



Special Report

A Critical Juncture: AUSSOM's Future and Somalia's Search for Sustainable Security



Photo: AUSSOM.

Date: 27th July, 2026

Executive Summary

The future of the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) has become one of the most critical security issues facing Somalia in 2026. The main question is no longer whether AUSSOM is necessary; most international partners recognise that Somalia is not yet ready for a complete withdrawal of external security support.

The debate has shifted to three key issues: who will finance the mission, how the transition will be managed, and whether Somalia can gradually assume greater responsibility for its own security while navigating a contested political environment.

The African Union's military presence in Somalia began in 2007 following the collapse of the Islamic Courts Union and the emergence of the Al-Shabaab insurgency. The AU deployed AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) to support the Transitional Federal Government, protect state institutions, and

conduct operations against armed groups threatening the Somali state. The mission later transitioned into ATMIS (2022–2024) and then AUSSOM in January 2025, with an expanded focus on supporting Somali security forces and preparing for the eventual transfer of full security responsibility to Somalia.

Over nearly two decades, the AU mission has achieved significant strategic gains. It helped prevent the collapse of the Somali government, pushed Al-Shabaab out of major urban centres including Mogadishu, Marka, Kismayo and Baidoa, protected key government institutions, and created space for political reconstruction and state-building. Troops from contributing countries including Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti absorbed major battlefield risks and played a central role in containing Al-Shabaab's territorial expansion.

The AUSSOM military component consisted of 12,626 troops as of June 2025¹. According to the mission's Concept of Operations (CONOPs), AUSSOM's transition and drawdown plan envisages a gradual reduction of forces toward a planned final exit in December 2029. The pace of the drawdown is expected to depend on Somalia's security conditions and will be guided by regular joint technical assessments involving relevant stakeholders.

Despite these achievements, the AU mission has faced significant challenges. Al-Shabaab has not been defeated and remains capable of controlling rural areas, collecting taxation, operating parallel governance structures, and carrying out complex attacks. Somali security forces continue to rely heavily on international support for logistics, training, financing, intelligence and operational capabilities. Furthermore, military gains have often been difficult to sustain due to weak local governance, political disputes, limited state presence, and challenges in holding areas recovered from Al-Shabaab.

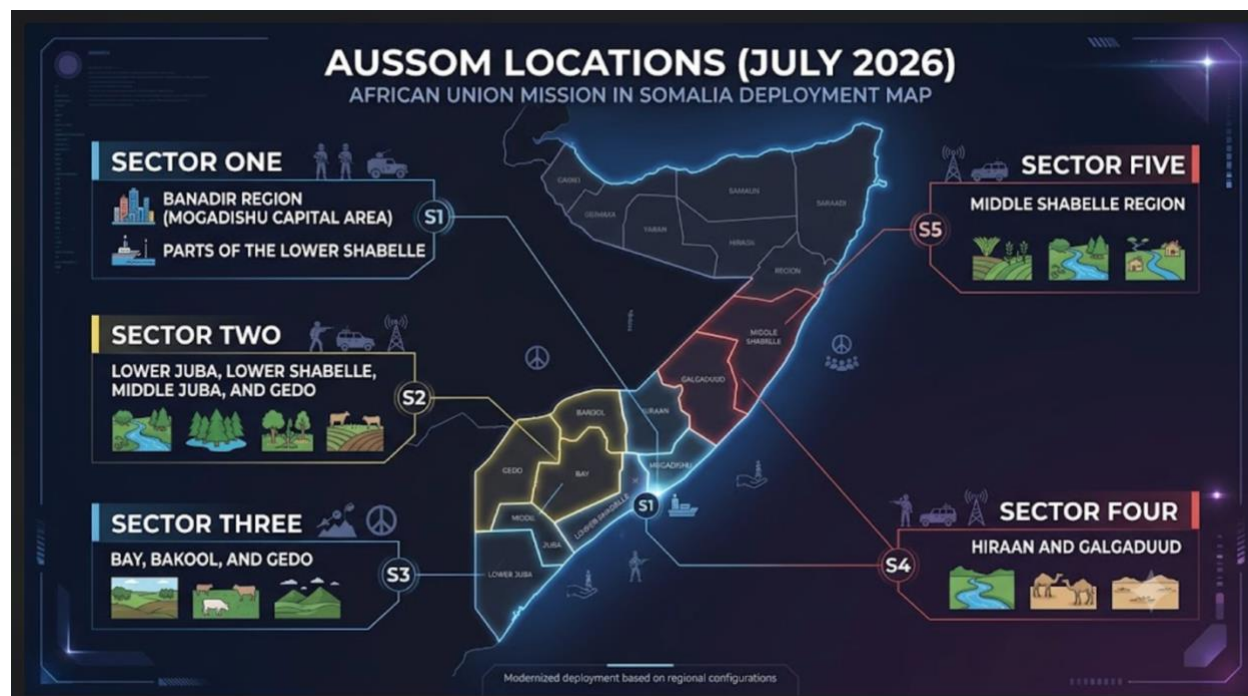
AUSSOM now faces a decisive transition period. The AU, European Union and United Kingdom continue to support sustained international engagement, while the United States has raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of external assistance and Somalia's slow progress toward security self-reliance. The central challenge is whether Somalia can use this remaining period of international support to build a capable, unified and accountable security sector before any significant reduction of AU forces creates new opportunities for Al-Shabaab to expand its influence.

