

# Peacekeepers Fighting a Counterinsurgency Campaign: A Net Assessment of the African Union Mission in Somalia

NOEL ANDERSON

Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA, USA

*In response to Somalia's decades-long political and humanitarian crises, the African Union has deployed a peace support operation known as the African Union Mission in Somalia. Tasked to help eliminate an ongoing insurgency, the mission has seen heavy combat as it fights to reclaim territory held by the al-Shabaab militant organization. This article applies the techniques of open source campaign analysis to assess the mission's prospects for long-term success. The prognosis is not good. Analysis reveals a range of vulnerabilities that threaten the deployment's core security objectives, suggesting that the optimism many have expressed for the mission is misplaced.*

Since 1991 Somalia has been the exemplar failed state, plagued by seemingly endless civil war, chronic food and water shortages, piracy, and militant Islamic extremism. Without a central authority for over twenty years, the country earned the unenviable distinction of serving as the longest running instance of complete state collapse in contemporary history. A new Federal Government of Somalia, formed in August–September 2012, has technically put an end to some eight years of fragile and flawed “transition” from statelessness to sovereignty. The practical realities on the ground, however, remain generally unchanged: this new authority finds itself largely constrained to the capital, Mogadishu, and under siege by the Al Qaeda–aligned *jihadi* group al-Shabaab.

In support of the beleaguered government, the African Union (AU), with the approval of the United Nations (UN), has deployed a regional peace support operation known as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The mission has been mandated to stabilize the security situation in the country, protect federal institutions, and facilitate humanitarian relief operations, among other tasks.<sup>1</sup> To date, AMISOM forces have seen heavy combat, fighting to reclaim territory held by al-Shabaab militants. With the assistance of Kenyan and Ethiopian forces, which launched coordinated offensives in the fall of 2011, the mission has enjoyed some progress toward that objective, recapturing several cities and dislodging insurgents from Mogadishu to consolidate control of the capital.

These successes have attracted the praise of many policymakers and observers. A January 2012 report by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described the security situation

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Address correspondence to Noel Anderson, Security Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Building E40, Room 404, 1 Amherst Street, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA. E-mail: nta@mit.edu

in Somalia to be at “a tipping point,” with the prospects for change “greater than they have been for many years.”<sup>2</sup> Later that year, Johnnie Carson, the United States Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, told reporters at the New York Foreign Press Center that “Somalia is a good news story for the region, for the international community, but most especially for the people of Somalia itself.”<sup>3</sup> And in September 2013, political scientist Ethan Bueno de Mesquita argued that AMISOM had made it “nearly impossible for al-Shabaab to hold territory even in its former strongholds in southern Somalia,” suggesting that the group is “fighting for its survival.”<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, this rhetoric of positive change is belied by the persistent presence of al-Shabaab across south-central Somalia; by the group’s continued attacks targeting aid workers, AMISOM forces, and administrative officials; and by the group’s demonstrated capacity to strike international targets throughout East Africa.<sup>5</sup> Before rushing to conclusions about what AMISOM has accomplished based on political imperatives, humanitarian requirements, or hopeful rationalizations of what might be possible, a realistic net assessment of the mission, its objectives, and its prospects for success seems imperative—yet no such study currently exists in the open source literature.

Will AMISOM succeed in its efforts to reclaim Somalia from al-Shabaab? This article aims to answer that question by undertaking a force-on-force campaign analysis of the mission. The techniques of open source campaign analysis were commonly employed to model possible conventional engagements during the Cold War, and have also been applied by analysts studying smaller contingencies in the post-Cold War era.<sup>6</sup> Such an approach cannot predict the outcome of a conflict, but it can inform policy debates with rigorous analyses that show how different assumptions about military requirements and capabilities generate different possible outcomes for a given contingency. By applying campaign analysis techniques to the AMISOM mission, this article highlights vulnerabilities that threaten the deployment’s core security objectives while simultaneously highlighting the ways in which policymakers can resolve mission deficiencies. It is hoped that these contributions not only inform policy decisions about the AMISOM deployment, but also enrich the academic and military debates surrounding the viability of stability operations elsewhere in the world.

While open source campaign analysis provides an indispensable tool for military analysts, two limitations of the approach merit attention. First, it does not draw on classified sources. Consequently, this article is at times forced to make simplifying assumptions about the objectives, capabilities, and operating environments of the actors under assessment. Over twenty years of sustained conflict in Somalia have made reliable data collection impossible across a range of indicators, and the dynamic nature of the ongoing AMISOM deployment encourages secrecy on the part of belligerents. Nonetheless, the military situation described below is as factually accurate as possible; where assumptions are required, they are clearly noted and in every instance conservatively biased *against* the article’s ultimate conclusions.

Second, the campaign analysis presented below offers only a periscope view of the crisis in Somalia. It shamelessly scopes out of the analysis many of the economic, political, social, and humanitarian problems that afflict the country, focusing exclusively on the military requirements of the AMISOM deployment. Undoubtedly, this dilutes the complexity of the challenge faced by AMISOM forces; however, these simplifications are necessary to render a campaign analysis tractable. Moreover, such an approach is conservative: if anything, the highly stylized perspective presented herein should give readers pause when considering the true scale of the task AMISOM confronts.

The article’s prognosis is not good. Analysis reveals that AMISOM is undermanned; that the Federal Government of Somalia fields too few Somali National Army units; that both

AMISOM and Somali forces lack the resources and force enablers needed to accomplish their objectives; and that neither force possesses the capacity to sustain combat operations over the long term. These findings suggest that AMISOM's prospects for success are low, that stability in Somalia remains deeply threatened by al-Shabaab, and that the optimism many have expressed for the mission is misplaced.

The remainder of this article proceeds in five parts. The first section provides a brief backgrounder on the origins of the al-Shabaab insurgency and the AMISOM response. The second clarifies the nature of the AMISOM mission and outlines the scope of the challenge posed by al-Shabaab. The third section models the military force needed to overcome that challenge. The fourth assesses the prospects for AMISOM success by comparing the modelled force to the mission's current set of assets and capabilities. Finally, the fifth section concludes by outlining what AMISOM can conceivably achieve given existing capabilities.

### **Backgrounder: Origins of the Insurgency and the AMISOM Response**

From its inception as a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004, through to its current manifestation as the "permanent" Federal Government of Somalia, the central authority of Somalia has faced an existential threat posed by radical Islamist militias. The most recent expression of this threat comes in the form of al-Shabaab, a *jihadi* organization that rose in prominence following Ethiopia's occupation of Somalia from 2006 to 2009. Ethiopia entered Somalia to establish the authority of the TFG and destroy a coalition of *Sharia* courts, known as the Islamic Courts Union, which had seized control of much of the country. While the Courts were rapidly defeated by Ethiopian forces in conventional battles between December 2006 and January 2007, its hard-line militant youth movement, al-Shabaab, carried on the fight by unleashing an insurgency against the occupation.

Recognizing that the Ethiopian presence was radicalizing Somali society, international diplomats pressed for the deployment of an AU peacekeeping mission to replace them. Authorized by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter in February 2007, the mission, dubbed AMISOM, was tasked to protect transitional institutions and key infrastructure, re-establish and train an inclusive Somali security force, facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance, and support dialogue and reconciliation in Somalia.<sup>7</sup> It was an ambitious—if hopelessly unrealistic—mandate, and African leaders proved reluctant to commit troops to Somalia's dangerous combat environment. Consequently, throughout 2007 and 2008 AMISOM suffered chronic delays in the deployment of troops and the acquisition of tactical combat equipment.<sup>8</sup> Together, these deficiencies rendered the AMISOM contingent largely inconsequential on the battlefield, necessitating the postponement of Ethiopia's withdrawal.

As predicted, the lingering occupation fanned the flames of insurgency, growing what had been a small coterie of Islamist hardliners into a robust insurgent organization fielding thousands of recruits. Violence increased dramatically, with daily assaults on occupying forces. Regrettably, Ethiopian and TFG troops responded with a heavy hand, making little effort to distinguish between civilians and militants. This radicalized the population, encouraging hundreds of thousands of Somalis to become either active or passive supporters of the insurgency. By the time Ethiopia finally did withdraw in January 2009, Somalia had become one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with 1.3 million internally displaced persons and 3.5 million people in need of emergency aid.<sup>9</sup>

Declaring victory in its war against the foreign occupier, and sensing the alienation of the Somali population from the TFG, al-Shabaab centered its gun sights on the transitional authority. With Ethiopian forces withdrawn and TFG forces suffering mass desertions, the

woefully undermanned and underfunded AMISOM force suddenly found itself to be the last line of defense against al-Shabaab.<sup>10</sup> The result was a rout: the insurgency rapidly captured territory and by June 2010 had seized the vast majority of south-central Somalia, limiting the TFG and its AMISOM protectors to a few neighborhood blocks of Mogadishu.

