

Updated briefing on support for Somalia after the withdrawal of ATMIS

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Tomorrow (21 May), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1213th session on the Report of the post-ATMIS Assessment. Initially scheduled for 13 May and removed from the monthly program, this session is brought back to the agenda of the PSC after the finalisation of the report due for submission by the AU Commission.

The session is expected to commence with an opening remark from Ambassador Innocent Shiyu, Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the AU and Chairperson of the PSC for May 2024. Subsequently, Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), is expected to provide a statement to the Council, introducing the report prepared for the session. It is also expected for Souef Mohamed El-Amine, the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission for Somalia and Head of ATMIS, to provide a briefing on the report.

This is the fourth meeting of the PSC inclusive of the informal consultation it held since March on support for Somalia post-ATMIS. The most recent session was held on 4 April during its 1205th session, dedicated to the session to an analytical briefing on the strategic planning for the post-AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) Somalia. In the communique adopted on the session, the PSC requested the AU Commission 'to undertake comprehensive and detailed planning based on the situation on the ground, including undertaking threat assessments, in consultation with the Federal

Government of Somalia, ATMIS Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs), and the UN.' Tomorrow's session constitutes a follow-up to this specific decision.

The session focuses on the post-ATMIS Assessment report. In order to prepare the report, AU's Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD) deployed a team to Somalia from 24 to 20 April 2024 to conduct a strategic assessment, including for a possible post-ATMIS AU peace support operation in Somalia. The team engaged and canvassed the views of a wide range of stakeholders involving representatives of FGS, some Federal Member States, ATMIS troop-contributing countries, UN, EU and bilateral states accredited to and based in Somalia.

The report is expected to provide an update on the security situation, including the threat assessment. Among others, this is expected to highlight the threat that Al Shabaab poses, including the balance of power between Somalia security forces and the terrorist group. In this respect, a [recent analysis](#) pointed out that while the major offensive that the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) undertook building on a wave of clan-based resistance to Al Shabaab in the Hiraan and Galmudug regions which succeeded in recovering over 200 settlements, the war stalemated again following the setback that the FGS faced in the second round of its offensive campaign. Noting the UN Monitoring Group's January 2024 report estimation that the strength of Al Shabaab is between 7,000 and 12,000, the same analysis pointed out that the force strength of Al Shaabab shows the group's 'ability to withstand significant casualties and recruit new fighters, including children.'

Tomorrow's session and report are also expected to discuss ATMIS drawdown. At the moment, there is a little over a month for the implementation of the third phase of the drawdown. In accordance with the ATMIS drawdown timeline, the third phase of drawdown envisages the withdrawal of 4,000 ATMIS troops and the generation of approximately 19000 troops by the FGS. Preparation for the drawdown of the third phase of ATMIS has

been underway since February when ATMIS fulfilled the second phase drawdown a month behind schedule. Some of the preparations undertaken by ATMIS and the AU since the second phase drawdown concluded include a [four-day conference](#) that aimed to plan for the next phase of the drawdown of the additional 4000 troops in June 2024 and conduct an impact assessment of Phase 1 and Phase 2 drawdowns.

On the part of the federal government, in addition to submitting its proposal for strategic planning for post-ATMIS, the National Security Advisor also [hosted](#) the head of ATMIS and UNSOS to discuss plans for the third phase of drawdown. This was followed by two additional meetings one among the [tripartite](#) leadership (FGS, ATMIS, and UNSOS) to further discuss the drawdown in alignment with the SSF Trust Fund as well as the Post ATMIS plans and the [second](#) involving FGS, ATMIS troop contribution countries and a delegation from the AU PAPS Peace Support Operations (PSOD) to further identify post-ATMIS security plans. As the focus has been on preparation for the post-ATMIS phase and as can be discerned from the FGS proposal for strategic planning for post-ATMIS, there is little indication of a delay in the implementation of this third phase of the drawdown.

On the security front, it is worth noting that there are legitimate concerns about the emergence of a security vacuum on the departure of ATMIS at the end of December 2024. This was highlighted in the FGS document on the proposal for strategic planning for post-ATMIS. Despite the launch of a second phase of the counter-insurgency by the FGS and the most recent [new phase of a military campaign](#) against al-Shabaab with the aid of US military command, al-Shabaab has significantly increased its target towards federal and ATIMS forces. Between March and April, al-Shabaab [orchestrated 26 attacks and 6 explosions](#) targeting the Somali security force.

