**3 CHALLENGES OF THE AFRICAN UNION MISSION IN SOMALIA {AMISOM**}

The challenges discussed are: The continued threat from Al-shabab; internal problems within AMISOM and the lack of political settlement between the federal government and the regions.

Challenge 1: The Lack of a Political Settlement AMISOM’s most fundamental problem was that the process of constructing a federal state in Somalia not only failed to make sufficient progress but sometimes actively generated conflict between the subsequent centers of power. AMISOM was mandated to support the federal government but the mission had to operate in a context defined by the lack of an overarching political settlement setting out how Somalia should be governed and by whom. The underlying problem, as the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia put it, was the inability of “Somalia’s political elite to prioritize the long-term goals of State-building over the short-term capture of State resources.”83 The lack of elite agreement left Somalia without a consensus on some fundamental issues. First, until very recently there was no consensus over how to form the next political dispensation, and therefore no way to get genuine buy-in and support from Somali citizens and international donors alike. When a decision was finally made, Somalia’s external partners ended up endorsing the Federal Government’s version, despite the fact this was rejected by important regions such as Puntland as well as Somaliland. Second, with regard to security, Somalia was left without a national security strategy setting out the vision for and roles of its security forces. Without such a document there could be no clarity on how to build national security forces and what form they should take. As we discuss below, the Guulwade (Victory) Plan, which emerged in 2015, was a poor substitute. Third, the numerous rounds of political infighting amongst Somalia’s political elites distracted them from building a genuinely national army and police force and taking the fight to al-Shabaab. Instead of national political consensus to take on al-Shabaab, AMISOM was stuck in the middle of bickering amongst Somalia’s politicians over how to interpret the country’s provincial constitution, which was finally adopted in 2012.84 In Mogadishu, MPs lost confidence in the executive, twice attempted to impeach the president and regularly changed prime ministers. In the regions, conflict occurred along two axes: against the federal government and among different actors struggling to gain power within particular regions themselves. The problem for the federal government was that although it was recognized as the legitimate sovereign authority by most external actors it lacked the power to impose its preferred political outcomes on other regional actors. As a result, several regional administrations emerged, sometimes generating intense conflict between the local actors and the federal government. The first Interim Regional Administration (IRA) was established in August 2013 when Ahmed Madobe effectively defeated the Federal Government in a power struggle to control the Interim Jubbaland Administration.85 Since then, the Interim South West Administration formed in June 2014, the Interim Galmudug Administration in July 2015, and the Interim Hiraan and Middle Shabelle Administration should be up and running by March 2016. The process of establishing these administrations created considerable (and sometimes violent) conflict among the participants. For AMISOM, this generated several headaches. First, it distracted national leaders from implementing President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud’s top three priorities, which he had defined as “security, security and security.” Second, it gave AMISOM an additional set of tasks related to providing security and logistical support at the numerous regional conferences and meetings across southcentral Somalia that took place in the process of establishing the IRAs. The mission did this successfully but it diverted resources from the offensives against al-Shabaab. Third, it was notable that most of the influential players in the process of establishing the IRAs derived their power from clan affiliations rather than political parties or religious movements. This highlighted that al-Shabaab was not the only security threat facing the FGS and AMISOM. Indeed, clan conflicts over the newly recovered towns, intercommunal clashes and fighting over land and water resources had often intensified after al-Shabaab withdrew from its strongholds. Fourth, AMISOM’s mandate to support the Federal Government sometimes put it at odds with the local regional power brokers who saw the SNA as a clan dominated institution.87 The situation was made even more complicated and confusing when certain AMISOM contingents ignored that mandate and struck up unofficial relationships with those actors, some of which put them in conflict with the FGS. In 2013, for example, Kenya’s support for Ahmed Madobe pitted one of AMISOM’s national contingents against the Federal Government. Tensions between the FGS and the Kenyan contingent in AMISOM flared up again in late 2015after the latest round of allegations that Kenyan troops in Kismayo were involved in illicit smuggling activities, which had the indirect effect of supporting al-Shabaab.88 Fifth, as discussed in more detail below, the lack of clarity about Somalia’s national security strategy made it impossible (for outsiders or insiders) to build a capable, legitimate, and inclusive set of Somalia National Security Forces. AMISOM was therefore left without an effective local security partner and had to fight al-Shabaab while walking through the political minefield of forces established by the IRAs, other clan militias and additional armed groups such as Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamma’a. In such circumstances, AMISOM’s attempts to work with the FGS to deliver stabilization programs and extend the Federal Government’s authority into the regions was always as likely to generate conflict as it was to build peace.