The gravity of the crisis, together with the realization of how close the TFG now was to total defeat, stirred Somalia's neighbors in the south and west. Kenya entered first, launching an offensive in southern Somalia in October 2011. Shortly thereafter, Ethiopian forces re-entered Somalia to attack al-Shabaab positions in the west. AMISOM, too, made progress in recapturing areas of Mogadishu, although these successes came largely as a result of al-Shabaab's unilateral withdrawal, rather than their military defeat.<sup>11</sup>

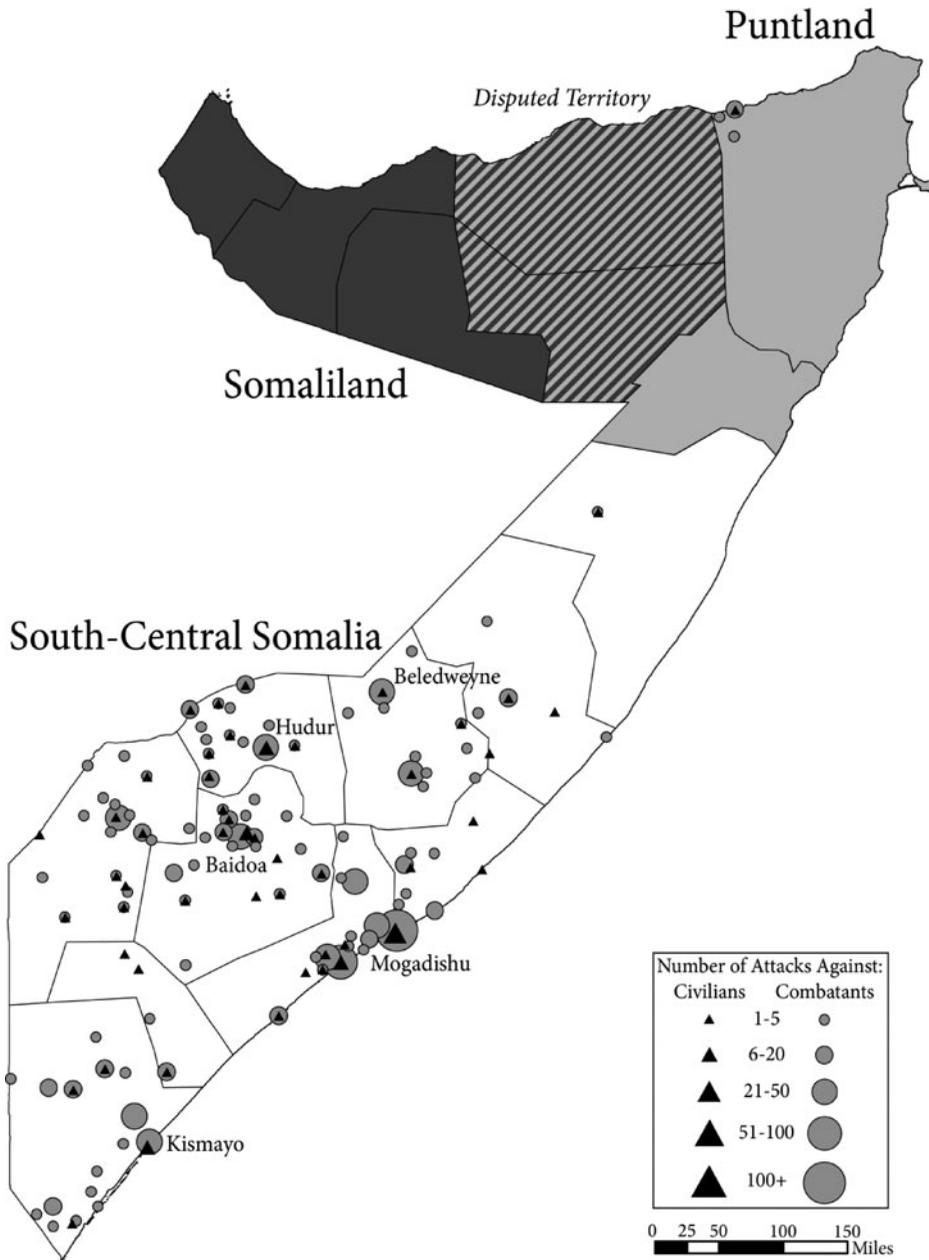
Hopeful that the insurgency was finally on the back foot, in February 2012 the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2036, requesting the mission to extend its presence beyond Mogadishu and authorizing the use of "all necessary measures . . . to reduce the threat posed by al-Shabaab."<sup>12</sup> Since then, AMISOM has made important gains: its troops have recaptured a number of Somalia's major cities; Kenyan and Ethiopian forces have been successfully integrated into the AMISOM contingent; and training for a new Somali National Army (SNA) has begun. Political progress has also been made, including the formal establishment of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in August–September 2012.

Yet, the security situation remains deeply imperilled, and the political situation highly complex. Essentially all northern Somali territory is controlled by secessionist authorities in Somaliland and by de facto independent (though nominally unionist) authorities in Puntland. To be sure, there is no expectation that AMISOM will establish a presence in these northern territories. Consequently, the analysis that follows scopes out these areas and focuses exclusively on the security situation south of the Puntland border.

South-central Somalia presents equally complex challenges. The fate of the southern Jubaland state, which is composed of the Gedo, Middle Juba, and Lower Juba regions, remains uncertain: while its semi-autonomous administration signed a national reconciliation agreement with the FGS in August 2013, thereby giving up its self-declared claim to independence, the FGS was forced to recognize and establish a two-year Interim Juba Administration. Arguably, deadlock over control of the region remains unresolved, not least due to Kenyan and Ethiopian meddling.

Competing state formation initiatives in the south-west have also complicated the political landscape. One group of clan leaders, recognizing the authority of the Interim Juba Administration, seek the formation of a three region south-western state composed of the Bay, Bakool, and Lower Shebelle regions. However, a second group has rejected the Interim Juba Administration, seeking the formation of a six region state composed of the regions of Bay, Bakool, and Lower Shebelle, as well Gedo, Middle Juba, and Lower Juba. These tensions have spawned political unrest and demonstrations, and have recently escalated to the point of violence, including the killing of local elders.

In the interim, AMISOM holds a number of south-central Somalia's major cities, including Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidoa, and Beledweyne, but al-Shabaab continues to control significant swathes of territory across the region. Figure 1 plots the locations of all al-Shabaab attacks against civilians and combatants from August 2013 to July 2014.<sup>13</sup> The wide territorial distribution of attacks demonstrates the group's expansive area of operations, while the sheer number of attacks underscores the threat al-Shabaab continues to pose throughout south-central Somalia. A more detailed assessment of the challenges AMISOM forces confront is a task to which this article now turns.



**Figure 1.** Territorial distribution of al-Shabaab violence against civilians and combatants in Somalia, August 2013–July 2014. Combatants include AMISOM troops, SNA soldiers, and clan militias. Compiled using data collected by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED) project. Note that all regional boundaries are subject to dispute and highly contentious; borders indicated in the figure are rough approximations and should be interpreted accordingly.

## The Scope of the Challenge

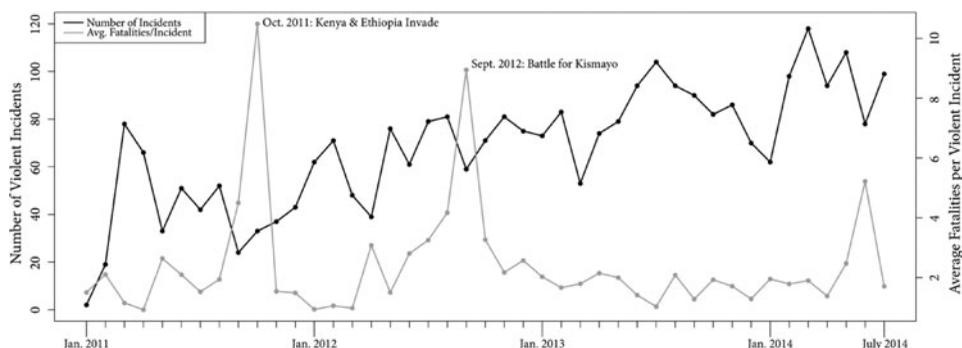
### *(Re)defining the AMISOM Mission: Counterinsurgency, Not Peacekeeping*

Politicians, journalists, and AMISOM media materials frequently stylize the AMISOM mission as an AU-led “peacekeeping” deployment tasked to conduct “peace support operations” and protect Somalia’s fragile federal institutions.<sup>14</sup> However, insofar as peacekeeping is defined by three basic principles—consent of the warring parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of a mission’s mandate—AMISOM is anything but a peacekeeping mission.<sup>15</sup> Al-Shabaab does not consent to the presence of AMISOM troops; the mission was explicitly established to support the Somali government; and AMISOM units have adopted offensive combat postures, aggressively attacking al-Shabaab strongholds.

Nor is AMISOM a peace enforcement mission, defined as “coercive action . . . to maintain or restore international peace and security.”<sup>16</sup> Peace enforcers must be prepared for armed factions to become hostile, but they nevertheless expect cooperation on the part of combatants, at least at the outset of the mission. These operations are characterized by *defensive* combat postures, *reactive* (rather than proactive) combat, and intensive efforts to *deescalate* fighting where and when it breaks out.<sup>17</sup> In Posen’s words, “peace enforcers do not go looking to engage an elusive enemy.”<sup>18</sup> Yet, this is precisely what AMISOM forces have done.

