



The politics of peacekeeping

# A QUESTION OF TRUST: THE AFRICAN UNION AND THE SOMALI ARMY

The relationship between the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali National Army (SNA) is strained. Efforts must be made to bring the two partners closer together, not least because of the expectation that eventually SNA can and should take over from AMISOM.

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) deployed in early 2007 with 1,650 Ugandan troops. Its initial peacekeeping mandate was expanded in mid-2010 to encompass a peace enforcement focus, primarily to fight al-Shabaab's onslaught against the different interim governments in Somalia. Today, in late 2015, AMISOM includes a little over 22,000

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Greater effort must be made by those who fund AMISOM to understand how the organisation is led and how it operates across southern and central Somalia.
- Acknowledge that the way support is provided to and by AMISOM has political implications within the SNA, and develop programming accordingly.
- Ensure that training and equipment provided by AMISOM-contributing countries is consistent.
- Develop a strategy to bring AMISOM and SNA closer together.

# The current relationship between AMISOM and SNA is characterised by lack of trust, but AMISOM's role in Somalia is vital.

**“And then there is the issue of what you do with the territory once you take it. How do you stabilize it after and deliver a real peace dividend to the local population? Neither AMISOM nor the Somali government is really equipped to do this”.**

Paul D. Williams, expert on AMISOM/African-led peacekeeping in *Foreign Policy*

personnel from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and other African Union (AU) member states.

It has been noted by external observers that the countries contributing troops to AMISOM have a financial interest in extending the mandate of the mission as long as possible. However, there is also a strong sense within AMISOM that its success will be measured against its ability to build the capacity of the SNA to take over from the mission. The sense of urgency that surrounds this issue is heightened by ongoing discussions about the lack of critical equipment (force multipliers), the insufficient numbers of personnel available to AMISOM and the continuous threat of financial cuts from the European Union (EU), AMISOM's main source of funding.

## **Clan, politics, military**

Before delving deeper into relations between AMISOM and the SNA, it is important to emphasise that clan identity conditions which groups that any external actor, including AMISOM, can collaborate with in Somalia. This also means that any support given by bilateral and multilateral institutions, by definition, is political.

Clan affiliation shapes Somalia's political life and the distribution of resources at national, regional and local levels. Therefore, access to and control of the security sector at the federal level is an important field of clan contestations. The majority of international support to Somalia, which is a central source of SNA funding, is channelled through and negotiated with the government in Mogadishu. Indeed, political leaders in Puntland, which is controlled by the Darood clan family, refer to the SNA as a Hawiye-dominated clan militia.

The Puntland authorities' assessment is not without merit. A closer look at the SNA's composition shows that in fact both key positions and the rank and file of the army are dominated by the Hawiye. An estimated 11,000 SNA personnel are distributed across four sectors in southern and central Somalia. (Puntland has its own separate defence force, which emerged from their pre-war paramilitary police unit, the Darwish forces). For example, Sector 12th April has the highest number of SNA troops, with six brigades of approximately 7,000 units that cover the Banaadir region where Mogadishu is located and Lower and Middle Shebelle. Five of these brigades are Hawiye-dominated.

Technical and other types of support from AMISOM are inevitably and directly shaped by these dynamics.

## **Technical support**

Apart from AMISOM, a number of international actors support capacity-building of the SNA, including the EU, Turkey and Bancroft Global, a private security company. These three have put their primary emphasis on middle and long-term development and high-level training of the SNA. Because of its presence on the ground and co-location with the SNA, AMISOM has been in a position to provide capacity-building to support the fight against al-Shabaab.

However, it is clear that there are a number of issues within the SNA and in its relationship to AMISOM that challenge SNA's collaboration with and learning from AMISOM. The strained relationship between the two is clearly reflected, for example, in the attendance of trainees in AMISOM courses, which has so far been sporadic, especially with respect to soldiers who are not based in Mogadishu. This is compounded by the



lack of lower ranks within the SNA. The majority of trainees who register for courses today are majors and colonels, which skews the power relationship between trainer (AMISOM) and trainee (SNA). It should be kept in mind, however, that stronger ties and a more effective working relationship between AMISOM and the SNA will not appear overnight; they can only be established over the long-term.