The Emerging Divide:

-  **African Union (AU):** Wants AUSSOM preserved and demands sustainable international financing while increasing African ownership.
-  **European Union (EU):** Remains the strongest financial supporter but expects gradual Somali responsibility.
-  **United States (US):** Increasingly argues that Somalia has received billions in support but has not delivered sufficient security-sector progress; Washington is challenging continued UN logistical financing.
-  **United Kingdom (UK):** Supports maintaining the international security architecture and UN logistical support while pushing Somali-led transition.

¹ AUSSOM website: <https://au-ssom.org/military-component/>

➔ The biggest risk now is a dangerous overlap between AUSSOM financial uncertainty, Somalia's unresolved political transition and Al-Shabaab's ability to exploit the divisions.



The Strategic Context: Why AUSSOM Matters

AUSSOM replaced ATMIS in January 2025 with the objective of supporting Somali security forces and enabling a gradual transfer of responsibility to Somalia. However, Somalia's security environment remains fragile:

- ➔ Al-Shabaab maintains territorial influence, taxation systems and intelligence networks.
- ➔ Somali forces still depend heavily on external logistics.
- ➔ Political disputes between federal and regional authorities continue to affect security coordination.

The UN has continued to identify Al-Shabaab as the main security threat to Somalia and the wider region. AUSSOM currently provides approximately² 11,146 military troops and 680 police personnel, totaling around 11,826 uniformed personnel. Its effectiveness depends not only on troops but also on fuel, transport, medical evacuation, aviation and supply chains. Much of this has historically been provided through the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS).

AU Strategic View

The African Union sees AUSSOM as an African-led security operation whose collapse would undermine years of investment. The AU Commission has argued that the future of AUSSOM requires clear strategic

² Report by the AU Commission on the Situation in Somalia December 2025: <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/1317-Report.pdf>

objectives, sustainable financing, stronger African ownership, and long-term support for troop-contributing countries. It has stressed that the mission cannot rely indefinitely on unpredictable external funding and that African institutions must play a greater role in sustaining peace operations on the continent.

AU Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf has called³ for faster operationalisation of the AU Peace Fund, implementation of the 0.2% import levy mechanism, and increased financial contributions from AU member states. The aim is to create a more reliable African-led funding model that can support missions such as AUSSOM and reduce dependence on external donors.

The Concern

The AU's biggest fear is a **rushed international exit creates a security vacuum before Somali forces are ready**. From the AU perspective Somalia is not yet at the point where international security assistance can simply disappear.

EU Position: Support AUSSOM, But Demand Progress

The European Union remains the backbone of external financial support. In April 2026, the EU approved an additional **€75 million**⁴ through the European Peace Facility for AUSSOM's military component. The EU stated that its total support to AU-led missions in Somalia has reached almost **€2.8 billion since 2007**. EU funding mainly supports troop allowances, non-lethal equipment and operational services.

EU Strategic Calculation

The EU sees Somalia through several lenses:

- **Security:** Prevent Al-Shabaab expansion.
- **Migration:** Prevent instability affecting migration routes that ultimately flood EU countries.
- **Regional stability:** Protect the Horn of Africa and Red Sea security.
- **Counter-terrorism:** Prevent Somalia becoming a stronger base for extremist networks.

However, European governments increasingly want stronger Somali institutions, greater accountability, political stability, and measurable security reforms as conditions for continued support. While the EU remains committed to supporting Somalia's security transition, it expects international assistance to contribute to building sustainable Somali-led institutions and reducing long-term dependence on external security support.

³ CapitalFM, <https://capitalfm.africa/au-chief-pushes-for-african-led-financing-to-keep-somalia-peace-mission-on-track/>

⁴ EU press release, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/04/21/european-peace-facility-support-for-the-military-component-of-the-african-union-support-and-stabilisation-mission-in-somalia/>

US Position: The Pressure Strategy

The US position represents the biggest change. Washington has reportedly decided not to support continuation of UN logistical assistance to AUSSOM after 2026. The concern is not necessarily AUSSOM itself, but the continued financing of UNSOS support.