In contrast to the peacekeeping rhetoric of the international community, this article identifies the AMISOM mission to be a counterinsurgency operation (COIN), defined as “comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.”<sup>19</sup> COIN operations are “fundamentally an armed political competition with the insurgents,” the success of which hinges on the counterinsurgent’s ability to win over the local population.<sup>20</sup> This “hearts and minds” approach prioritizes the defense of civilians over the targeting and destruction of enemy forces. “Clear-hold-build” strategies, the cornerstone of recent counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, are illustrative of this population-centric orientation: counterinsurgents begin by separating insurgents from the population to provide security to civilians (“clear”); followed by defensive military operations and policing to deter the insurgents’ return (“hold”); culminating in assistance operations which promote economic, political, and human development (“build”). Paired with an information campaign that explains the military and political objectives of COIN forces, the strategy aims to set the stage for effective governance over the long term.<sup>21</sup>

The distinction between peacekeeping, peace-enforcement, and counterinsurgency has important implications for the AMISOM mission. These different operations vary in the types of tactical problems they face, in the methods they must employ to secure their objectives, in the levels of impartiality with which they treat parties to the conflict, and in the expected intensity of combat they will encounter. This must be understood not only by the soldiers who take part in these operations, but also by the civilian policy-makers who send them into combat. To accomplish its objectives AMISOM must deploy troops into areas where it is known from the outset that the enemy will be hostile and combative; it must not only expect deadly contact with insurgents, but actively seek it out; and it must work tirelessly to build popular support for the Somali government while marginalizing al-Shabaab militarily and politically. These are all essential elements of a counterinsurgency operation; AMISOM must be equipped, staffed, and trained accordingly.



**Figure 2.** Al-Shabaab violence in Somalia, January 2011–July 2014. Compiled using data collected by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED) project.

### *The Enemy: Al-Shabaab Capabilities and Tactics*

Initially a member of a loose network of *Sharia* courts united against warlordism and opposed to the TFG, al-Shabaab has today become the vanguard of a broader Islamist insurgency in Somalia.<sup>22</sup> Recently formalizing its relationship with Al Qaeda, the group espouses a radical, *Salafi-jihadist* ideology that seeks the establishment of an Islamic state in accordance with strict interpretations of Islamic scripture.<sup>23</sup> This religio-political ideology has been an important factor in the group's prominence across south-central Somalia, with appeals to pan-Somali Islamic traditions and anti-West rhetoric successfully fostering the perception that Islamist control is preferable to traditional forms of clan conflict, warlordism, and foreign-backed institutional rule.

Recent setbacks in Mogadishu, Kismayo, and elsewhere have led some analysts to suggest that al-Shabaab's survival is threatened, and that the group's embrace of asymmetric tactics is a sign of weakness, rather than strength.<sup>24</sup> However, Figure 2 shows that high-frequency, low-intensity attacks have characterized al-Shabaab violence since January 2011. Indeed, the high intensity fighting occasioned by the Kenyan and Ethiopian invasions in October 2011, the battle for Kismayo in September 2012, and (to a lesser extent) recent flare ups of violence in June 2014 stand out as exceptions to the general pattern seen over the past three and a half years of conflict. And while it is true that al-Shabaab has ceded several urban areas to AMISOM and SNA forces, many of these setbacks were less the result of military defeats and more the group's decision to strategically withdraw. By avoiding set-piece battles, al-Shabaab has prioritized the preservation of its military capacity over territorial control. This is a common guerrilla tactic that has been employed in many insurgencies. Al-Shabaab's objective is the fixing of counterinsurgent forces on multiple fronts to disperse manpower, lengthen supply lines, and impose asymmetrical costs. Ambushes, hit-and-run tactics, and terrorist attacks require far fewer resources than those necessary to govern and defend urban areas. This has enabled al-Shabaab to preserve its strength and even increase the frequency of its attacks over the course of the last year, resulting in the deaths of some 2,199 people from August 2013 to July 2014 (an average of 183 deaths per month).<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, al-Shabaab has retained considerable human and material assets. The group is estimated to maintain a force of some 5,000 active recruits, and an October 2013 AU report suggests these numbers are likely on the rise.<sup>26</sup> Many of these men are veterans of combat, having spent years fighting against Ethiopia's occupation between 2006 and 2009.

The group operates a number of training camps across south-central Somalia, providing recruits with routine small-arms and hand-to-hand combat skills.<sup>27</sup> Foreign fighters have provided technical assistance with weapons systems and operational planning, and the Eritrean government has provided specialized tactical skills training in suicide bombing and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).<sup>28</sup>

The group's militants are equipped with small arms and light weapons, mortars, anti-tank weapons (MANPATS), anti-air weapons (MANPADS), field artillery, technicals, Fiat Type 6614 armored personnel carriers, landmines, and multiple types of IEDs.<sup>29</sup> Taken together, these capabilities have enabled al-Shabaab to wage a form of "hybrid warfare" against their adversaries, employing conventional deployments with irregular formations and terrorist tactics. In the first instance, al-Shabaab has dug trenches and foxholes, camouflaged defensive positions, and booby-trapped approaches, creating well-defined front lines akin to what would be found in a conventional warfare environment.<sup>30</sup> But irregular tactics are also commonly employed: snipers have been used in both offensive and defensive roles to harass AMISOM forces as well as deter them from advancing toward al-Shabaab artillery emplacements, and IEDs and landmines have been used to constrain AMISOM movement in and outside the capital. Finally, car bombs and suicide attacks complete the trinity of violence. Deployed in a combined arms fashion, this mixed set of capabilities has enabled al-Shabaab to wage an insurgency campaign that has proven difficult to counter.<sup>31</sup>

The group possesses a centralized command structure with decentralized operational capacities.<sup>32</sup> The group is not monolithic: internal divisions between locals, who hold the more limited aims of toppling the Somali government to establish an Islamic republic, and foreigners, who see the insurgency as part of a larger global *jihadi* struggle, have been noted by a number of analysts.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, al-Shabaab remains cohesive: the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea reports that "internal dissension has had no impact on al-Shabaab's ability to conduct operations" and the International Crisis Group notes that external influences have "never overwhelmed its core Somali foundations."<sup>34</sup>

The group is relatively well financed. In 2011 its yearly revenue was estimated to be between US\$70 and US\$100 million per year.<sup>35</sup> Financing is secured in a number of ways: cross-border contraband trade into Kenya and Ethiopia; foreign donations and remittances from the Somali diaspora and other East African networks; aid provisions from the Eritrean government; an elaborate illegal export business; and a system of taxation that is "far more sophisticated and comprehensive than that of any other Somali authority, including the administrations of Puntland and Somaliland."<sup>36</sup> AMISOM's capture of Kismayo, a port city that served as the central hub of al-Shabaab's illegal charcoal exports, was followed by a decrease in al-Shabaab's income in October 2012; however, a recent AU report notes that the group has simply shifted its export operations to smaller towns with access to natural sea-jetties.<sup>37</sup> Even in Kismayo, al-Shabaab continues to enjoy healthy profits from the illegal charcoal trade: it remains a key shareholder both locally and internationally, with revenues in the tens of millions of dollars.<sup>38</sup>

Politically, al-Shabaab works tirelessly to turn Somalis against AMISOM and the Somali government. Despite its brutal treatment of the population, there is evidence that the group is responsive to the public. Starting in 2008, it began a series of public outreach initiatives, which the International Crisis Group describes as "remarkably sophisticated" and "well choreographed."<sup>39</sup> The group has also won appeal by providing a range of social services, including policing, judicial decision-making, and public works projects.<sup>40</sup> Together, these services have contributed to relatively higher levels of security and stability in its areas of control, helping the organization build close relationships with village and clan elders.<sup>41</sup> Residents credit the group for reducing the high levels of extortion, robbery,

and murder that characterized the country before their rule.<sup>42</sup> This stability has also won the support of Somali businessmen, who find al-Shabaab's rule to be "better for business."<sup>43</sup>

The seizure of local print and radio media, as well as its presence on the internet, has enabled al-Shabaab to broadcast its message across Somalia and to international audiences. Its propaganda machine runs a sophisticated operation, including a multimedia campaign featuring high-definition videos the group posts online. Al-Shabaab is also connected to social media websites, maintaining Twitter accounts that provide regular updates on its campaign and commentaries on international diplomatic efforts relating to Somalia.<sup>44</sup>

In sum, al-Shabaab remains a capable organization and a dangerous military force. The group possesses extensive human, material, and financial resources, has earned credibility among many Somalis, and has demonstrated considerable battlefield prowess and tactical skill. Al-Shabaab's avoidance of direct confrontations should not be interpreted as military weakness; rather, it is indicative of a group choosing to trade territory for the preservation of its military capability—a choice often made by insurgent organizations. The group has preserved the core of its fighting force; has devoted only a fraction of its resources and manpower to asymmetrical warfare; and has retained its military operational readiness. Consequently, al-Shabaab remains a critical threat to peace and security in Somalia and a formidable opponent for AMISOM forces.

