



Vates Special Report: Not So AUSSOM – Somalia's Security Mission in Crisis

Security/Counterterrorism/Political Analysis
May 2025

Executive Summary

The African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) is facing an existential crisis. At the Apr 22-25 Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) summit in Kampala, hosted by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, officials delivered sobering assessments: the AU has only U.S.\$ 16.7 million for the entire year against a requirement of U.S.\$ 190 million – "We need \$15 million per month. That's the fact. And we do not have that money currently." TCCs called for an increase of at least 8,000 additional troops, a significant departure from the streamlined mission authorised by the UNSC.

The summit represents a significant rethink by TCCs as ground reality has degenerated since Feb 2023. Al-Shabaab has overrun multiple Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) including strategic positions in Lower and Middle Shabelle, with Uganda reporting five of nine handed-over FOBs in Middle Shabelle and three of nine in Lower Shabelle have fallen. The situation marks a significant rollback to pre-2019 positions.

The summit signals a public rebuke by TCCs, IGAD, and the AU to the FGS and indirectly to international partners. The options presented are stark: fund AUSSOM and influence positive change or face the likelihood of al-Shabaab taking over southern Somalia within 12 months.

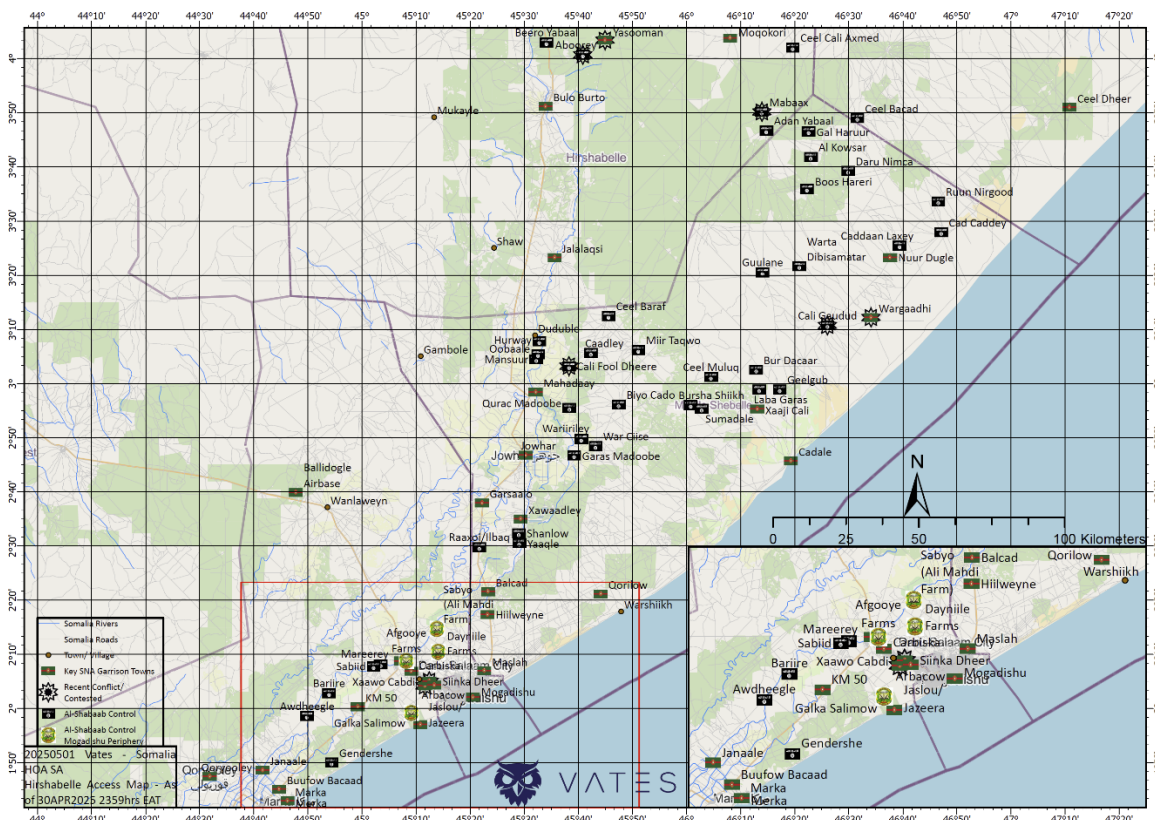


Figure 1 Southern Somalia FGS vs Al-Shabaab areas of control as of Apr 30. Source: Vates Internal

Funding Crisis

AUC Chairman Mahmoud Ali Youssouf warned of total collapse: "The transition from ATMIS to AUSSOM must not fail... it will take a collective effort from member countries and partners to save this African peace mission in Somalia

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from collapsing." IGAD Executive Secretary Workneh Gebeyehu noted AUSSOM inherited not just the ATMIS mandate but a U.S.\$ 96 million funding shortfall, warning: "When only 75% of our budget is secured exclusively through UN assessed contributions, commanders in the field face impossible choices about fuel, ammunition, and even basic necessities."

