

One year of ATMIS Operations: Progress, Challenges and Funding

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Tomorrow (28 April), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1151st session to take stock of the progress, challenges, and funding as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) marks the first anniversary of its operation on 1 April, replacing the 15 years long African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

The session is expected to start with opening remarks by Abdelhamid Elgharbi, Permanent Representative of Tunisia and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of April, followed by introductory remarks of Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS). The representatives of Somalia and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) are expected to deliver statements. The representatives of the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) are also among the speakers.

This session is coming against the background of increasing diplomatic efforts to address challenges facing ATMIS, most notably the dire funding shortfall facing the Mission. Delegates from ATMIS TCCs have started a four-day meeting on 24 April to evaluate the performance of the mission and deliberate on how to undertake a smooth withdrawal of the 2000 troops from Somalia as per the revised timeline of 30 June.

ATMIS, mandated through the PSC communique 1068 (2022) and the UN Security Council Resolutions 2628 and 2670 (2022) for a fixed period ending by 31 December 2024, is expected to

undertake transfer of security responsibilities to SSF in four phases as envisaged in its Concept of Operations (CONOPs) and the STP. In each phase, different benchmarks and timelines are outlined that ATMIS and the FGS need to meet, including ATMIS troop drawdowns and force generation of the SSF (for more details on the four phases in the implementation of ATMIS mandate, see our [March 2022 monthly digest](#)).

But the last one year proved the difficulty of delivering on the agreed benchmarks and timelines as evidenced from the need necessitated by security conditions for delaying the first troop drawdowns for additional six months. 2000 ATMIS troops were set to withdraw at the end of Phase I on 31 December 2022. The FGS however requested the revision of the operational timeline for the drawdown considering the security situation on the ground. Accordingly, the PSC, at its 1121st session held on 11 November 2022, supported the request to extend Phase I of ATMIS for the drawdown of 2000 troops until 30 June 2023 while reaffirming to maintain the exit date of 31 December 2024. Accordingly, the UN Security Council Resolution 2670(2022) 'exceptionally' extended the authorization of the mission until 30 June.

While the drawdown created the space to undertake outstanding tasks during Phase I, it also brought about critical challenges as highlighted by the SRCC Souef during his remarks to the PSC and UNSC in March of this year. The first challenge is the unclarity over how to carry out the drawdown given that UNSC requested, under its Resolution 2670(2022), for the mission to implement a 'strategic sector-by-sector' approach to the drawdown of the 2000 troops while ATMIS CONOPs envisaged the 'pro rata formula' for the drawdown. The second challenge is that no funding modality has been agreed so far to fund the six months drawdown delay, further compounding the ATMIS funding shortfall.

Over the last one year, ATMIS has made notable progress in the

execution of its mandate, carrying out joint kinetic operations with the SSF against Al Shabaab as well as providing critical support to the 'SSF-led and owned offensive' that has been launched since August 2022. Such offensives, which benefited greatly from the support provided by local communities, registered significant security gains inflicting defeats on Al Shabaab, particularly in Hirshabelle and Galmudug states, degrading Al Shabaab's operational capability and recovering several towns and villages from the group. The successful security operations led by local militias and the FGS also paved the way for the handover of Forward Operating Basis (FOBs) as part of the security transition in line with the CONOPs and the STP. The first of such handover took place in January when ATMIS transferred Maslah FOB, which had been under its control since 2012, to the federal government. It also played critical role in securing the May 2022 Presidential election and the subsequent peaceful transfer of power in June 2022.

Encouraging, albeit slow, steps have been taken by the FGS to increase the pace of force generation that remains a critical factor for the realization of the STP and orderly exit of ATMIS at the end of 2024. In that context, the return of 3,500 Eritrean-trained Somali troops to Somalia, and the ongoing trainings of the SSF in Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Turkey, and Uganda are expected to enhance momentum in speeding up force generation that is critical towards the gradual transfer of security responsibilities to the SSF pursuant to the PSC communique 1068 (2022) and the UNSC Resolutions 2628 (2022).

