**ASSIGNMENT.**

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**Discuss critically and intelligently the THREE of the challenges of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) (Maximum 3 pages)**

In January 2007, the African Union launched its fourth peacekeeping operation, the AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Now approximately two and a half years old, AMISOM’s short life has not been a happy one. It was deployed to Mogadishu essentially in support of the Ethiopian government’s preferred faction in Somalia’s ongoing civil war. Not surprisingly, and like the three UN-authorized peace operations deployed to Somalia during the early 1990s, AMISOM faced serious challenges which severely restricted its ability to operate. In January 2009 the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, the election of Somalia’s new transitional government led by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, and the arrival of Barrack Obama’s administration in the United States renewed the debate over how AMISOM should relate to the new Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and how the mission might be brought to an end.

This article reflects upon AMISOM’s five main challenges: the legacy of the “Black Hawk Down” episode of October 1993; the shadow of Ethiopia’s military campaign; the African Union’s capacity problems; the conflict environment in Mogadishu; and finding an appropriate exit strategy. It concludes that AMISOM was an ill-conceived mission which attracted few serious political champions. The predictable results were a dangerously under-resourced operation that placed several thousand peacekeepers in harm’s way for morally and politically dubious reasons.

**The Legacy of Black Hawk Down**

All contemporary discussions of peacekeeping in Somalia are colored by the events of October 3-4, 1993, and the images of a violent country awash with arms that they left behind. The deaths of American soldiers not only sparked the Clinton administration’s retreat from UN peacekeeping (codified in Presidential Decision Directive 25) but also acted as a major warning against putting boots on the ground in African war zones. Second, the subsequent U.S. disengagement from Somalia left Ethiopia as the central plank in Washington’s regional policy in the Horn. Third, when U.S. troops did return to the Horn, it was primarily to conduct counter-terrorism operations initially after the 1998 embassy bombings and then in the aftermath of 9/11. U.S. policy thus looked at Somali and regional politics through the narrow and distorting prism of counterterrorism.

**The Shadow of Ethiopia’s Intervention**

Established during Ethiopia’s attempt to forcibly install the TFG in Mogadishu, AMISOM was born into a war zone. Ethiopia’s 2006 campaign was the latest in a long series of military incursions aimed at degrading Islamist bases in Somalia, initially focused on al-Ittihad al-Islamiya, and more recently elements within the coalition of local Shari’a courts known as the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). The main sticking point was that the regime Ethiopia was trying to install was deeply unpopular with many Somalis and once installed, made little effort to build its political legitimacy or reach out to its opponents. AMISOM was thus mandated to support a weak, divided, and (in the view of many Somalis) illegitimate government which was widely seen as being one faction in the country’s ongoing civil war. It didn’t help that the TFG was unable to control many of its security forces and demonstrated virtually no capacity to govern effectively.

There was also considerable skepticism within the African Union about the legitimacy and effectiveness of Ethiopia’s actions and the wisdom of deploying into a violent, chaotic vacuum with no apparent peace strategy. As a direct consequence, few African countries contributed troops to AMISOM. It was also widely noted that Ethiopia’s representative in the Peace and Security Council’s (PSC) had ignored the internal procedures when AMISOM was established – specifically Article 8.9 of the PSC Protocol (2002) states that a PSC Member ‘which is party to a conflict under consideration ... shall not participate either in the discussion or the decision making process relating to that conflict or situation.’

AMISOM was seen in Somalia as being a tool of Western interests because of Washington’s support for Ethiopia’s campaign and because of a strong diplomatic push by the Bush administration to get African states to contribute troops to the mission. Many Somalis were outraged that the United States had openly dismissed the UIC’s achievements during 2006 and acted as if the courts were dominated by terrorists, did not condemn abuses committed by Ethiopian troops against Somali civilians, provided intelligence support to Ethiopia during its operations, and engaged in airstrikes on Somali soil.

**The African Union’s Lack of Capabilities**

The AU’s short record of peacekeeping provided little evidence to suggest that it would be able to find, deploy, manage or pay the 8,000 troops authorized to form AMISOM. Sure enough, the AU struggled to secure promises of just over 60 percent of the authorized troops. In practice, approximately 1,600 Ugandan troops were the sum total of AMISOM until December 2007 when a company of 100 Burundian soldiers arrived. By April 2009 AMISOM had around 4,300 troops from Uganda and Burundi. Nor could the AU pay for its own peacekeeping mission. Instead, it relied on funds from the U.S., UN, the European Union and several other states. Deploying them also proved impossible without Western assistance and when they were deployed they lacked crucial pieces of equipment and materiel (after mid-2008 these needs were partly fulfilled by scavenging assets from the defunct UN Mission in Ethiopia-Eritrea, UNMEE). These predictable shortfalls confirm the findings of a joint UN-AU panel on peacekeeping (the so-called “”), which concluded that, “It is simply undesirable to expect peacekeeping missions to deploy into uncertain situations without the necessary means. It is a recipe for failure. We are deluding ourselves if we believe that having something on the ground is better than doing nothing. In the absence of the necessary capabilities, such an approach brings a high level of risk, not only of failure but also of raising expectations of the people that cannot be fulfilled. Worse still, it undermines the credibility of peacekeeping and weakens the organisation that is responsible.” (para.16). These are sensible warnings and there is little evidence to suggest that these concerns will disappear any time soon.