### *The Operational Environment*

In addition to the threat posed by al-Shabaab, AMISOM confronts the challenging operational environment of the Somali theater. The country's lack of transport infrastructure presents one such challenge. Somalia's cities are separated by large swaths of desert which must be traversed by air or land. There are a number of airfields capable of landing military transport aircraft in Somalia, but with the exception of Mogadishu's airport, most likely suffer from serious disrepair. Indeed, the poor condition of Somalia's airports limited U.S. strategic airlift during the 1992–1993 Operation Restore Hope deployment; given some twenty years of ongoing warfare, contemporary conditions are likely worse. Helicopters present one solution, but they are an expensive option that would supplement, rather than spearhead, a logistics train. Consequently, Somalia's national highway system is the principal means of troop and logistical transport. Unfortunately, only a portion of the country's road network is all weather, covered with bitumen, crushed stone, or gravel. Instead, most roads are made of loose surface materials and dirt, creating conditions that are marginal at best. The poor quality of these roads, in tandem with the fact that most are patrolled by militias and riddled with IEDs, slows movement between cities and increases force attrition rates outside Mogadishu.

AMISOM also confronts the unique dangers of military operations on urban terrain. It is widely recognized that urban areas are among the most difficult combat environments. Desch summarizes the challenge aptly: "urban warfare multiplies the number of possible dimensions of combat, increases the density of terrain, disperses forces, reduces the distance between combatants and non-combatants, increases the demands for manpower, places a premium on low-technology warfare, increases the likelihood of casualties, complicates the military's rules of engagement, and challenges traditional indices of success and failure."<sup>45</sup> Even for powerful militaries, the siege of a city entails complex operations which often impose significant costs and casualties. The Russian invasion of Grozny in December 1994 inflicted heavy casualties on both Russian and Chechen forces.<sup>46</sup> A similar narrative could be told for other urban military campaigns: upon reviewing case study evidence, Posen reasons that "[a] skilled, reasonably well armed adversary with a few thousand good and

committed infantry can probably impose very significant costs on even a very competent Western military force.”<sup>47</sup>

Finally, there are a range of politico-military considerations that will tax AMISOM’s manpower. As one example, consider the critical importance of food and water security. Somalia’s climate is characterized by hot, arid weather and low annual rainfall, rendering the country vulnerable to severe droughts, water shortages, and famine. At present, the UN estimates that emergency humanitarian aid is needed for nearly 860,000 people who are acutely food insecure and another 2 million people who remain on the margins of food insecurity.<sup>48</sup> These realities make control over water and food supplies critical from a political and military perspective. Clan militias have routinely fought over these vital resources and have often used their control over the distribution of humanitarian aid to pay fighters, punish rivals, and coerce the local population. This necessitates that AMISOM dedicate mission assets to humanitarian relief efforts to ensure access and delivery of essential assistance. Similar manpower strains will be occasioned by the need for public services provision, population medical care, and infrastructure repair—governance issues that have been neglected for decades in the context of Somalia’s simultaneous political and humanitarian crises. Precisely because COIN operations adopt population-centric orientations, these non-military considerations are critical to the broader fight against al-Shabaab.

## **Mission Requirements**

Given the objectives of the AMISOM mission, the capabilities possessed by al-Shabaab, and the operational challenges of the Somali theater, what force structure is required for success? Drawing on relevant academic and military literatures, this section constructs a hypothetical counterinsurgent force purposely built for the task at hand. This model will be used as a benchmark with which to assess the capabilities of the AMISOM mission in the next section. Due to data limitations and space constraints, only the most basic components of a COIN deployment are considered here: force size, composition, and air support and logistics.

### ***Force Size***

In the past, military planners employed counterinsurgent-to-insurgent ratios when sizing counterinsurgent forces, often assuming that a 10- or 20-to-1 advantage over insurgents was necessary for victory.<sup>49</sup> This approach has since fallen into disrepute. As the U.S. Army Field Manual 3–24 explains, “no predetermined, fixed ratio of friendly troops to enemy combatants ensures success in COIN. The conditions of the operational environment and the approaches insurgents use vary too widely.”<sup>50</sup>

Force-to-space ratios are another common heuristic for force sizing. Proponents of this metric argue that a minimum number of troops are required to defend territory of a given size. This minimum is understood to be independent of the size of the defending force—regardless of counterinsurgent-to-insurgent ratios, defenders can still be defeated if the force-to-space ratio drops below the necessary minimum.<sup>51</sup> Force-to-space ratios make sense in the context of theater-level conventional confrontations, where “space” refers to a fixed frontline. But precisely because counterinsurgency warfare is characterized by irregular combat that lacks clearly demarcated frontlines, these ratios are inappropriate metrics for COIN force sizing.

**Table 1**  
Population statistics and force size requirements

Region	Population (est.)	Force size requirement (20:1000)
South-Central Somalia + Puntland + Somaliland	10,428,043	208,561
South-Central Somalia + Puntland	8,123,446	162,469
South-Central Somalia	6,632,235	132,645
South-Central Somalia, urban only	2,500,353	50,007

There has not been a census of the Somali population since 1975. Population estimates are further complicated by the large number of nomads and by refugee movements in response to famine and armed conflict. Consequently, all population figures are extrapolations and are highly contentious. Reported country-level statistics are compiled from the *CIA World Fact Book* (2014) and broken down regionally using population distributions reported in the Somali Joint Needs Assessment reports prepared by the World Bank and United Nations (see *Somali Reconstruction and Development Framework: Deepening Peace and Reducing Poverty, Volume II: South-Central Somalia*, p. 18). Data on Somalia's urban population percentage is taken from the *CIA World Fact Book*, which reports urbanization to account for 37.7 percent of the Somali population.

A counterinsurgent force must be sized not only to meet the demands of the insurgency, but also the anticipated policing and political tasks required to win the support of the local population. Consequently, troop density—the ratio of counterinsurgents-to-country inhabitants—is the recommended metric. Most troop density recommendations fall within a range of 20 to 25 counterinsurgents for every 1000 residents in an area of operation, with 20-to-1,000 often considered the minimum required density.<sup>52</sup> Admittedly, these ratios have been criticized: Krause argues their derivation has tended to lie on shaky methodological ground;<sup>53</sup> Goode notes they have been constructed on an overly narrow set of case studies;<sup>54</sup> and McGrath points to inconsistencies regarding the inclusion of police in the ratios.<sup>55</sup> Notwithstanding these criticisms, a troop density ratio of 20-to-1,000 is the appropriate metric for this study for at least two reasons. First, over twenty years of war have devastated Somalia's domestic infrastructure and institutions. As noted above, this puts considerable manpower stresses on COIN forces in terms of service delivery and other non-military operations necessary for COIN success. Second, the "hybrid warfare" approach al-Shabaab has adopted in its confrontation with AMISOM forces—its simultaneous employment of conventional, irregular, and terrorist formations and tactics—presents a particularly challenging combat environment. AMISOM troops must simultaneously defend their front lines (especially in Mogadishu), attack dug in al-Shabaab defensive positions (as in Barawa), police against guerrilla-style hit and run tactics (across south-central Somalia), and conduct counterterrorism operations (especially in major cities). Population protection under the threat of these multiple forms of combat should be expected to be highly manpower intensive, rendering the 20-to-1,000 ratio a conservative metric for the case in hand.

Table 1 applies the 20-to-1,000 metric to the AMISOM mission objective. It presents force size requirements for the scenario examined in this article—securing south-central Somalia—but also provides regional breakdowns for reference. The table shows that, at a minimum, AMISOM will require some 50,000 troops to secure south-central Somalia's urban population. Note that this is a limited objective: the capturing of the region's major cities that together comprise the territory's seaports,<sup>56</sup> airfields,<sup>57</sup> and roughly 38 percent of

its population (approximately 2.5 million people). This is arguably a realistic scenario that could serve as a first step in a sequenced campaign to eliminate the al-Shabaab insurgency.

### ***Force Composition: Indigenous Troops, Training, and Mechanization***

High numbers of indigenous security forces are essential to COIN success. Even in cases where local forces are less well trained, led, or equipped, they possess distinct advantages. First, locals have superior knowledge of the human terrain, speaking the inhabitants' language and understanding their culture. Second, they are often more familiar with the country's physical geography and climate. Third, it is less likely that local forces will be seen as "occupiers" because they are the inhabitants' next of kin. Fourth, local forces are likely to be more committed and motivated than foreign soldiers owing to the fact that an insurgent victory threatens their own lives and those of their family. Finally, local forces are generally much more capable of recruiting informers and thereby acquiring intelligence.<sup>58</sup> To be sure, there are risks inherent with the use of local forces as well: Lieven points out that in highly divided societies there is a risk that they will "use the umbrella provided by your military protection to massacre and expel their local ethnic rivals, deeply embarrassing and compromising you in the process."<sup>59</sup> Yet he concludes that local forces are "a necessary evil" for the purposes of intelligence and for avoiding accusations of foreign imperialism.<sup>60</sup> Thus, mission planners would do well to maximize their use of local troops, supplemented as necessary with foreign soldiers.

