahead for the drawdown which despite deferrals will ultimately happen.

1. Other TCCs include Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti.
2. ATMIS Military Commander Conclude Meeting on Troop Withdrawal ATMIS Statement July 2023.
3. Afghan forces assumed full responsibility in 2014 when the ISAF mission was completed.
4. Farmaajo currently lives in Qatar, a country he enjoyed close relations with. He is reportedly eyeing a presidential comeback in 2027.
5. Katusiime, Ian 2022: Old fights haunt 'new' AU Somalia mission, in: The Independent, 18 Apr 2022.
6. Senior UPDF officers like Lt. Gen. Kayanja Muhanga and Lt. Gen. Paul Lokech had two tours of duty in Somalia. The late Lokech had two as Contingent Commander where Kayanja was his Deputy. He later became Contingent Commander and is now UPDF Commander of Land Forces.
7. <https://www.updf.go.ug/missions/atmis-continues-to-build-somali-national-army-capabilities-as-military-training-centre-is-handed-over/>
8. Williams, Paul. 2020: The European Training Mission in Somalia: An Assessment, in SIPRI.
9. Savage, Charlie; Schmitt, Eric. 2022: Biden Approves Plan to Redeploy Several Hundred Ground Forces Into Somalia, in: The New York Times, 16 May 2022.
10. Interview with senior Ugandan military figure, Mogadishu June 2023.
11. In a meeting at State House Entebbe in March 2023, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni told President Mohamud of Somalia to build a national army with the right ideology to defend the country.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Speech by Annette Weber, EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, at the UNSC Private Meeting on Somalia on 27 March 2023 in New York.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. The number of 54 was officially announced by President Museveni although it is hard to independently verify such a figure. In 2015, after a similar attack in Janale, Museveni while at a press conference in Japan said that 19 soldiers had been killed. Doubts remain on the actual figure.
18. Interview with Hassan Said, former Permanent Secretary in the Somalia Ministry of Defence, June 2023.
19. Jones, Michael. 2023: Mired in Mogadishu: An Appraisal of UK Engagement in Somalia, in: RUSI.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Nochils, Michelle 2023: Somalia asks UN to delay peacekeeper drawdown after 'significant setbacks', Reuters, 22.09.2023, in <https://shorturl.at/nstFK> [18 Dec 2023].
23. Interview with Hassan Said.
24. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2687(2023) 27 June 2023.
25. Conversations with a hotel staff in Mogadishu. Green Zone is the UPDF protected area in Sector 1 Mogadishu.
26. Garrison, Ann 2023: Is the UAE in Control in Somalia?, Black Agenda Report, 07.06.2023, in: <https://www.blackagendareport.com/uae-control-somalia> [18 Dec 2023].
27. Ibid.
28. Jones, Michael. 2023: Mired in Mogadishu: An Appraisal of UK Engagement in Somalia, in: RUSI.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Interview with US State Department official.
32. Interview with US AFRICOM spokesperson.
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