The US argues that Somalia has received significant international investment, yet its security forces remain dependent on external support. In its last communication to the AU on 1 July 2026, Washington also points to political disputes⁵ that have slowed security progress and the continued strength of Al-Shabaab despite years of international assistance. Washington is effectively saying: **"Somalia must take more responsibility for its own security."**

The US pressure strategy could produce two very different outcomes. On the positive side, it could push Somalia to accelerate security reforms, strengthen its armed forces, and take greater responsibility for national security. However, the negative risk is that reducing international support too quickly could weaken AUSSOM before Somali forces have the capacity to fully take over, creating security gaps that Al-Shabaab could exploit.

What is UK's Position?

The UK remains supportive of the current international framework. British officials have continued engagement with UNSOS and AUSSOM structures. A UK delegation visited UNSOS in April 2026 to assess operations and support delivery ahead of UN discussions on the mission's future.

The UK is closer⁶ to the AU/EU position than the current US approach. London's approach focuses on maintaining international support for Somalia's security transition, strengthening Somali security institutions, and avoiding a sudden withdrawal that could create a security vacuum. London supports a gradual transfer of responsibility to Somali forces while ensuring that international assistance continues until Somalia is better prepared to manage its own security.

Somalia's 2026 Political Transition: The Security Factor

AUSSOM's future cannot be separated from Somalia's political crisis. Somalia is entering a highly sensitive political period marked by deep disagreements over constitutional changes, the future political system, and the timing and model of national elections. These disputes have created tensions between the federal government and opposition groups, with competing views over how political power should be organised and how the country's next transition should be managed.

⁵ Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somalia-peacekeeping-mission-risk-us-blocks-un-support-sources-say-2026-07-02/>

⁶ UNSOS press release, <https://unsos.unmissions.org/en/news/uk-delegation-visits-unsos-to-assess-operations-and-support-delivery-in-somalia>

The June 2026 clashes⁷ in Mogadishu exposed the growing political crisis over constitutional changes and elections, with fighting between government forces and opposition-aligned groups raising concerns that political disputes could undermine security efforts and benefit Al-Shabaab.



Armored vehicle on the street during June clashes between the opposition and government forces.

The disagreement over elections has become one of the central sources of political instability. While the federal government has pushed its preferred electoral model, opposition actors and some federal member states have raised concerns about the process, transparency, and political inclusiveness. The lack of consensus risks weakening national unity at a time when Somalia is still facing major security challenges.

The Mogadishu fighting demonstrated how political disputes can quickly turn into security crises. When political actors use armed supporters, security forces become divided, or institutions are viewed as serving political interests, it creates vulnerabilities that Al-Shabaab can exploit. The ongoing political tensions therefore have direct implications for AUSSOM, Somali security forces, and the broader fight against armed groups.

Why This affects AUSSOM?

Because international partners are concerned that Somalia's political conflicts could weaken the effectiveness of AUSSOM and the wider fight against Al-Shabaab. In reality, when political disputes dominate government attention, leaders and institutions may focus more on internal competition than on security priorities, counterterrorism operations, and state-building efforts. This is exactly what we have

⁷ Kaab TV: <https://en.kaabtv.com/breaking-heavy-clashes-erupt-in-mogadishu-near-key-government-areas/>

witnessed in Somalia's recent history, with political and security tensions emerging between the Federal Government forces and federal member states, including Jubaland, Southwest State, and Puntland.

Political tensions also risk politicising Somalia's security institutions. If the army, intelligence agencies and police become involved in political and clan disputes, their neutrality and effectiveness can be undermined, reducing public trust and weakening coordination with AUSSOM and international partners.

Federal-state disagreements present another challenge to Somalia's security transition⁸. Disputes between Mogadishu and federal member states, including Puntland and Jubaland, have indeed created wider divisions that make coordinated military operations against Al-Shabaab more difficult.

Al-Shabaab has already benefited from these political and institutional divisions. When Somali leaders are divided, security forces become fragmented, and federal authorities are in conflict with regional administrations, the group has gained opportunities to expand its influence, exploit grievances, strengthen its networks, and challenge state authority.

How Al-Shabaab Could Exploit AUSSOM Uncertainty?

Al-Shabaab is already closely monitoring the uncertainty surrounding AUSSOM's future and appears to be adapting its political messaging and local strategies accordingly. The group's media outlets, including *Radio Andalus*, have this week broadcast discussions about AUSSOM's funding challenges and the possibility that Al-Shabaab could become the dominant authority if international forces withdraw. This messaging reflects the group's attempt to portray itself as a potential alternative governing force rather than only an armed movement.