These soldiers require high levels of military, social, and political training. At any given time, counterinsurgents can find themselves providing services to the local population, escorting political figures, or engaging insurgents in kinetic battles. Conventional military forces are all too often optimized for combat operations to the detriment of service provision and local engagement. In contrast, AMISOM troops must develop great political sensitivity in their interactions with the local population—cultural awareness, proficiency in local languages, and communication skills. They must also be accustomed to employing limited firepower, as heavy handed responses to insurgent provocations risk alienating the local population. To these ends, combat skills appropriate for soldiers in conventional combat often need to be "trained out" of COIN units.<sup>61</sup> This can be a time-consuming endeavor: Pearson reports that British army units stationed in Northern Ireland in 1976 "were receiving 3 months of training for a 4-month tour."<sup>62</sup> Such long training windows reflect the fact that meeting the multiple demands of a COIN campaign requires highly skilled and disciplined units built to handle the variety of tasks such operations entail.

Finally, these units need to be mechanized: transported in and supported by armored combat vehicles. Recent research suggests that overly-mechanized militaries are ill-suited for counterinsurgencies: built to ensure troops can survive high-intensity confrontations in conventional wars, they privilege survivability and firepower over presence. In the context of COIN, this is problematic for three reasons. First, such a posture underscores the counterinsurgent's preoccupation with its own, rather than the population's, security. Second, without a sustained and substantial presence, counterinsurgents are less able to recruit reliable collaborators or win the population's trust. And third, mechanized units often fail to wield their power selectively.<sup>63</sup>

At the same time, al-Shabaab's use of IEDs and landmines makes light vehicles inappropriate for the task at hand. The UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea reports a proliferation and diversification in the use of these weapons in Somalia, as well as evolving tactics devised for their effective deployment in varied operational contexts. To date, vehicle-borne, person-borne, and roadside IEDs, in combination with ambush tactics

and small arms fire, have severely constrained troop movement, halted road construction and repair, and imposed casualties. AMISOM therefore requires a fleet of mine-resistant ambush protected vehicles (MRAPs) and armored personnel carriers (APCs) to transport troops within and between cities.

### *Air Support and Logistics*

Research on aerial bombing highlights its disutility as a counterinsurgency tactic.<sup>64</sup> For this reason, fighter jets and bombers are not expected to play a role in Somalia. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), on the other hand, have assumed a lead role in the counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Their low cost renders them expendable, their high flying altitudes thwart their detection, and their long loitering capabilities make them ideal for reconnaissance missions. The offensive combat roles UAVs have played worldwide remains controversial—a debate that is beyond the scope of this article. However, their utility as surveillance platforms is undeniable, and it is in this capacity that UAVs can serve as essential force multipliers in Somalia.

Helicopters present another option. To be sure, a helicopter kill offers insurgents an aspired publicity prize—the infamous Black Hawk Down incident makes this point abundantly clear<sup>65</sup>—but the utility of helicopters in COIN operations is demonstrated by their extensive use in previous counterinsurgency campaigns, where they have provided close air support, tactical movement, logistics and resupply, and medical evacuation. In offensive roles, attack helicopters can counter an enemy's reserves and limit counterattacks; in defensive roles, they can track insurgent movements and coordinate ground forces. Roaming helicopter patrols also supplement ground forces by establishing the appearance of presence without the need for additional troops.

Strategic airlift assets need to be supplemented by ground transport vehicles and dedicated supply, maintenance, and support units. “Tooth-to-tail” ratios serve as a useful metric for gauging these logistical requirements. These ratios measure the number of troops employed in combat duties (the “tooth”) relative to the number functioning in noncombat administrative or logistical support positions (the “tail”). In effect, they capture the infrastructure and personnel required to generate and sustain the deployment of forces over time. Dempsey argues that militaries with ratios below 1:2 (that is, moving toward parity) are unlikely to be able to sustain even basic military operations in a combat environment, let alone COIN.<sup>66</sup> Counterinsurgency warfare increases the need for bulk logistics, maintenance operations, and equipment replacement—all of which increase the proportion of forces tasked with non-combat roles. Recent U.S. experience in Iraq is consistent with Dempsey's argument: pre-surge tooth-to-tail ratios have been estimated to have been between 1:2.5 and 1:3.<sup>67</sup> Given that AMISOM logistics convoys will be required to cover large swaths of desert terrain littered with landmines, IEDs, and al-Shabaab ambush teams, a 1:2.5 tooth-to-tail ratio provides a conservative metric by which to assess the mission's capacity to sustain operations over the long-term.

### **Net Assessment: Prospects for AMISOM Success**

This section assesses the prospects for AMISOM success by comparing the mission's existing force structure (as of August 2014) to the requirements set out in the previous section. It moves sequentially through each model component detailed above: force size, composition, and air support and logistics.

**Table 2**  
Force size estimates

Contributor	Numbers (est.)
AMISOM	22,126
Somali National Army (SNA) & allied militias	20,000
Somali police force	5,711
<i>TOTALS</i>	
[1] AMISOM	22,126
[2] AMISOM + SNA & allied militias	42,126
[3] AMISOM + SNA & allied militias + police	47,837

The above figures are rough estimates. AMISOM is allotted its entire authorized deployment as per UN Security Council resolution 2124 (2013). Data on Somali National Army and allied militia troop levels sourced from Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia, S/2013/521 (September 2013), paragraph 29 and International Institute for Strategic Studies, “Chapter Nine: Sub-Saharan Africa,” *The Military Balance*, 114(1) (2014), p. 457. Data on Somali police force strength sourced from Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia, S/2014/140 (March 2014), paragraph 34.

### *Force Size*

Table 2 provides a breakdown of AMISOM, SNA, and police force troop levels. While these numbers are only rough estimates, they are purposely biased upward in favor of the counterinsurgent coalition: AMISOM has been allotted its entire troop ceiling of 22,126 uniformed personnel (as per UN Security Council resolution 2124); the SNA troop total includes “allied militias,” which are assumed to serve as loyal combat units that are fully integrated into the SNA and that obey orders issued by SNA military commanders; and Somali police are counted as counterinsurgents capable of undertaking military-type operations.

A simple comparison of mission requirements and existing capabilities reveals that, even with these conservative assumptions, the counterinsurgent force is significantly undermanned. Combining AMISOM, SNA, and police contributions generates a force of some 47,837 personnel. This is 2,170 troops short of the estimated 50,007 required to secure south-central Somalia’s urban population and much less than half the required 132,645 troops needed to secure all of south-central Somalia. As a sensitivity analysis, Table 3 calculates troop shortfalls across the gambit of metrics discussed above—troop-to-population ratios, troop-to-insurgent ratios, and troop-to-space ratios. For reference, upper and lower bound comparisons informed by historical counterinsurgency campaigns are provided. Across every force size metric, the counterinsurgent force comes up short.

Notably, and despite these clear manpower deficiencies, AMISOM force levels are unlikely to rise in the near future. The most recent “increase” in AMISOM’s troop ceiling, from 17,731 to 22,126 uniformed personnel, was actually a re-hatting of Ethiopian forces that were *already* deployed in the country—that is, the actual number of counterinsurgent forces remained unchanged. Nonetheless, the UN Security Council appears to believe that this “surge” in troop strength can serve “as part of an overall exit strategy for AMISOM, after which a decrease in AMISOM’s force strength will be considered.”<sup>68</sup> The analysis presented here would suggest otherwise: AMISOM is in need of significant manpower increases; piecemeal additions of a few thousand troops will not meet mission requirements.

**Table 3**  
Sensitivity analyses

Metric	Required force size	Troop shortfall
Troop-to-population (20:1000), south-central Somalia, urban population only	50,007	2,170
Troop-to-population (20:1000), south-central Somalia	132,645	84,808
Troop-to-insurgent (14:1), lower bound, ex. French in Algeria	70,000	22,163
Troop-to-insurgent (21:1), upper bound, ex. British in Northern Ireland	105,000	57,163
Troop-to-space (0.31/sq. km), lower bound, ex. Soviets in Afghanistan	101,433	53,596
Troop-to-space (1.39/sq. km), upper bound, ex. US-led coalition + indigenous security forces in Iraq	454,811	406,974

Data on historical counterinsurgency campaigns compiled in Sameer Lalwani, *Pakistani Capabilities for a Counterinsurgency Campaign: A Net Assessment* (Washington, DC: New America Foundation, 2009), pp. 30–32. Troop-to-insurgent ratios calculated by assuming al-Shabaab fields 5,000 recruits. Troop-to-space ratios calculated by assuming a total south-central Somalia area of approximately 327,202 sq. km.

### ***Force Composition: Indigenous Forces, Training, and Mechanization***

While the academic and military literatures stress the importance of local units in the execution of counterinsurgency campaigns, the FGS has been heavily reliant on external contributors— Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. In general, troops from these countries lack language skills (only some Djibouti soldiers can speak Somali) and come from different cultural and religious backgrounds (Burundi, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda are predominantly Christian countries).

