

AMISOM- A Model for a Peace Operation in Mali?

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In 2012, armed Islamists seized large parts of northern Mali. Planning for a military intervention by West African troops operating under a UN mandate was initiated early on, but full deployment still remains to be implemented. In January 2013, France launched an intervention aimed at defeating the rebel militias. The French troops are expected to withdraw by March, by which time an international peacekeeping force needs to assume responsibility for preventing a resurgence by the militias.

As part of the African Union's (AU) peacekeeping operation, AMISOM¹, military forces from the East African countries have fought armed Islamists in Somalia for several years. Among options for an intervention in Mali, AMISOM has been depicted as a potential model for an African-led mission. Over the past two years, AMISOM has achieved considerable success in Somalia. The security situation in the country has vastly improved, allowing for the establishment of a new government and a functioning state.

AMISOM has benefitted from an extensive support package supplied by international partners. The Secretary-General of the UN has suggested that a similar model may be required for the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). For this reason, it is of interest to explore the content of the AMISOM support model, as well as to assess what lessons need to be learned if adopting a similar structure to Mali.

AMISOM's initial mandate allowed for 8,000 troops tasked with supporting the transitional government, enabling the provision of humanitarian assistance, and creating conditions conducive to long-term stabilisation, reconstruction and development.

AMISOM has encountered a range of challenges. It was deployed in early 2007, but was immediately attacked by armed elements. Full mandated strength was not achieved

until 2012.² A great number of force casualties reduced the willingness of participating nations to commit troops. The slow troop build-up was also a consequence of a lack of resources among potential troop contributors, as well as within the AU. In addition, the AU suffered from a lack of capacity for operational planning and management.

The support architecture developed for AMISOM is both extensive and complex. Several partners contribute, the largest donors being the UN, EU and United States. International support to AMISOM can be divided into the following categories:

- Institutional capacity-building and technical support to AU headquarters for planning and managing AMISOM. Primarily supplied by the UN but also by means of expert technical advice from for example NATO and individual countries.
- Logistical support to AMISOM. The UN provides a logistical support package similar to that supplied to the UN's own operations. The use of the UN's own resources for a regional operation has been controversial and has required a creative interpretation of UN legal codes, as well as the establishment of a special UN office at AMISOM with the authority to use UN resources.
- Voluntary financial and other support to the AU and troop contributors. The EU has contributed extensively to the management of AMISOM, particularly with regard to troop allowances, through resources from the EU's African Peace Facility. Bilateral partners support troop-contributing countries primarily in terms of strategic air support, training, equipment and troop sustenance. The major bilateral donors are the United States, Algeria and the United Kingdom.

¹ African Union Mission in Somalia

² The mandated troop level was increased from 8,000 to 12,000 in December 2010 and was further extended to 17,000 in January 2012.

Modelling AFISMA, or any other African mission, on AMISOM is not free of problems. The construction of the AMISOM support structure has been both unwieldy and complex. In addition, the effectiveness of the mission was long questioned. AMISOM did not contribute to any substantial change in Somalia in the first four years after its inception. Until 2011, the mission had only managed to secure Mogadishu Airport, the presidential residence and the Port of Mogadishu, as well as the road between these points. This achievement came at a high cost in terms of the number of members of the force killed or wounded.

AMISOM has not stood alone in the fight against the militias. At times, both Ethiopia and Kenya have launched separate interventions in Somalia. Partnership between the national security forces and AMISOM has also been of importance for the improved security situation. The EU has run a training mission in Uganda, aimed at strengthening the Somali army since 2010. Together with AMISOM, the trained forces have contributed to the fight against the main enemy, Al-Shabaab. The EU recently launched a similar training mission to Mali. In the case of Somalia, finding partners to guarantee the payment of force allowances has been an important complement to the EU mission by helping to ensure that the soldiers returning from Uganda are not recruited by Al-Shabaab. Similar solutions are essential for success in Mali, as well.

The main troop contributors to AMISOM – Uganda and Kenya – have been instrumental in the offensives against Al-Shabaab. The US has provided AMISOM with counterterrorist training and equipment to strengthen its abilities to fight the militias. Many of Mali's neighbours lack the needed military capacity and experience for long-term counter-insurgency fighting. The deserts and mountains that constitute the main operational environment in northern Mali are also considered more challenging than the urban environment that AMISOM has primarily operated in. Despite being ejected from the cities, Al-Shabaab is still present in rural areas. Continued engagement with armed elements in the countryside will be the main task for the multinational force in Mali, after securing the liberated cities. As experience from Afghanistan shows, the initial defeat of irregular forces does not equate to securing a sustainable peace. In addition, there is also a broader regional dimension to the armed Islamists in Mali than in the case

of Al-Shabaab.

Discussions about a peace operation to Mali have been going on over the past year. Some African forces are already on the ground in Mali, but full deployment is lagging. The Security Council is also considering a UN peacekeeping mission to Mali, possibly using AFISMA as an interim force. The willingness of the Mali government to accept a UN -mission remains uncertain at the time of writing. Al-Shabaab has used previous discussions of launching a UN operation in Somalia together with rhetoric regarding imperialism and colonisation, as a way of mobilising its supporters. Nevertheless, UN negotiations have recently been resumed.

Given the situation in Mali, any peace mission launched will likely need to remain in the country for a considerable period of time. It is important to remember that the rationale behind AMISOM's deployment was not based on a preference for an African mission, but rather due to a lack of viable alternatives. The difficult security situation in the country and the lack of a peace agreement – factors also applicable to Mali – led the Security Council to regard a UN-mission as inappropriate. AMISOM was initially deployed for a period of six months, with expectations that the mission would be re-hatted as a UN operation at the end of the period. This never happened. In addition, it took four years before international partners provided AMISOM with the resources necessary to make an actual difference in Somalia. Mali cannot afford to wait that long. A peace operation to Mali modelled on AMISOM thus needs to be founded on a clear will and intent of the international community to immediately, and substantially, ensure the effectiveness of the operation. Otherwise the mission will be at risk of an AMISOM-like paralysis, with potentially destabilising consequences for the entire region.

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