This lack of attendance – referred to by AMISOM as lack of discipline – is considered to go hand-in-hand with the current weakness of a sense of national identity that would presumably strengthen the ties between Somalia's clans. There has been a relatively weak sense of responsibility expressed in Mogadishu for Puntland, for instance, which means that none of the international support channelled into the capital has reached Garowe, and AMISOM has no presence in Puntland.

In more practical, immediate terms, AMISOM has no say about which soldiers are assigned to their training courses: such decisions are made solely by the SNA army chief, Major General Mohamed Adan Ahmed. Moreover, the courses are not compulsory and there

is no final exam that would determine employment and promotion opportunities. These factors undermine active participation of the trainees in AMISOM's courses.

### **Lack of trust**

The above described conditions reflect a palpable distance between the SNA and AMISOM. What are its causes, and how might they be mitigated?

One answer to the first half of the question is the lack of trust that characterises relations between the SNA and AMISOM. There is a strong and often-voiced sense within the SNA, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and among Somali intellectuals that if the funding available to AMISOM troops were given directly to the Somalis, the war against al-Shabaab could be won. This complaint reflects the SNA's suspicion that some AMISOM troop-contributing countries, notably neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia, work according to their own national agendas, rather than in the interest of a unified Somalia. Many SNA and FGS actors think that Kenya and Ethiopia fear that the emergence of a functioning government in Mogadishu would threaten their economic interests in



Suspected al-Shabaab militants wait to be taken for interrogation during a joint night operation by the Somali security services and AMISOM in Mogadishu, May 2014 © UN Photo/Tobin Jones

Somalia and their own as well as regional security.

At the same time, the FGS would not endure without the presence of AMISOM in Somalia – despite the mission's shortcomings and challenges it faces.

By extension, the FGS is unable to maintain control of areas recovered by AMISOM and SNA without AMISOM support. In 2015, AMISOM was forced to guard the towns they took together with the SNA in 2014. Leaving captured towns to the FGS would have had severe, negative implications for AMISOM's image. They would no doubt have been lost to al-Shabaab again, and if that had happened, one high-level AMISOM officer explained, 'it is better not to liberate a town at all'. This on-going AMISOM responsibility to guard captured towns also constitutes a dilemma, he continued, because 'AMISOM is not in a position to hold a town and at the same time chase al-Shabaab, because of manpower.'

Mistrust between AMISOM and SNA also reflects the fundamental instability that remains a reality in Somalia. There have been numerous attacks on AMISOM by individuals in SNA uniforms, which has contributed to the breakdown in communication. Shortly after a deadly attack by al-Shabaab fighters clad in SNA uniforms on AMISOM headquarters in Mogadishu in early 2015, a high-ranking AMISOM officer noted, 'the relationship between AMISOM and SNA is poor and distant'.

### **Co-locating headquarters**

While relations between AMISOM and SNA can be tense, there is a sense within AMISOM that concerted efforts must be made to strengthen it. Indeed, the success of the mission largely depends on it. One of

the reasons for this is the sheer scale of the operation in Somalia, which according to informal estimates would require twice as many troops as are currently available to AMISOM. Therefore, one high-ranking officer noted, 'we can only liberate this country with the help of the SNA. In order to do that, we must make a greater effort to build the capacity of the SNA'.

A first step in reaching this aim would be to co-locate the headquarters of AMISOM and the SNA. This would allow more regular meetings and mentoring to take place, rather than the current, limited 'protocol relations' between the two entities.

### **Streamlining support**

Another important place to begin to improve relations is to establish stronger coherence among troop contributing countries with respect to training of and equipment gifted to the SNA by AMISOM troop contributors. Neither is currently provided consistently, which does not foster the establishment of one united army in Somalia.

Whatever solution is found will ultimately take its point of departure in regional political negotiations at the level of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the AU. While a concept of operations has been developed by the AU, it does not set out a timetable for the progress of AMISOM's campaign against al-Shabaab and does not address how many Somali soldiers should be trained during the life of the mission. Priorities must be made within the concept of operations, which can only be done on the basis of an in-depth after-action review, which did not happen in 2014 after one of AMISOM's key operations, Operation Indian Ocean.

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Cover photo: A commanding officer gives orders to recently trained members of the Somali National Army at an AMISOM training facility near Mogadishu, August 2012 © UN Photo/Stuart Price