The other issue that will be of interest for tomorrow's session and expected to be highlighted in the report is the

political environment in Somalia. The tension surrounding the constitutional amendment undertaken by the FGS, which recently saw the approval of amendments to parts of the constitution by Parliament, has heightened tensions among various clan members. This friction plays into the hands of Al Shabaab and undermines counter-insurgency coordination. The most serious fallout from the tension that arose between the FGS and Federal Member States (FMS) is Puntland renouncing its ties with the FGS and announcing its independence. While it has not reached the breaking point as with Puntland, there are reports of discontent in other FMS such as Southwest and Jubaland. Although the FGS has attempted to neutralize the tension, these persisting and recurring tensions between FGS and FMS are indicative of recurring challenges of cohesion that undermine the consolidation of cohesive state authority necessary to narrow down the space of maneuver for Al Shabaab.

In terms of the post-ATMIS presence that the AU may have, one of the other issues expected to be highlighted is the continuity that is expected to be maintained between the end of ATMIS mandate and the start of the new mission. While there seems to be agreement on the need for avoiding the emergence of vacuum, it is far from clear whether and which of the ATMIS contingents constitute the nucleolus of or remain part of the post-ATMIS mission that Somalia has requested to have. In the light of the tension that erupted between Somalia and Ethiopia following the signing of an MoU between Ethiopia and Somalia, there is uncertainty on whether the FGS would like to see a withdrawal of ATMIS troops and their replacement by contingents from countries it may consider more friendly to it. This is not without its own ramifications for relations between FGS and some of the FMS and for avoiding the emergence of a security vacuum. The PSC may therefore underscore the need for consensus on the matter having regard to the imperative for ensuring continuity and avoiding any security vacuum.

The report is also expected to present both the options for the form that the post-ATMIS mission could take and the sources of funding for the mission. While options for the post-ATMIS mission may range from a regional mission involving troops of countries of the region along the lines of the East African deployment to Eastern DRC to another AU mission of a limited mandate and duration, the most realistic option is another AU mission, which was already hinted at in the FGS's proposal for strategic planning for post-ATMIS presented on 27 March to the PSC.

The one issue which is of pressing concern in this context is the source of funding for this post-ATMIS mission. The funding shortfalls that ATMIS faced have created gaps in the operational capacity of ATMIS, including in effecting payment to ATMIS troops. It is thus expected that from the options that the strategic assessment report would present PSC's decision would be informed by these experiences. As such, it is not expected that the PSC would opt for the current and AMISOM/ATMIS model of funding. Both FGS and the PSC are expected to have a shared view that the post-ATMIS mission is not as hamstrung by similar financial shortfalls as ATMIS. The option that PSC members are expected to endorse is one that ensures predictable funding of the mission for the duration of its mandate. This requires the current AMISOM/ATMIS model plus payment for troop allowance and death and disability benefits which would be sourced either from UN assessed contributions or another dedicated source that is not a trust fund.

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. The PSC is expected to commend the AU Commission for producing a Post ATMIST report promptly. In this regard, the PSC may welcome the findings of the post-ATMIS Assessment report and request the AU Commission to work closely with the FGS to ensure the post-ATMIS Security arrangements reflect the key finding of the report. As for ATMIS drawdown, the PSC may commend the preparation by the FGS and ATMIS for the third phase of

drawdown. In light of the limited time ahead of the third drawdown, the PSC may in alignment with the UN recommend the third phase go hand in hand with the preparations by the FGS for a post ATMIS Security Plan as well as their capacity to produce the next set of federal forces. The PSC may also reiterate its call for adequate and sustainable financing of post-ATMIS Security arrangements and in this respect may urge the UN to give serious consideration for use of UN assessed contributions either under UN Resolution 2719 or as a special case for such funding as AU and UN finalize the necessary preparations for the implementation of Resolution 2719. In relation to the political tensions particularly between the FGS and FMS, the PSC may welcome the efforts by the Somalia to de-escalation the tension and underscore the need for maintaining political cohesion and national reconciliation as the foundation for the success of any post-ATMIS deployment. Furthermore, the PSC may reiterate the need for a coordination among key stakeholder in the region to combat the threat posed by al-Shabaab.