

Briefing on the situation in Somalia: Post ATMIS

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Tomorrow (8 March), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene an informal meeting on the situation in Somalia: post-AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS).

Following opening remarks by the Permanent Representative of Namibia and PSC Chairperson for March, Emilia Mkusa, Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) is expected to deliver a statement. Souef Mohamed El-Amine, the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission for Somalia and Head of ATMIS may also brief the PSC.

The PSC last discussed the situation in Somalia and ATMIS operations during its [1173rd](#) session on 14 September of the previous year, amidst the approaching deadline for the phase 2 drawdown of ATMIS troops, originally slated for 30 September 2023. While initially opting to proceed with the troop drawdown as per the original plan, Somalia's subsequent request for a three-month technical pause in the drawdown led the PSC, during its [1177th](#) session, to reverse its earlier decision and postpone the withdrawal until 30 December 2023. Previous sessions of the PSC on ATMIS emphasized the importance of adhering to the agreed timelines for the phased troops drawdown and eventual exit, while also safeguarding against potential security vacuums and reversal of the hard-won gains.

It was in this context that PSC's 1173rd session requested the

Commission to 'work out a viable ATMIS exit strategy, which should include proposals on AU's continued engagement with and support to Somalia post 31 December 2024.' Tomorrow's meeting is expected to follow up on this request. In this context, the PSC could receive critical updates on recent political, economic, and security developments in Somalia since its last session in September, including updates on the completion of phase 2 drawdown, preparations for phase 3, and ongoing discussions regarding post-ATMIS security arrangements.

On the political and economic front, Somalia has made significant strides in recent months. Notably, it was admitted to the East African Community (EAC) in November 2023 and achieved the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Completion Point in December 2023, providing total debt service savings for Somalia of USD4.5 billion. According to the IMF, following the HIPC Completion Point, Somalia's external debt has fallen from 64% of GDP in 2018 to less than 6% of GDP by end 2023, which further facilitates access to critical additional financial resources that will help Somalia strengthen its economy.

Recognizing the benchmarks reached on implementing the security transition, the Somalia Transition Plan and the national security architecture, in December 2023, the UN Security Council (UNSC) also unanimously adopted resolution [2714](#) (2023) lifting the arms embargo on Somalia, which had been in place since January 1992. ATMIS hailed this decision as 'a key step' in bolstering the operational capabilities of the Somali Security Forces (SSF). The 44th Ordinary Session of AU's Executive Council, held in February, also endorsed Somalia as the candidate from East Africa for the non-permanent seat on the UNSC for 2025-2026.

Another significant development on the political front is the initiative to finalize the long-awaited constitutional review process. On January 24, Somalia's Parliament, comprising both

chambers, approved the adoption procedure for constitutional amendments, albeit amid a chaotic session. Earlier, in May 2023, the National Consultative Council (NCC), which brought together leaders from the FGS and Federal Member States (FMS), reached a consensus on the form of government and electoral system.

Another development with potentially adverse implications for the political and security dynamics relate to the tension that erupted between Mogadishu and Addis Ababa following an MoU the latter signed with Somaliland that the PSC addressed during its [1192nd session](#) on 17 January. It is to be recalled that the PSC issued a press statement urging both parties to exercise restraint, de-escalate tensions, and engage in meaningful dialogue to peacefully resolve the matter.

On the security front, the meeting is expected to highlight ongoing operations against Al-Shabaab, and the milestone of completing the phase 2 ATMIS troops drawdown on 2 February, in line with PSC's 1177th session and UNSC resolution [2710](#) (2023). This phase witnessed the departure of 3000 troops, the transfer of seven Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), and the closure of two others. With the withdrawal of a total of 5000 troops during phase 1 and 2, ATMIS force strength currently stands at 13,586. Preparatory efforts are underway for phase 3, slated to further reduce troop numbers by 4000 as of 30 June, leading towards a final exit on 31 December 2024. In this respect, PSC Members could be interested to hear more about the implementation of phase 2 drawdown and the lessons identified from it, and emphasize the importance of leveraging these lessons while conducting the upcoming drawdown. Moreover, assessing the prevailing context in the country—taking into account factors such as the security situation, the status of force generation and the overall readiness of the FGS to take on greater security responsibilities—will remain critical in determining the viability of moving forward with phase 3. It is recalled that

the UNSC, under resolution 2710, requested the FGS and the AU to conduct a joint technical assessment by 31 March 2024 to evaluate phase 2 drawdown, and provide an update by 30 April on their preparations for phase 3 drawdown.