Table 2 shows that the SNA military and police forces account for only half (53.8 percent) of the total COIN deployment. These low numbers are largely attributable to the Somali government's inability to retain SNA recruits. During the spring of 2010, hundreds of Somali troops were reported to have deserted, with some defecting to al-Shabaab, because they were not receiving their US\$100 monthly stipend.<sup>69</sup> More recently, a 2013 report by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea notes that, “due to inadequate or irregularly paid salaries, members of the Somali security forces often work as private security providers at night, adding to the number of armed men in the streets.”<sup>70</sup> Likewise, a recent AU report explains that SNA capacity has fallen short of the levels anticipated due to a “lack of basic logistics, such as rations, fuel, transport, medical and stipends.”<sup>71</sup> This has required AMISOM forces to maintain responsibility of liberated areas rather than hand them over to Somali authorities, thereby preventing the mission from undertaking further expansion operations.<sup>72</sup>

Fully integrating “allied militias” into the SNA remains another enduring challenge. Paul Williams identifies two key problems. First, because AMISOM and the SNA have, to date, controlled relatively little territory, most new SNA recruits are drawn from a small subset of clans concentrated in areas under AMISOM/SNA control. This has spawned the

perception that the SNA represents a narrow set of partisan, rather than national, interests. Second, and relatedly, individual recruits have tended to retain primary loyalty to their clan or sub-clan, rather than the FGS. Consequently, ostensibly allied militias have at times shifted their alliances in pursuit of narrower clan interests in local turf battles.<sup>73</sup>

Additional financing for training missions is another pressing priority. To date, U.S. and EU training missions have provided recruits with training in combat skills, medicine, and international humanitarian law, but existing evidence strongly suggests that troop discipline remains problematic: recruits have sold weapons and ammunition to private arms markets in Mogadishu;<sup>74</sup> elements of SNA combat brigades have diverted weapons to independent clan militias;<sup>75</sup> senior AMISOM officers have been suspended over corruption charges;<sup>76</sup> troops have been accused of rape and sexual violence against women;<sup>77</sup> government-aligned militias have been responsible for abuses against civilians;<sup>78</sup> and soldiers from all factions have used indiscriminate force that resulted in civilian casualties.<sup>79</sup> Of course, the actions of a few should not condemn the entire mission, but such abuses reflect poorly on AMISOM and the SNA and are anathema to the population-centric orientation of a COIN campaign.

The hellish combat conditions of the Somali theater also necessitates that AMISOM be provisioned with appropriate numbers of armored combat vehicles to provide protected mobility to its soldiers. Media materials prepared by the mission show that COIN forces operate T-55 tanks, a variety of APCs and MRAPs (including Saxon AT105s, Type 85/89s, WZ551s, Mamba Mk5s, and Buffels), Bedford military trucks, and armored bulldozers—equipment supplied by troop-contributing countries or donated by third-party states. Taken together, this is an appropriate mix of combat vehicles given AMISOM mission requirements and the threat posed by al-Shabaab ambushes, landmines, and IEDs. However, evidence suggests the mission is under-equipped: AMISOM officials have consistently bemoaned the mission's lack of combat vehicles and other force multipliers, most recently in a joint AU–UN benchmarking report;<sup>80</sup> senior AU officials have suggested that vehicle shortages have been a critical factor limiting AMISOM's ability to liberate new areas of Somalia;<sup>81</sup> and the UN Security Council has stressed “the critical need” for sourcing of contingent owned equipment.<sup>82</sup> The SNA likewise suffers from a dearth of modern weaponry, communications equipment, and vehicles.<sup>83</sup> Without data on numbers it is impossible to estimate the extent of these equipment shortages, but existing evidence suggests both AMISOM and the SNA are in need of significant increases in armored fighting vehicles, troop transports, military trucks, and other force multipliers.

### *Air Support and Logistics*

Air support and logistics remain a key vulnerability hindering AMISOM's capacity to sustain operations. The UN Security Council has authorized the mission to deploy three attack helicopters and nine utility helicopters, but to date it has been supplied with none.<sup>84</sup> This is despite the fact that the mission has been mandated to secure a country that is equivalent in size to Afghanistan. Remarkably, AMISOM even lacks medevac aircraft, and has been entirely dependent on a UN support office for emergency evacuations of casualties.<sup>85</sup>

The Kenyan Air Force has launched airstrikes against al-Shabaab's southern positions, and it is widely acknowledged that the United States operates UAVs that have executed targeted killings of al-Shabaab militants.<sup>86</sup> However, in both instances these capabilities are beyond the command and control of AMISOM, rendering their role in the broader counterinsurgency effort difficult to assess. AMISOM does operate its own UAVs in theater, but the mission has expressed its concern about unidentified UAVs operating in Mogadishu

in the past.<sup>87</sup> And while airstrikes from foreign warplanes likely benefit AMISOM's military campaign, there is no evidence they have been coordinated with the mission in any way. Moreover, the risk of civilian victimization caused by indiscriminate bombings threatens to undermine AMISOM political objectives.<sup>88</sup>

Without dedicated air support assets, AMISOM logistics teams must send supply convoys across Somalia's dilapidated national highway system. Thus, a significant "tail" (support operations) is required to maintain AMISOM's "tooth" (combat troops) outside Mogadishu. Unfortunately, tooth-to-tail ratios in African militaries—including contributor nations of the AMISOM mission—are among the worst in the world. Dempsey reports tooth-to-tail ratios for Ethiopia and Kenya (arguably the two most advanced African militaries supporting the AMISOM mission) to be 1:2 and 1:1.6, respectively.<sup>89</sup> The impact of such poor ratios can be profound: military forces are often slow to rescue and recuperate the wounded, are unable to recover disabled or malfunctioning equipment, and are incapable of maintaining and replacing weapons and communications systems in a timely fashion. This suggests that AMISOM's capacity to sustain combat operations outside Mogadishu will be low, and that the mission risks mounting losses in personnel and equipment over time. Without additional support elements and enablers, AMISOM forces will become overstretched, its territorial advance will slow, and the probability of al-Shabaab recapturing liberated territories will increase.

### **Conclusion: Final Assessment**

In May 2013, former Somali Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon insisted that "Somalia has turned a corner and there is no going back," declaring al-Shabaab to have been "militarily defeated and reduced to a shrinking guerrilla force on the brink of extermination."<sup>90</sup> The campaign analysis presented in this article suggests otherwise. Al-Shabaab remains a capable organization, while the AMISOM mission tasked to eliminate it suffers from a host of vulnerabilities that threaten the deployment's core security objectives. The mission is undermanned; the FGS fields too few SNA combat units; both AMISOM and the SNA lack the resources and force enablers needed to accomplish their objectives; and neither force possesses the capacity to sustain combat operations over the long term. Together, these findings suggest that AMISOM's prospects for long-term success are low, that Somalia's fledgling federal institutions remain deeply threatened, and that contrary to Shirdon's claims, al-Shabaab remains a formidable opponent.

It has not been this article's purpose to disparage AMISOM's achievements or to suggest it is destined to fail. To the contrary, this article has highlighted just how remarkable the mission's successes have been. Despite manpower shortages and material deficiencies, AMISOM has liberated over one million Somali citizens from al-Shabaab's tyrannous social control; has provided increased safety and security in liberated territories; and has taken the first steps toward terminating the country's decades-long civil war. These accomplishments have made a real difference and warrant respect and admiration.

But much remains to be done. Al-Shabaab's territorial losses have not been the product of military defeats, and the group's strategic withdrawals have ensured their fighters did not bloody their noses in set-piece battles with AMISOM forces. Moreover, al-Shabaab militants have demonstrated that they cannot be stopped from entering liberated cities, nor prevented from launching attacks against military targets, government officials, and the civilian population. It therefore remains uncertain just how far AMISOM forces have come in terms of fulfilling their mandate; victories in battle have not yet won the war.

What *can* AMISOM and the SNA conceivably achieve given existing capabilities? From a force sizing perspective, it stands to reason that existing units will be capable of holding Mogadishu and other urban areas in south-central Somalia. Using the 20-to-1,000 population density metric employed in the above analysis, and assuming the capital city holds 1.353 million people, Mogadishu would require some 27,060 troops.<sup>91</sup> AMISOM's existing troop levels, when complemented by the Somali police force, should be sufficient to repel al-Shabaab offensives on the capital. Moreover, tooth-to-tail concerns are attenuated when forces are concentrated in a single city—logistics supply lines are dramatically decreased, medevac routes are shorter, and equipment recovery is easier given the proximity of troops to maintenance depots. Adding the SNA and allied militias generates a force size capable of holding additional cities. Assuming their combined populations sum to less than 2.4 million people, FGS-aligned forces should be able to hold Kismayo, Beledweyne, Merca, and Baidoa, in addition to Mogadishu.<sup>92</sup> Note, however, that holding these urban areas puts AMISOM and the SNA's operational capacity to its limit. Moreover, securing these cities will require the continued loyalty and effectiveness of allied militias—a contingency that cannot be guaranteed in the future.

