



Regional Rivalries Heat Up as AMISOM Leaves Somalia

OE Watch Commentary: The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is withdrawing from Somalia, with the last troops scheduled to leave by December 2020. Much of the press coverage about their departure involves whether or not the Somali National Army (SNA) will be up to the task of filling that void. However, as the final deadline approaches, another problem has received far less attention. As the accompanying excerpted article from *The East African* notes, regional rivalries are heating up as the region prepares for a post-AMISOM Somalia.

When Ethiopia briefly went into Somalia in 2006 to rout the forerunner of al-Shabaab, the Islamic Courts Union, it triggered a regional race. Soon, Eritrea, which had a longstanding adversarial relationship with Ethiopia, and at one point even fought a war with it, entered the fray. Kenya also became involved, and later accused Eritrea of supplying weapons to al-Shabaab.

As the article points out, Kenya and Ethiopia should be on the same side as AMISOM withdraws. Both countries entered Somalia to prevent a regime linked to terrorism from taking hold. However, despite their common interest in keeping al-Shabaab contained, their interest in Somalia's resources as well as involvement in that country's local politics "has set them on a collision course."

Uganda and Burundi have also been involved in Somalia, with Uganda supplying the most AMISOM troops of any country followed by Burundi. While the article does not discuss their post-AMISOM plans regarding Somalia, the two countries have at times had markedly strained relations.

Of the many actors in Somalia, only one can potentially benefit from the rivalries and tense relations that abound: al-Shabaab. Though degraded from AMISOM's 12-year offensive, the terrorist organization could experience a resurgence if the countries that fought against it are unable to find common ground for a post-AMISOM Somalia. Should the SNA falter and need a rapid response force, it is not clear if these regional rivalries could be put aside to provide assistance. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



"As AMISOM soldiers, such as the ones pictured here, permanently leave Somalia there is concern that regional rivalries will flare-up."

Source: AMISOM/Flickr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/au_unistphotostream/6440482901/, Public Domain

"Now, as Amisom packs its bags, these rivalries are back, quietly distracting from the primary objectives of the 12-year intervention. Hedging their bets, Kenya and Ethiopia are backing competing interests and have actively tried to influence the outcome of Somalia's regional elections."

Source: Post-Amisom vacuum in Somalia should be AU's priority," *The East African*, 25 August 2019. <https://www.theeastafican.co.ke/oped/editorial/Post-Amisom-vacuum-in-Somalia-should-be-AU-priority/434752-5248280-hc4rr7/index.html>

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Also, Al-Shabaab has at one time invoked the latent territorial claims Somalia has made against [Kenya and Ethiopia] at different times in the past. But now, their involvement in local politics and interest in resources has set them on a collision course. The divergent interests are evident in the simmering diplomatic battles that have manifested in the race for a seat at the UN Security Council.

Although the 12-year offensive against it by the UN-backed Amisom has degraded its strength and pushed it out of major urban centres, Al-Shabaab's ability to mount deadly attacks in the region demonstrates that it remains the primary challenge to peace and security in Somalia and the wider Horn.