**The Conflict Environment**

Instead of bringing peace and stability to Somalia, the installation of the TFG in Mogadishu brought about a significant deterioration in the security situation and a renewed phase of warfare. In this context, arguably AMISOM’s most fundamental challenge was how to act as a peacekeeping operation when there was no peace to keep.

Although the UIC’s forces were initially routed from Mogadishu in late December 2006, elements soon reorganized and attacked Ethiopian and TFG soldiers as well as AMISOM peacekeepers. The most deadly element was the youth militia al-Shabaab, which by late November 2008 was estimated by the AU to be around 2,000-strong and to operate in cells and units of about 300-400 militias.  On 22 February 2009, al-Shabaab coordinated the most deadly single attack on AMISOM, which killed 11 Burundian peacekeepers and injured another 28. On April 16, 2009, the UN Secretary-General noted that insurgent attacks against AMISOM were “becoming more sophisticated, coordinated and lethal.”

The ongoing conflict produced an escalating spiral of violence, not least because Ethiopian, TFG, and later AMISOM forces were often heavy handed in responding to these attacks. The resulting collateral damage among the civilian population produced a huge wave of displacement (in 2007, 400,000 of Mogadishu’s population of approximately 1.3 million fled the city) and generated intense levels of anti-Ethiopian and also anti-American feeling.

For AMISOM, this environment meant two main things. First, it was largely dependent on Ethiopian forces to do the lion’s share of security-related activities. Second, its personnel faced significant restrictions on their ability to operate. Indeed, AMISOM was largely restricted to helping to keep open Mogadishu’s air and sea ports, and helping to protect the TFG’s president and prime minister. These tasks also meant that AMISOM had to guard the Kilometer-4 intersection that linked the airport and the presidential palace. Controlling these sites was also essential for maintaining supplies and a potential escape route.

Unfortunately, AMISOM did not always respond to this environment in an appropriate manner, particularly as the peacekeepers themselves become the target of attacks. Most seriously, its troops engaged in the indiscriminate use of force which left many civilians dead or wounded. It was not until April 2009 that AMISOM explicitly recognized this problem and changed tactics: it would only return fire when its soldiers could visually identify their attackers, and would only use weapons that allowed for discriminate fire.

**Finding an Exit**

AMISOM’s final challenge is figuring out how to leave. This became particularly important in early 2009 after the Ethiopian withdrawal and the election of the new transitional President, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. Within Somalia opinion has been divided: some see AMISOM playing a necessary role in supporting the new TFG and Sheikh Sharif’s outreach efforts, others, including the new Prime Minister, recommended that AMISOM should depart within 120 days.

Within the AU, the weight of opinion was clearly to hand over the mission to the UN; the sooner the better. But in the UN Security Council there were good reasons to be cautious. In November 2007, for instance, Ban Ki-moon had said that deploying UN peacekeepers to Somalia was ‘neither realistic nor viable’. A year later, however, the Bush administration pushed for a UN peacekeeping operation for Somalia. It soon discovered that there was no appetite for such a force among European and African powers. The furthest it got was resolution 1863 (16 January 2009) which expressed the Security Council’s “intent” to establish a UN peacekeeping operation “as a follow-on force to AMISOM, subject to a further decision of the Security Council by June 1, 2009” (para.4). With Barrack Obama’s arrival in the White House, however, the U.S. government began to adopt a more cautious stance.

In his April 16, 2009, report on the modalities of such a transition, Ban Ki-Moon set out four options intended to help achieve the UN’s strategic objective in Somalia. The “high-risk” Option A, envisaged replacing AMISOM with a 22,500 strong UN peacekeeping operation with a Chapter VII mandate. The “pragmatic” Option B was for the UN to devise a support package for AMISOM until the Somali National Security Force could secure Mogadishu on its own. The “prudent” Option C was Option B plus a UN Political Office for Somalia and a UN Support Office for AMISOM within Mogadishu. Option D, “Engagement with no international security presence,” was intended to serve as a contingency plan in case of an AMISOM withdrawal (either intentional or forced).

The Secretary-General has advocated an “incremental” approach, divided into three phases: Phase 1 would entail adopting Option B; during Phase 2, Option C would be practiced; and during Phase 3, it would be appropriate to enact Option A. Option D would remain the contingency plan in case of AMISOM withdrawal. It remains to be seen whether this plan will be adopted and, if so, whether it will work.