For many, the key unanswered question will be why policymakers in Africa and the West have failed to adequately equip the AMISOM mission. The great tragedy of the war in Somalia is that for external third-parties, *not losing is more important than winning*. The West abhors al-Shabaab, but it is not willing to spend the resources needed to resolve Somalia's multifaceted crisis. Its response has therefore been to do the minimum necessary to prevent al-Shabaab from dislodging the government incumbent in Mogadishu, but not enough to actually end the insurgency. For their part, AMISOM troop-contributing countries benefit by earning valuable combat experience for their troops, reputation and prestige for their country, and reimbursement for equipment and troop allowances. They also acquire diplomatic leverage—a fact revealed when Uganda threatened to withdraw its contributions to AMISOM over UN charges that it was aiding Congolese rebels.<sup>93</sup> Sadly, even for the AMISOM troops that face the hellish conditions of Mogadishu's streets, there are pecuniary benefits: the lowest paid Ugandan soldier earns about US\$120 per month, but if he opts to fight in Somalia, he will earn US\$828.<sup>94</sup>

Meanwhile, Somalia's people continue to suffer in the context of simultaneous political, economic, and humanitarian disasters, and al-Shabaab continues to operate across south-central Somalia, threatening not only Somalis but citizens across East Africa—a fact illustrated in most horrific fashion in September 2013 by al-Shabaab's massacre of innocent civilians at the Westgate shopping center in Nairobi, Kenya. Governments optimistic about AMISOM's prospects for long-term success contend that the mission promises to bring real change—peace and state-building—to Somalia. But there is still “no peace for peacekeepers to keep, no state to which state-building projects [can] contribute.”<sup>95</sup> This article is no manifesto for Western intervention in Somalia—history has taught us well that such interventions will not solve that country's underlying problems. But if the al-Shabaab insurgency is to be eliminated, policymakers in Africa and the West must stop pretending that peacekeepers can win a counterinsurgency campaign.

## Acknowledgments

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Given the dynamic nature of the ongoing conflict in Somalia, this article should be regarded accurate as of 4 August 2014.

## Notes

1. AMISOM's mandate was first stipulated in Communiqué of the 69th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council, PSC/PR/Comm(LXIX) (January 2007), paragraph 8 and UN Security Council, Resolution 1744, S/RES/1744 (2007), paragraph 4.

2. Special Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia, S/2012/74 (January 2012), paragraph 40.

3. A transcript of Johnnie Carson's remarks is available on the United States Africa Command website: <http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Transcript/9997/transcript-ambassador-johnnie-carson-on-the-situat> (accessed 13 October 2013).

4. Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, "Al-Shabaab is Fighting for its Survival," *CNN* (27 September 2013). Available at <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/27/opinion/mesquita-al-shabaab/> (accessed 27 September 2013).

5. Al-Shabaab frequently carries out attacks in Kenya and has also successfully attacked targets in Djibouti and Uganda.

6. For examples of the former, see: John Mearsheimer, "Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe," *International Security* 7(1) (1982); Barry Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). For examples of the latter, see: Kelly Greenhill, "Mission Impossible? Preventing Deadly Conflict in the African Great Lakes Region," *Security Studies* 11(1) (2001); Sameer Lalwani, *Pakistani Capabilities for a Counterinsurgency Campaign: A Net Assessment* (Washington, DC: New America Foundation, 2009).

7. S/RES/1744 (2007), paragraph 4.

8. As late as the fall of 2008, AMISOM force levels remained at a measly 3,000 troops. See: Ken Menkhaus, "Somalia: They Created a Desert and Called it Peace(building)," *Review of African Political Economy* 36(120) (2009), p. 226 note 5.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 224. For a detailed account of the causes and consequences of the Ethiopian invasion, see: Ken Menkhaus, "The Crisis in Somalia: Tragedy in Five Acts," *African Affairs* 106(424) (2007).

10. By December 2008, over 80 percent of the TFG's soldiers and police had deserted, some taking weapons, uniforms, and vehicles. See: "'Thousands' Desert Somalia Forces," *BBC News* (12 December 2008). Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7779525.stm> (accessed 13 September 2013).

11. It remains unclear what the motivations behind al-Shabaab's retreat were, but analysts have speculated that the group's mishandling of the 2011 summer famine—and the popular discontent that sowed in the capital—was likely the cause. Al-Shabaab forbid international aid agencies access to the country, accusing them of engaging in activities "hostile" to Islam. These restrictions severely impacted humanitarian assistance operations, rightly leading many Somalis to blame al-Shabaab for the humanitarian crisis in south-central Somalia.

12. UN Security Council, Resolution 2036, S/RES/2036 (2012), paragraph 1.

13. These data are compiled by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED) project, which was first introduced in Clionadh Raleigh, Andrew Linke, Håvard Hegre, and Joakim Karlsen, "Introducing ACLED: An Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 47(5) (2010). Figure 1 plots the 26 July 2014 release of the dataset for the dates 1 August 2013–25 July 2014. Note that individual attacks were collected over 5 kilometer distances and then combined to create weighted point data to represent their relative frequency geographically.

14. Note that the AU differentiates between peacekeeping and peace support operations (PSOs). The latter term is more encompassing, spanning the spectrum from conflict prevention through to peace enforcement. Specifically, the AU defines PSOs as "multifunctional operations in which impartial activities of diplomatic, military and civilian (which among others include police, rule of law and civilian administration) components, normally in pursuit of United Nations Charter purposes and principles, work to restore or maintain peace in a mandated area of operations. Such operations

may include conflict prevention, peacemaking, peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peace building and/or humanitarian operations.” See: Headquarters of the African Union, *African Standby Force Peace Support Operations Doctrine* (November 2006), p. 3–1.

15. UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* (New York: United Nations, 2008), p. 31.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

17. Barry Posen, “Urban Operations: Tactical Realities and Strategic Ambiguities,” in Michael Desch, ed., *Soldiers in Cities: Military Operations on Urban Terrain* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), p. 159.

18. *Ibid.*

19. U.S. Department of State, *US Government Counterinsurgency Guide* (January 2009), p. 12.

20. *Ibid.*

21. On COIN strategy, see: U.S. Department of the Army, *The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3–24* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), henceforth FM 3–24; David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1964); David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

22. For a detailed overview of the origins and ideology of al-Shabaab, see: Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

23. At present, it appears the al-Qaeda/al-Shabaab alliance has been more institutional than operational. See: Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, S/2013/413 (July 2013), paragraph 13.

24. Bueno de Mesquita, “Al-Shabaab is Fighting for its Survival”; Robert Rotberg, “A Wounded Leopard: Why Somalia’s al-Shabaab Attacked a Nairobi Mall,” *Globe and Mail* (23 September 2013). Available at <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/a-wounded-leopard-why-somalias-al-shabaab-attacked-a-nairobi-shopping-mall/article14460642/> (accessed 30 September 2013); Simon Tisdall, “Al-Shabaab Shows Weakness, Not Strength In Somalia Theatre Bombing,” *The Guardian* (4 April 2012). Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/apr/04/al-shabaab-somalia-theatre-bombing> (accessed 30 September 2013).

25. Figure 2 and death estimates compiled using the 26 July 2014 release of the ACLED dataset for the dates 1 January 2011–25 July 2014.

26. S/2013/413, p. 7; Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Joint AU-UN Benchmarking Exercise and the Review of the African Union Mission in Somalia, PSC/PR/2(CCCXCIX) (October 2013), paragraph 13.

27. Rob Wise, *Al-Shabaab* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2011), p. 6.

28. S/2013/413, annex 1.4, paragraph 1. On Eritrean training of al-Shabaab, see: Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, S/2011/433 (July 2011), annex 8.5. On Eritrea’s wider spoiler efforts, see: Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, S/2013/440 (July 2013), paragraphs 34–54.

29. International Institute for Strategic Studies, “Non-State Groups and Affiliates,” *The Military Balance* 112(1) (2012), p. 484. Fiat Type 6614 armored personnel carriers identified by the author.

30. For example, until August 2011 Mogadishu was essentially cut in two by a clearly demarcated front line that extended across the city.

31. On al-Shabaab’s tactics, techniques, and procedures, see: S/2011/433, paragraphs 18–29; S/2013/413, annex 1.5.

32. For a detailed breakdown of al-Shabaab’s structure, see: S/2013/413, annex 1.2.

33. International Crisis Group, *Somalia’s Divided Islamists*, Africa Briefing, no. 74 (May 2010); Matt Bryden, *The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 2014).

34. S/2013/413, p. 7; International Crisis Group, *Somalia: Al-Shabaab—It Will Be a Long War*, Africa Briefing, no. 99 (June 2014), pp. 4–5.