The other major aspect of tomorrow's informal meeting will be the post-ATMIS security arrangement. As the December 2024 deadline for final departure of ATMIS troops approaches, discussions are underway regarding the follow-on mission after ATMIS exists. On 12 December 2023, during the Somalia security conference held in New York, Somalia requested for a post-ATMIS 'limited and new multilateral mission' to provide protection of strategic population centres and key Mogadishu and Federal Member State infrastructure. In tomorrow's briefing, PSC Members may receive detailed information about the proposed mission, informed by engagements between AU high-level delegation led by Alhadji Sarjoh Bah, AUC's Director for Conflict Management, and Somalia's authorities during his five-day working visit in Somalia in January/February 2024. During his visit, Sarjoh [noted](#) that the strength, mandate, posture, composition and the overall architecture that will replace ATMIS will be based on 'a very comprehensive security assessment that focuses on the threats and other variables'. Furthermore, on 13 February, the AU convened the Core Security Partners Group high-level consultative meeting in Addis Ababa, which brought together key partners, to explore avenues for supporting 'Somali-led and owned security arrangements post-ATMIS'.

In this context, it would be of interest for the PSC to learn about whether there is an established arrangement for joint monitoring, assessment and consultation between the AU and Somalia in order to ensure that Somalia plays active and leading role in the drawdown and exit of ATMIS and importantly in planning the post-ATMIS mission. This is critical not only to avoid communication gaps but also to ensure ownership and responsibility by Somalia as the host state. Also of interest

for the PSC are the issues that require clarification in terms of planning the post ATMIS mission. These include the scope of the mandate of the mission, the size of the force, its composition, and whether and how elements of ATMIS would constitute part of this new mission to avoid vacuum that may arise due to complete lack of continuity. In clarifying these issues, as well as how the mission will be organized and how it interfaces with FGS and its security forces, the request Somalia made during the Somalia security conference last December and the lessons from AMISOM and ATMIS provide useful basis.

Financing is likely to be the other key aspect to be discussed. This can be approached from two perspectives: the persistent financing challenges confronting ATMIS and funding sources for the post-ATMIS mission. Regarding the former, the AUC may highlight the considerable financial resource required for ATMIS operation until its December exit, surpassing USD 100 million. This estimate assumes no further delays in forthcoming drawdown. Despite this, there are encouraging efforts on the side of the AU to bridge the USD25,895,129 funding gap, disbursing USD3.5 million from the Crisis Reserve Facility (CRF) of the AU Peace Fund and USD 19,068,914 from the AU Members States contributions. In relation to post-ATMIS mission, a critical issue will be how to secure predictable, adequate and sustainable funding for the mission. During the 19 February UNSC briefing on Somalia, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Catriona Laing, alluded to the use of UN assessed contribution within the framework of resolution 2719 (2023) on the financing of the AU-led peace support operations as one of the potential funding modalities. Indeed, this presents the first test for the practical application of resolution 2719.

No formal outcome document is expected to be issued from tomorrow's informal meeting. The PSC may welcome positive developments that Somalia registered in recent months,

including its admission to the East African Community, the lifting of arms embargo, the attainment of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Completion Point, and its candidacy for a non-permanent seat at the UNSC for the 2025-2026 slot. The PSC may also commend the FGS for initiating the constitutional review process, while emphasizing the imperative of inclusive dialogue among Somali stakeholders. Regarding the ATMIS drawdown, the PSC is expected to welcome the completion of phase 2, and urge ATMIS and the FGS to make all necessary preparations for the next phase of the drawdown, involving the withdrawal of 4,000 troops by 30 June, 2024. It may highlight that this withdrawal, as outlined by UNSC resolution 2710, should be based on a comprehensive assessment of the security landscape and Somalia's readiness to assume increasing security responsibilities to ensure that the preparations as well as the departure of the troops are not exploited by Al-Shabaab. In relation to financing, PSC may commend the AU member states for the efforts to bridge the funding gap in ATMIS operations, and may call upon international partners to scale up their support, given the significant USD100 million required to sustain ATMIS operation until its scheduled exit in December. On the post-ATMIS mission, PSC may welcome and express its support to the outcome of the 12 December 2023 Somalia Security Conference held in New York, notably Somalia's request for a 'limited' and 'multilateral' post-ATMIS mission. To ensure a plan that is mutually owned by Somalia and AU and adequately reflects the needs and expectations of Somalia, the PSC may encourage the AU Commission and Somalia to establish a joint monitoring, assessment, consultation and planning mechanism that will, among others, help clarify critical questions relevant to the development of the concept of operations for the Post-ATMIS mission.