The second drawdown of further 3000 troops should be completed by 30 September 2023. This means that ATMIS is expected to withdraw 5000 of its 18,586 troops from Somalia in the next five-month period. Despite the fact that ATMIS faced some of the most fatal attacks since the deployment of AU's mission to Somalia and the security gains are not completely secure from facing reversals, it is anticipated that some of the gains

made may avoid the need for a request for extending this second drawdown. This is more so the case on account also of the support and coordination that Somalia initiated with its neighbouring countries.

Above all, the funding shortfall has been one of the biggest challenges of ATMIS, risking reversal of the hard-won security gains in Somalia. The mission went operational without securing the required funding. Since then, the mission witnessed widening funding shortfall as highlighted above. On account of the seriousness of the problem, financing ATMIS has been one of the recurrent themes that featured throughout PSC's sessions that are dedicated to address Somalia/ATMIS.

Despite the direct funding by the EU, which remains the major ATMIS financial contributor, the mission's funding shortfall for the year 2022 was around €25.8 million, but the shortfall has considerably increased this year. In March, Bankole reportedly [appealed](#) to bilateral and international partners to help fill \$ 89 million funding gap, further warning that if ATMIS does not have the funds to operate effectively in the coming months before the scheduled handover in December 2024, 'it may mean that al-Shabaab will eventually take over the responsibilities of a state in Somalia.' Even more concerning is the substantial reduction of EU's contribution in support of ATMIS military component from Euro 140 million for 2022 to 85 million for 2023.

With the aim to address the budget shortfall, PSC sought different options in various of its sessions including an appeal to the UN Security Council to hold a special session on financing ATMIS and the SSF (1075th session); a call on EU and other partners to establish a financial support package (1075th session); and a request on AU Commission and UN, along with IGAD and partners, to jointly organize international pledging conference by March 2023 (1121st session). The PSC also stressed, in all its communiqués adopted at the sessions on

ATMIS, the need for accessing UN assessed contributions for sustainable and predictable funding necessary for the effective execution of the mandate of the mission.

As highlighted by Amani Africa's ['Ideas Indaba'](#) on the first anniversary of ATMIS, the AU Commission along with FGS most recently undertook a roadshow in an effort to mobilize funds to make up for the funding shortfall. This involved travels to and holding of convening with partners in New York and Washington DC for soliciting funding for ATMIS. While no major breakthrough has emerged, India contributed \$ 2 million following the roadshow in New York.

On its part, the AU is set to use its Peace Fund in line with the decision of the 36th Ordinary Session of the Assembly held in February that approved the 'immediate use of the AU Peace Fund and its Crisis Reserve Facility (CRF)' to fill the financial gap in ATMIS. While this is a welcome decision, for the immediate needs of ATMIS it would only avail from \$ 5 million Crisis Reserve Fund that was approved and can be disbursed in the short term.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a communique. The PSC is expected to welcome progress made in the execution of ATMIS mandate over the last one year despite the challenges that the mission continues to face. It may particularly commend ATMIS and the FGS for the successful offensives launched against Al Shabaab and may further request them to keep up the momentum in the fight against the terrorist group. It may also emphasize the imperative of stabilization efforts to restore state authority and basic services in those areas that are liberated from the terrorist group. PSC is likely to commend the FGS for its effort to increase the pace of force generation as evidenced from the return of Eritrea-trained Somali troops to Somalia and the ongoing training in several other countries. In that regard, the PSC may highlight the issue of force generation in the required number and quality

as a critical factor to ensure a timely and orderly transition of security responsibilities from ATMIS to the SSF. As the timelines for the first and second ATMIS troop drawdowns are fast approaching, the PSC may request the ATMIS leadership and the FGS to make timely preparations and work on all pending tasks to avoid any further delays to the agreed timelines for troop drawdowns. On financing ATMIS, the PSC is expected to express once again its deep concern over the mission's funding shortfall that continues to widen and may draw attention to the risk of reversal of the hard-won security gains in Somalia without addressing this challenge. In that light, while acknowledging the significant support provided by the EU and other partners, the PSC may reiterate its appeal to bilateral and international partners to contribute their part in filling the existing financial gap. It may also reiterate its longstanding position over the possibility of using UN assessed contribution to finance ATMIS and ensure sustainable, predictable and adequate funding throughout the duration of the mission.