At the same time, Al-Shabaab has reportedly increased efforts⁹ to improve relations with local communities and clans in areas such as Hiiraan, Middle Shabelle, and Galgaduud. The group has eased¹⁰ some restrictions on civilian life, including allowing mobile network services to return in areas between Wanlaweyn in Lower Shabelle and Hiiraan, and permitting young people to organise and record traditional performances during *Eid al-Adha* in some towns under its control. These steps indicate a shift in how the group engages with communities, aimed at reducing resistance, strengthening local acceptance, and attracting younger populations.

Scenario 1: Gradual Withdrawal

If a new funding arrangement is secured, AUSSOM remains operational, and Somali security forces continue improving, Al-Shabaab's opportunities to expand will remain limited. However, the group is likely to continue using political narratives, local grievances, and governance strategies to maintain influence and challenge state authority.

⁸ Crisis Group report : <https://www.crisisgroup.org/brf/africa/somalia/b212-new-chapter-same-stalemate-somalias-war-al-shabaab>

⁹ Abdalle Mumin, <https://x.com/Cabdalleaxmed/status/2081363230711042503>

¹⁰ Kaab TV: <https://kaabtv.com/al-shabaab-iyoo-hormuud-telecom-oo-isgaarsiinta-u-fasaxay-qeybo-ka-mid-ah-shabeellaha-hoose/>

Scenario 2: Reduced AUSSOM presence

A significant reduction in AUSSOM's presence could create security gaps that Al-Shabaab may exploit. If international support declines without a strong Somali security replacement, the group could increase attacks, pressure government positions, and expand its influence in areas where state authority remains weak.

Possible consequences include Somali forces withdrawing from isolated or difficult-to-sustain bases, allowing Al-Shabaab to regain access to previously contested areas. The group could also strengthen its rural networks, increase taxation and recruitment, and present itself as an alternative authority in communities where government services and security are limited.

Scenario 3: Political Crisis + Security Withdrawal

This would be the most dangerous scenario for Somalia's security. A combination of political instability, divisions among Somali leaders, and a significant reduction in AUSSOM support could create the conditions Al-Shabaab has historically exploited to expand its influence.

Al-Shabaab could use government weakness and political divisions as propaganda tools to portray the state as ineffective and divided. The group could increase recruitment among communities affected by instability, expand its taxation networks, strengthen its local administration structures, and intensify attacks, including in Mogadishu and other major urban centres.

Strategic Forecast: What Happens Next?

Somali officials appear uncertain about how the unfolding situation will develop. However, one option now being widely discussed in Mogadishu is the possibility of maintaining a smaller mission with a limited geographical focus — aimed at preventing a wider collapse of government control — as explained by **Hussein Sheikh Ali**¹¹, former Somalia National Security Adviser.

"I do not see our forces having the strength and capability to fill the gaps left by AMISOM/AUSSOM. Therefore, new donors must be sought, or it may be necessary to withdraw from many areas and concentrate forces on defending Mogadishu and the two Shabelle regions," Hussein said.

Recent media reports indicate Somalia is seeking support from Turkey and Egypt as uncertainty grows over the future of the AU mission. However, it remains unclear whether either country could cover the financial and operational costs required to fill any gap left by the mission. Turkey currently has an estimated 800 personnel¹² in Somalia, mainly focused on training and advising Somali forces at the TURKSOM military base and protecting the Turkish embassy. Expanding its role into a wider security mission would require significant additional resources.

The most likely outcome is that AUSSOM survives but changes rather than collapsing completely. A full withdrawal is unlikely because the AU wants the mission to continue, the EU remains a major supporter,

¹¹ Hafid Nor interview with Hussein Sheikh Ali: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/893776207135308>

¹² Garowe Online report: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/turkish-parliament-extends-military-mission-in-somalia-until-2028>

the UK supports the existing security framework, and Somalia is not currently able to take full responsibility for replacing AUSSOM.

However, the mission is likely to evolve into a smaller and more focused operation, with greater emphasis on Somali-led security responsibilities. Future support may become more conditional on reforms, accountability, and progress in building Somali security institutions, while reducing long-term dependence on UN structures and external assistance.

Final Assessment

The future of AUSSOM will likely shape whether Somalia enters 2027 through a managed transition, where Somali forces gradually assume greater responsibility with continued international backing, or through a premature withdrawal that could allow Al-Shabaab to regain momentum.

The decisive issue is not only financing but whether Somalia's political leadership can demonstrate that decades of international investment are producing a credible, accountable, and sustainable national security system. The coming months before decisions on future funding and mandate renewal will therefore be critical.