The hybrid funding model under UNSC Resolution 2719 (2013) is contingent on a UNSC decision by May 15 2025. During the Kampala summit, U.S. Ambassador William Popp made clear the U.S. would not support the resolution, raising the realistic possibility that the U.S. could utilise its P5 veto to derail the funding mechanism.¹

At current spending levels with arrears, AUSSOM would require over one billion dollars for its stated five-year mandate. A planned donors conference in Qatar may secure short-term funding but not the sustainable, predictable funding required.²

TCC Sector Assessment

Uganda (Sector 1 – Mogadishu/Lower Shabelle): The drawdown caused significant gaps resulting in resurgent al-Shabaab taking over significant territory. Uganda's 4,500 allocated troops are insufficient; the FGS has requested additional bilateral troops. Uganda called for urgent force surge of at least 8,000 troops.³

Kenya (Sector 2 – Lower Juba): KDF allocated 1,410 troops to secure Dhobley, Kismayo Airport and Seaport, but the biggest challenge is the expansive territory between those areas given low troop numbers, highlighting the need for air support.

Ethiopia (Sector 3 – Bay/Bakool/Gedo; Sector 4 – Hiraan): 12 FOBs are very remote (2,000 personnel in Sector 3, 500 in Sector 4). Stressed need for dialogue between FGS and FMS, warning poor relations affect operations. Current troop and investment levels make Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) challenging.

Djibouti (Sector 4 – Hiraan/Galgaduud): Sector comprises approx. 700sq km; 2,000 troops (including 500 to Ethiopia) insufficient for operational tempo across five locations. Djibouti stressed it is not willing to deploy bilateral troops.

Egypt (Sector 5 – Middle Shabelle): Troops to deploy to Jowhar, Xawaadley and Buraane, but 1,091 allocated troops insufficient. Concern raised that likely departure of Burundi contingent before replacement "will create more gaps and exacerbate the already deteriorating situation."

Request for 8,000 Additional Troops

The AUSSOM Force Commander stated the 11,146 troops in the CONOPs cannot save the current security situation. The proposed 8,000-troop increase departs significantly from UNSC authorisation promising a streamlined mission focused on securing strategic assets. This raises questions of how such a request can be accommodated or funded at this late stage.

Bilateral forces from Türkiye, Egypt, and potentially Ethiopia based on recent MOUs are being considered, though no mention made the final communique. However, this risks contributing to poor coordination and confusion over command authority – arguably already a weakness – aside from evident geopolitical rivalries. The call for more troops contradicts FGS claims of training 20,000 SNA from 2022-2024 and plans to train 5,000 Gorgor in 2025.

¹In Dec 2024, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2767 (2024) authorising AUSSOM, passed with 14 member states supporting and the U.S. abstaining specifically over the planned application of UNSC Resolution 2719 (2013) for AUSSOM funding under a hybrid model.

²Sources indicate the UK, as UNSC penholder on Somalia, may be willing to make an unspecified pledge at a planned Qatar donors conference, though there is no confirmation. Concerns have been raised regarding Genel Energy exploration plans and perceptions the UK may shield Somalia from wider scrutiny to protect commercial interests.

³Uganda's statement on FOB losses was directly contradicted by the Somali delegation who inaccurately claimed that of the 23 ATMIS FOBs handed over to SSF, only one (Biyo Cado, Jowhar district) had fallen to al-Shabaab.