35. S/2011/433, paragraph 60.

36. Ibid., paragraphs 63–68 and annex 3.
37. PSC/PR/2(CCCXCIX), paragraph 13.
38. S/2013/413, annex 9.1.
39. International Crisis Group, *Somalia: To Move Beyond the Failed State*, Africa Report, no. 147 (December 2008), p. 12.
40. One recent example includes al-Shabaab's cooperation with Lower Shabelle community members to build irrigation canals. See: Tres Thomas, "Al-Shabaab Bombs Symbolic Restaurant, Builds Symbolic Canal," *Somalia Newsroom* (7 September 2013). Available at <http://somalianewsroom.com/2013/09/07/al-shabaab-bombs-symbolic-restaurant-builds-symbolic-canal/> (accessed 8 September 2013).
41. Wise, *Al-Shabaab*, pp. 5–6.
42. Human Rights Watch, *Harsh War, Harsh Peace: Abuses by al-Shabaab, the Transitional Federal Government, and AMISOM in Somalia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2010), p. 2.
43. S/2011/433, p. 12.
44. For example, in a tweet posted on 16 September 2013, al-Shabaab dismissed the recent Brussels Conference for a New Deal for Somalia as little more than "Belgian waffle."
45. Michael Desch, "Why MOUT Now?" in *Soldiers in Cities*, pp. 5–6.
46. On the Russian capture of Grozny during the First Chechen War, see: Anatol Lieven, "Lessons of the War in Chechnya, 1994–1996," in *Soldiers in Cities*.
47. Posen, "Urban Operations," p. 162.
48. Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia, S/2014/140 (March 2014), paragraph 58.
49. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, p. 23. A more recent advocate is Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), p. 171.
50. FM 3-24, paragraph 1-67.
51. On force-to-space ratios, see: Stephen Biddle, David Gray, Stuart Kaufman, Dennis DeRiggi, and D. Sean Barnett, *Defense at Low Force Levels: The Effect of Force to Space Ratios on Conventional Combat Dynamics* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 1991). For an application to COIN, see: James Kiras, "Irregular Warfare: Terrorism and Insurgency," in John Baylis, James Wirtz, and Colin Gray (eds.), *Strategy in the Contemporary World, 4th edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 178–179.
52. R. Royce Kneee Jr., David Adesnik, Jason Dechant, Michael Fitzsimmons, Arthur Fries, and Mark Tillman, *Force Sizing for Stability Operations* (Alexandria: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2010), p. 5; FM 3-24, paragraph 1-67; James Quinlivan, "Burden of Victory: The Painful Arithmetic of Stability Operations," *Rand Review* 27(2) (2003), pp. 28–29.
53. Peter Krause, "Troop Levels in Stability Operations: What We Don't Know," MIT Center for International Studies Audit of the Conventional Wisdom, 07-02 (February 2007).
54. Steven Goode, "A Historical Basis for Force Requirements in Counterinsurgency," *Parameters* 39(4) (2009).
55. John McGrath, *Boots on the Ground: Troop Density in Contingency Operations* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006).
56. Seaports are located in Kismayo and Mogadishu; there is a jetty located in Merca; and there are minor ports in Barawa and Hobyo.
57. International airports are located in Kismayo and Mogadishu. Major domestic airports are located in Baidoa, Bardera, Beledweyne, Galkayo, and Hudur.
58. Goode, "Force Requirements in Counterinsurgency," p. 49; Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla*, p. 267; James Corum, *Training Indigenous Forces in Counterinsurgency: A Tale of Two Insurgencies* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2006).
59. Lieven, "Lessons of the War in Chechnya," p. 69.
60. Ibid.
61. Posen, "Urban Operations," p. 163.
62. David Pearson, "Low-Intensity Operations in Northern Ireland," in *Soldiers in Cities*, p. 116.

63. Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson, "Rage against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars," *International Organization* 63(1) (2009).
64. Matthew Kocher, Thomas Pepinsky, and Stathis Kalyvas, "Aerial Bombing and Counterinsurgency in the Vietnam War," *American Journal of Political Science* 55(2) (2011).
65. Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999).
66. Thomas Dempsey, "The Transformation of African Militaries," in Amy Krakowka and Laurel Hummel, eds., *Understanding Africa: A Geographic Approach* (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy, 2009), p. 393.
67. The ratio includes contractors and varies as a function of whether one includes the large Army logistical base located in Kuwait as support elements. See: John McGrath, *The Other End of the Spear: The Tooth-to-Tail Ratio (T3R) in Modern Military Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007), pp. 50–54.
68. UN Security Council, Resolution 2124, S/RES/2124 (2013), paragraph 5.
69. David Smith, "US-Trained Somali Soldiers Defect to Al-Qaida," *The Guardian* (28 April 2010). Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/28/somalia-soldiers-defect-alqaida> (accessed 13 June 2013).
70. S/2013/413, annex 8.2, paragraph 7.
71. PSC/PR/2(CCCXCIX), paragraph 13.
72. Report of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on the Implementation of the Mandate of the African Union Mission in Somalia, S/2013/371 (June 2013), paragraph 26.
73. Paul Williams, "After Westgate: Opportunities and Challenges in the War against Al-Shabaab," *International Affairs* 90(4) (2014), pp. 918–920.
74. Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group, Letter from the Coordinator Addressed to the Chair of the Committee, S/AC.29/2014/SEMG/OC.8 (February 2014), p. 6.
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–6.
76. "Uganda Suspends Officers Sent to Somalia on AU Mission," *BBC News* (16 September 2013). Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24116606> (accessed 16 September 2013).
77. Nicholas Kulish, "African Union and Somalia to Investigate Rape Accusation," *The New York Times* (15 August 2013). Available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/16/world/africa/african-union-and-somalia-to-investigate-rape-allegations.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/16/world/africa/african-union-and-somalia-to-investigate-rape-allegations.html?_r=0) (accessed 1 September 2013); Human Rights Watch, *Hostages of the Gatekeepers: Abuses against Internally Displaced in Mogadishu, Somalia* (2013), p. 30.
78. S/2013/413, paragraph 132.
79. *Ibid.*, paragraph 134. Notably, AMISOM did not adopt a mission-wide protection-of-civilians (PoC) strategy until May 2013. For an overview and analysis of AMISOM's struggle with PoC issues, see: Paul Williams, "The African Union Mission in Somalia and Civilian Protection Challenges," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2(2) (2013).
80. PSC/PR/2(CCCXCIX), paragraphs 7, 13, and 21.
81. S/2013/371, paragraph 26.
82. S/RES/2124 (2013), paragraphs 6 and 13.
83. Williams, "After Westgate," p. 921.
84. S/RES/2036, annex. Recent reports and briefings confirm that AMISOM does not possess any helicopters. See: S/2014/140, paragraph 82; Briefing by Nicholas Kay, UN Special Representative for Somalia, to the 7181st meeting of the UN Security Council, S/PV.7181 (May 2014), p. 4.
85. Available evidence suggests the UN operates three Mi-8 helicopters and one Dash-7 fixed wing aircraft in Somalia. See: UN Procurement Division, "Air Transportation Acquisition Plan for Financial Year 2013/2014." Available at <http://www.un.org/depts/ptd/pdf/AirTransport-AllMissionsConsolidated.xls> (accessed 15 April 2014); Progress Report on the Implementation of the Mandate of the African Union Mission in Somalia, S/2014/100, paragraph 29.
86. On Kenyan airstrikes, see: S/2013/413, paragraphs 93–94. On American UAVs, see: Craig Whitlock, "US Drone Base in Ethiopia is Operational," *The Washington Post* (27 October 2011).

Available at [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-10-27/world/35276956\\_1\\_drone-flights-drone-operations-reaper-drones](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-10-27/world/35276956_1_drone-flights-drone-operations-reaper-drones) (accessed 1 September 2013).

87. Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, S/2012/544 (July 2012), annex 5.2, paragraph 2.

88. Al-Shabaab has been quick to propagandize civilian casualties in the past. For example, following air strikes that killed 12 civilians and wounded 52 others, the group urged followers to attack Kenya with “huge blasts” in retaliation. See: ABC News, “At Least 12 Killed as Kenyan Jets Bomb Somali Town” (31 October 2011). Available at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-10-31/kenyan-jets-bomb-somali-town/3609458> (accessed 12 April 2014).

89. Dempsey, “Transformation of African Militaries,” p. 394.

90. Abdi Farah Shirdon, “A Bright Future for Somalia is Within Touching Distance,” *Al Jazeera* (7 May 2013). Available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/05/201356104956136289.html> (accessed 1 September 2013).

91. Mogadishu’s population is reported in the *CIA World Factbook* (2014).

92. Population estimates for these cities vary widely; crude estimates are as follows: Kismayo, 130,000; Beledweyne, 150,000; Merca, 200,000; Baidoa, 250,000.

93. Elias Biryabarema, “Uganda Says to Pull Out Troops from Somalia over Congo Charges,” *Reuters* (2 November 2012). Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/03/us-uganda-congo-un-idUSBRE8A111U20121103> (accessed 15 August 2013). On the question of Uganda’s decision to intervene in Somalia and how it relates to managing Uganda’s relationship with the West, see: Jonathan Fisher, “Managing Donor Perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda’s 2007 Intervention in Somalia,” *African Affairs*, 111(444) (2012).

94. AMISOM troops are paid an allowance of US\$1,028 per month, but the Ugandan government deducts US\$200 for “administration costs.” See: Moses Walubiri and Paul Kiwuwa, “Uganda: MPs Query Deployment of Police to Somalia,” *All Africa* (13 March 2013). Available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201303131218.html> (accessed 31 July 2014). The estimate for the lowest paid Ugandan soldier’s salary is from Dan Damon, “Why is Uganda Fighting in ‘Hellish’ Somalia?” *BBC News* (15 March 2012). Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16853499> (accessed 30 August 2013).

95. Menkhaus, “Somalia,” p. 224. Note that Menkhaus is characterizing the situation in Somalia circa 2007–2008. Nonetheless, I find his description fitting for contemporary conditions inside the country.