

Briefing on consultations with Somalia on post-2021 AU Engagement

Automatic Heading TextDate | 31 August, 2021

Tomorrow (31 August) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is set to convene a briefing session on the consultations with the Federal Government of Somalia on the post-2021 AU mission in Somalia the AU (AMISOM). The session is a follow up to Council's meeting convened on 30 July during which the PSC considered the report of the AU Independent Assessment team regarding AU's engagement in and with Somalia post-2021.

Following opening statement by Ambassador Churchill Ewumbue-Monono, Chairperson of the PSC for August, Fiona Lortan, the Ag. Director for Conflict Management, at the Political Affairs Peace and Security (PAPS) Department is expected to brief the Council. As the country of concern, a representative of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) is also expected to deliver a statement.

It is to be recalled that the PSC considered the report on independent assessment on the future of AMISOM 1015th session. The independent assessment team, established pursuant to PSC Communique of 9 February 2021, led by Major General Xolani Mankayi from South Africa, recommended the establishment of an AU-UN Multidimensional stabilisation support to Somalia as the most appropriate options, among the four options, for the future of AMISOM post-2021. The consensus reached among members of the PSC during their last session on AMISOM was in support of AU-UN multidimensional stabilisation mission despite UN independent-led assessment report calling for a reconfigured AMISOM.

It is worth noting that the government of Somalia, through its Foreign Minister, rejected the report of independent assessment team, complaining on the lack of sufficient consultation. Somalia's rejection of the AU independent assessment team's report seemed to also show preference for a more supporting role from AMISOM through the supply of mobile forces while the main security responsibility falls within the hands of government forces. This perspective of Somalia's Government was also emphasised by the country's representative at the United Nations (UN) Security Council (UNSC)'s meeting on the situation in Somalia which took place on 12 August 2021.

While there is recognition on the need for transition involving transfer of security responsibility for Somalia security forces (SSF), how this is done and the nature of AMISOM support that the security situation and the state of readiness of SSF remain critical questions for averting rushed processes risking reversal of gains made with so much sacrifice. As stressed in the report of the AU Independent Assessment team, a premature withdrawal of AMISOM could result in a serious security vacuum and lead to the loss of positive gains that have been made over the years. The importance of a cautious approach is highlighted by the threat Al-Shabaab continues to pose in Somalia. This is particularly true in light of recent fears that were ignited as a result of Al-Shabaab's hailing of Taliban following the latter's takeover of Kabul in Afghanistan.

It is against this context that AU Commission sent a delegation led by Fiona Lortan to engage with the government of Somalia with the aim to iron out differences and reach on a common understanding on the future of AMISOM post-2021. The meeting between AU Commission delegation and the FGS took place on 18-19 August 2021 in Mogadishu, Somalia. This led to a breakthrough resulting in the signing of an agreement and a joint statement. Tomorrow's PSC session is in accordance with

the agreement reached between the AUC delegation and the FGS to present the outcome and main agreements of the joint meeting to the PSC as well as the UN Security Council and the international partners. In this respect, the briefing by Lortan is expected to highlight the major outcomes of the agreement.

One major issue likely to receive attention is the consensus reached on the AU Transition Mission as the post-2021 Somalia mission. The agreement reached focusing on strengthening the command control of AMISOM and most importantly the call for AMISOM and Somalia national army joint operations seem to suggest a model that resembles option 2, which is a reconfigured AMISOM. The exact shape that this post-2021 AMISOM takes in Somalia is expected to become clearer with the finalization of the joint Concept of Operations (CONOPS), which, according to the joint statement, 'will form the basis for the future AU Transition Mission'. It is worth noting that the Commission and FGS agreed on developing a joint 'workable', 'realizable', and 'game-changing' CONOPS no later than 31 October 2021 with the participation of UN and other international partners. It is of interest to the Council that AU is also working with UN, EU, UK as well as the FGS to address the main concern of securing predictable and sustainable funding to the post-2021 AU mission in Somalia.

In light of the growing threats posed by the Al-Shabaab and the upcoming elections in Somalia, the other issue of interest to the Council is the consensus reached on enhancing military operational effectiveness of AMISOM and Somalia Security Forces (SSF). An interesting development in this respect is the agreement reached for joint operations by enabling 'effective, agile and mobile operations with strong tactical cooperation and coordination'. As a follow up to this agreement, the military commanders of AMISOM held a two-day meeting with their Somalia counterpart to evaluate the progress towards the implementation of joint operations. The

two sides also assessed progress made regarding AMISOM's CONOPS, the Somalia Transitional Plan (STP), and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2568 (2021). The reconfiguration of military, police, and civilian components of AMISOM and the establishment of 'mobile and quick reaction forces' are considered as steps towards enhancing operational effectiveness in countering the evolving threats posed by Al-Shabaab.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a Communiqué. The PSC may commend the work done by the AIA team and the AU delegation that visited Somalia for reaching at a common position. Council may congratulate the AU and FGS for reaching an agreement on the modalities for determining the form that AU's Mission in Somalia takes post-2021. It is also expected to underscore the need for a well-planned and phased and adequately resourced and structured transition that is capable of sustaining the gains and containing the threat posed by Al Shabaab. It may call on the UN, EU and UK as well as other relevant partners to engage with AU on the modalities and financing of the transition mission. The PSC may also reiterate its appreciation for AMISOM and call on its continued support to the country in realising the goals of the Somalia Transition Plan (STP). Council may also welcome the initiatives by AMISOM working with the Government of Somalia towards enhancing the effectiveness military operations. The PSC may also indicate next steps including the plan for engagement by the AU Commission and African members of the UNSC with members of the UNSC and the EU as well as the process and timeline for the elaboration of the CONOPS for post-2021.