SSF Capabilities Crisis

TCC documentation clearly outlines concerns over SSF capabilities and the mismatch between FGS claims of readiness and reality. FOBs handed over under ATMIS drawdown have been overrun. The loss of strategic positions including Adan Yabaal (Apr 16) and Sabiid (Mar 20) continues to reveal SSF are not in a position to assume security responsibility.⁴

The al-Shabaab offensive has repeatedly demonstrated lack of will to fight and poor unit cohesion, as well as AUSSOM troops refusing to leave bases even when adjacent locations are attacked including on the Balcad and Afgooye corridors near Mogadishu. Concerns exist over force degradation, loss of materiel to al-Shabaab, capabilities of foreign-trained units, and ongoing force generation problems. The FGS has called up security force reserves and untrained prison wardens to frontlines in Hirshabelle. Al-Shabaab is almost certainly emboldened by the confused handover and offensive success.

Controversial Peer Review Mechanism

One of the most controversial elements is the proposed "TCCs Plus Somalia Peer Review Mechanism" to be chaired by President Museveni. The language of 'Political Oversight Body' was removed from the final text, but the mechanism caused controversy due to implied foreign influence and loss of sovereignty – a key criticism of successive AU missions.⁵

TCCs appear to seek increased authority to ensure milestones are met and hold the FGS accountable. Ethiopia argued had this mechanism existed, the drawdown would not have been rushed. The oversight extends to political affairs including governance, reconciliation, and dialogue between FGS, FMS, and clan leaders. TCCs insist effective counter-insurgency is impossible without political stability and FGS-FMS cooperation.

The FGS utilised its assessment to champion achievements toward one-person-one-vote elections and claim prioritised FMS relationships through continuous dialogue – which are patently false. Two FMS (Puntland and Jubaland) plus Somaliland have suspended relations with the FGS, and unilateral election plans have created political tumult with direct elections highly unlikely given security conditions. Viability should become clearer within the two-month deadline set in the communique.

Assessment

Near Term: The May 15 UNSC decision on funding operationalisation is critical. U.S. opposition raises realistic possibility of veto. Without resolution, AUSSOM will face immediate operational constraints affecting fuel, ammunition, and basic necessities. Al-Shabaab will almost certainly continue to exploit the situation to consolidate its territorial gains.

Medium Term: Even if funding is secured, AUSSOM success depends on SSF capability that demonstrably does not exist. The mismatch between FGS characterisation and reality is very likely to frustrate TCCs and alienate foreign partners. Throughout 2024, ATMIS repeatedly warned key milestones were being missed, yet UNSC insisted the drawdown continue—almost certainly driven by cost considerations while ignoring security realities. The proposed peer review mechanism may provide a more neutral platform for FGS-FMS dialogue, but implementation requires good will from parties currently in open conflict.

⁴The loss of River Shabelle bridge towns of Awdheegle, Bariire and Sabiid marks a significant rollback to pre-Operation Badbaado (2019) when AMISOM led joint SSF operations to reclaim these positions, seen as providing an important buffer zone disrupting al-Shabaab access into Mogadishu.

⁵The FGS declared AUSSOM acting Head Sivuyile Thandikhaya Bam persona non grata for his accurate account of the security situation at the UNSC on Apr 09. Defence Minister Ahmed Moallim Fiqi alleged Bam submitted misleading reports portraying al-Shabaab as seeking statehood, calling him "a supporter of Al-Shabaab and an enemy of Somalia's progress."

Long Term: Without AUSSOM and focused international partner support, TCCs assess al-Shabaab could take over southern Somalia within 12 months. SSF require coordinated, sustained international support beyond intermittent airstrikes, but it is unclear where this would manifest even if AUSSOM was willing to support combat operations. A fundamental rethink on AUSSOM requires a significant rethink on funding approach.

Key Upcoming Dates

May 15 2025: UNSC decision on operationalising UN assessed contributions to AUSSOM

Within two months: First meeting of proposed TCCs Plus Somalia Peer Review Mechanism

TBD: Qatar/International donors conference

Conclusion

The Kampala summit represents TCCs publicly and firmly expressing concerns they may have intended to expose the FGS position and stress the seriousness of the situation to leverage international partners at this critical decision point. The ground reality facing Somalia has fundamentally degenerated since AUSSOM was conceived, demanding a change in approach.

AUSSOM is not so awesome, and Somalia's Security Mission is in crisis. Without urgent action on funding, force generation, SSF capabilities, and political reconciliation between the FGS and FMS, the mission risks collapse. The consequences of failure extend beyond Somalia to regional security across the Horn of Africa. International partners face a choice: invest in a reformed, adequately resourced mission with realistic assessments and accountability mechanisms, or accept the likely outcome of al-Shabaab dominance across southern Somalia. **End**