

Consideration of the new Concept of Operations (CONOPS) of AMISOM

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Today (4 February), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to consider and adopt the new Concept of Operations (CONOPS) of African Union Mission to Somalia

(AMISOM) when it meets at 3pm. Although initially planned in the program of work for 15 February, it is brought forward to today as we indicated in our review of the Program of Work for the month late last week.

The AU Department of Peace and Security is expected to present the CONOPS. Following applicable rules and established practice, invitations have also been extended to all AMISOM troop/police contributing countries (Burundi, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) to participate in the session.

It is to be recalled that the PSC at its 806th session expressed its expectation to the consideration and adoption of the new revised CONPOPs of AMISOM. It was the ministerial meeting of the PSC held in Nouakchott, Mauritania, on 30 June at its 782nd session which, on renewing the mandate of AMISOM and within the framework of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2431 called for the development of a new AMISOM CONPOPS.

Developed on the basis of the framework of the AMISOM Operational Readiness Assessment (ORA), the Somali Security Forces (SSF), the 2018 AU-UN Joint Review, the National Security Architecture (NSA), the Somalia Transition Plan (STP) and UNSC Resolution 2431, the CONOPS are designed to guide the

operations and organizational reorientation of AMISOM for the transitional period of 2018-2021 during which AMISOM transitions and hands over security responsibilities to Somali Security Forces (SSF).

The CONOPS provide the operational framework for the implementation of the AMISOM exit strategy designed to reduce the threat from al-Shabab, secure the political process and transfer security responsibilities to Somali forces. Based on review of the prevailing political situation and threat analysis in the operational environment in Somalia, the CONOPS provides for a three-phased process of the reconfiguration and progressive handing over of responsibilities to SSF.

Phase I runs until 30 June 2019, during which AMISOM will be reconfigured to enable it to degrade al-Shabaab, secure Mogadishu-Baidoa MSR, hold and secure Leego, protect key population centers identified especially along the MSRs, collapse or consolidate existing FOBs and build ones (where appropriate jointly with SSF) and commence a multi-faceted transition from AMISOM to SNA/SSF. During Phase II, which runs from July 2019 to December 2020, SSF are expected to take increasing lead role to degrade al-Shabaab, build and hold positions along MSRs and continue to strengthen population centers with Somali or AMISOM police gradually taking over security of the main population centres. Phase III, which runs until December 2021 the end time of AMISOM's operations, AMISOM takes the role of supporting the leadership of SSF and prepare for exit by 2021. In all the three phases, AMISOM will reconfigure its uniformed personnel while strengthen the role and presence of its police and civilian components to key locations. The CONOPS also outline the revised tasks of the military, police and civilian components of AMISOM.

The CONOPS and the effective implementation are premised on a number of assumptions including improvement in the political situation such as the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Federal Member States (FMS) of Somalia working in

partnerships, the generation of the required trained, equipped, and sustained SSF, adequate logistics support and effective strategic communications.

Yet, as the recent experience in the situation in Somalia shows, it is unlikely that there will be a linear implementation of the CONOPS and the AMISOM exit strategy. The first challenge comes from Al Shabaab. Despite gains registered in pushing back the terror group, it continues to orchestrate major attacks including those targeting AMISOM, SSF, FGS and UN. On 2 January 2019, in a sign of possible shift in tactics, Al-Shabab launched a series of mortar attacks against AMISOM camp in Mogadishu landing particularly affecting UNSOM compound. Outside Mogadishu as well Al Shabaab's attacks remain high targeting convoys in Middle Juba, Lower Juba, Gedo, Hiiran and Bay regions. On 2 February, al Shabaab exploded a suicide car bomb outside a military base for Ethiopian soldiers.

That the implementation of the exit strategy and the different phases of the CONOPS depend on security situation came out when the initial plan of the withdrawal of 1000 AMISOM troops was

postponed from the initial period of October 2018 to February 2019.

The other challenge is in the political front. Here the major problem is the lack of cohesion among Somali government actors. There have been major issues between FGS and the FMS affecting the

implementation of the STP. There have been issues within the FMS of Somalia as well.

In terms of the drawdown of the size of AMISOM, a major issue has been whose troops should withdraw. The CONOPS envisage that the 1000 troops that will be withdrawn by end of February 2019 would be from Burundi. There seems to be no agreement on the criteria for troop withdrawal. Burundi appears to insist

that the withdrawal has to be on the basis of equitable proportion from each of AMISOM's troop-contributing countries, while the CONOPS is based on consideration of threat analysis. Indeed, one of the reasons for the factors for early convening of today's session was to get the endorsement of the PSC in order to meet the planned deadline for the withdrawal of the 1000 troops by end of the month.

The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué, which is expected to endorse the CONOPS.