Challenge 2: The Threat of Al-Shabaab Although al-Shabaab is a significantly weaker movement than it was during its golden age (2009-10), it still poses a deadly threat to AMISOM, the Somali security forces and government officials and civilians.90 AMISOM’s offensive operations during 2014 and 2015 did make life more uncomfortable for al-Shabaab: the insurgents lost several senior leaders (mainly through US strikes) and numerous towns and ports, which, in turn, forced them to generate financial resources from a narrower set of activities such as zakat (taxation) which was much more unpopular with locals than skimming profits from the illicit trades in charcoal and sugar. But in other respects the AMISOM/SNA operations did not deal a major blow to alShabaab’s combat capabilities, particularly its Amniyat forces, its “technicals” and the new Abu Zubair Battalion that reportedly conducted the assaults on the AMISOM bases in Leego and Janaale in June and September 2015 respectively. Nor did AMISOM’s operations completely stop alShabaab benefitting from the illicit trades in charcoal and sugar. Most recently, al-Shabaab demonstrated its continued ability to overrun AMISOM forward bases when its Saleh Nabhan brigade captured Kenya’s El Adde base on 15 January 2016, and to wreak havoc in Mogadishu with an attack on Lido beach a week later. In this sense, AMISOM continued to face an adaptable enemy that was down but not out. First of all, al-Shabaab usually chose to surrender most of its settlements without a fight. Before they withdrew, al-Shabaab often left these towns in a desperate state of humanitarian crisis. In some towns the militants destroyed wells. In its former headquarters of Barawe, the militants completely gutted the hospital of its equipment. As a result, a single SNA mobile clinic was the only medical care available to the local population.91 Having retreated, al-Shabaab fighters would often set up camp several kilometres outside the recovered towns and return for harassing raids as well as set up roadblocks and taxation points along the entry routes as a means of continuing their control over the local population. Alternatively, the militants would sometimes force local people to leave with them, leaving AMISOM to inherit ghost towns. AMISOM was also not well prepared to deal with the IED threats and its main supply routes were left vulnerable, presenting problems not only for AMISOM, SNA, and UNSOA personnel but also humanitarian relief supplies, which could reduce local reliance on alShabaab.92 Second, AMISOM’s operations prompted some members of al-Shabaab to relocate. Some of its forces moved north into Puntland while it dramatically expanded its presence and influence in Kenya. Indeed, one of al-Shabaab’s recent propaganda videos even extolled the virtues of jihadi life in Kenya’s Boni forest where its fighters could feast on giraffe and other local wildlife.93 there was also renewed internal debate within al-Shabaab about its position in the global jihadi marketplace. Despite some flirtation with ISIL by small factions in Puntland, most of alShabaab remains wedded to al-Qaida. Third, al-Shabaab’s dwindling political fortunes in Somalia pushed it to conduct a war of destabilization rather than attempt to build a genuine alternative form of government to the federal process. Indeed, it is important to recall that al-Shabaab’s voice hardly registered in any of the debates about the IRAs, nor did it succeed in disrupting them. This highlights the militants’ political insignificance in the ongoing process of reconstructing the Somali state. However, this has also forced al-Shabaab to morph into a more extreme transnational network. Kenya has borne the brunt of this transformation.94 As such, alShabaab needs only to survive and launch reasonably regular attacks to be deemed a success.

Challenge 3: AMISOM’s Internal Problems It is important to remember that the AMISOM that exists on paper in the UN Security Council resolutions and AU communiqués is not the same AMISOM that exists in reality. The real AMISOM suffers from several major internal problems that have hindered its ability to effectively implement its mandated tasks. AMISOM’s first internal challenge is its lack of military enablers. Although African governments and external donors regularly made statements supporting the mission, they failed to deliver the resources required to effectively take the fight to al-Shabaab while simultaneously supporting the stabilization of the south-central regions. Specifically, AMISOM was forced to conduct its offensive operations without sufficient military helicopters, armored vehicles, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, and a quick reaction strike force (ideally comprised of air mobile troops) that could operate across AMISOM’s sectors. All these resources have been authorized in previous UN Security Council resolutions, some more than three years ago. Yet AU member states and external donors have consistently failed to deliver them to the commanders in the field. The lack of military helicopters in particular has left AMISOM without the ability to strike alShabaab in depth. It enabled the militants to simply retreat before AMISOM’s greater firepower, while retaining the luxury of freedom of movement. Hence, al-Shabaab remained able to target the new AMISOM/SNA bases at the time and place of their choosing. Although both Ethiopia and Kenya deployed their own air assets inside Somalia, they were not part of AMISOM and hence were not able to deliver sustained or coordinated cross-sector operations. Another dimension of this problem was that AMISOM’s success in capturing about two dozen towns over-stretched its forces and left its main supply routes and some of its forward operating bases vulnerable. Again, helicopters would have been useful to provide rapid response and protection of these supply routes and bases. The continued under-resourcing of the UNSOA and the stark differences between a UN organizational culture focused on peacekeeping and the war-fighting environment in Somalia also left many gaps in the logistical support needed to mount sustained, effective and coordinated offensive operations against al-Shabaab.