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No Time To Drift: Somalia and the Deadline for a Managed Security Transition

Why Somalia’s next five months will determine whether its security gains survive the end of UN logistics

By

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Acknowledgements

Balqiis Insights prepared this policy paper through an independent review of official documents, diplomatic communications, African Union and United Nations mandates and budgetary materials, as well as interviews with subject-matter experts and practitioners. The analysis also draws on communications and supporting documentation made available to Balqiis Insights during the course of its research. All sources were carefully assessed and incorporated where relevant to ensure the accuracy, context, and integrity of the analysis.

Cover image source: African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), 'New AUSSOM Head praises AUSSOM troops' role in Somalia's peace process,' 11 August 2025.

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Executive Summary

The United States (U.S.) decision of 1 July 2026 not to support the continuation of the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) beyond the current AUSSOM authorization, which ends on 31 December 2026, is a direct challenge to the way Somalia's security architecture and subsequent transition has been financed and sustained. This decision does not, by itself, end the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) as Washington has stated it will not object to renewing the mission's Chapter VII mandate under the UN Charter. However, what it does remove is the logistics system that allows the mandate to function, leaving, in effect, a mandate without logistics. Because it is expected that the U.S. position is exercised through its Security Council veto over the authorization itself, not merely through withholding its 25% accessed share, this raises the stakes, as this is a gap that cannot be offset by other contributors simply paying more.

> *"The United States has no objection to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) renewing the Chapter VII mandate for AUSSOM when it comes up for renewal in December this year, should the AU wish to continue the mission. The United States would not, however, support the UNSC renewal of AUSSOM if it includes UNSOS or any UN logistical or operational support."*
>
> *United States Mission to the African Union. 2026. Note Verbale 118-26*

The issue is therefore not only about money; rather, it is the gap between a political mandate and the operational means needed to implement it. AUSSOM may retain a Security Council mandate beyond 2026. But without fuel, food, water, casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), medical evacuation (MEDEVAC), medical support, troop transport, aviation support, and field sustainment, the functions that UNSOS delivers at a scale of half a billion dollars a year, that mandate loses much of its practical value. This effectively means that AUSSOM cannot continue unless another body replaces UN support.

This impending operational paralysis should not, however, come as a surprise. The writing has been on the wall for a while now for AUSSOM, representing the culmination of actions and inaction. The US decision formalizes a trajectory that has been visible since at least May 2025. The U.S. blocked activation of the Resolution 2719 hybrid funding model for AUSSOM, a model that would have ensured African Union (AU) troops in Somalia receive predictable stipends. Through August-September 2025, a White House decision cancelled the U.S. 25% contribution to UNSOS. During the December 2025 mandate renewal for AUSSOM, Resolution 2809 was adopted unanimously but with clear signals from the U.S. that the existing support model would not survive another cycle. It is evident that at least 18 months of explicit warnings produced no agreed contingency plan, by either the AU or the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). This paper addresses this failure.

Ultimately, this paper argues that the UNSOS decision should not be treated merely as a single funding dispute. Instead, the crisis exposes three linked problems in Somalia's transition.

1. Continued reliance on external logistics
2. Limited agreement between Somali political actors on national security priorities
3. The absence of a credible fiscal and operational pathway for Somali-led security.

The current political environment makes this challenge substantially more serious. It is marked by constitutional disputes, contested electoral timelines, the suspension of cooperation with Mogadishu by Puntland and Jubaland, and the most recent armed confrontation in the capital in June 2026. Compounding these uncertainties is the fact that the UN Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS) closes on 31 October 2026, meaning Somalia faces the dual departure of its UN special political mission and its UN logistics platform within a tight nine-week window.

In light of the above, this paper argues that Somalia, the African Union, the United Nations, and key partners should use the period leading up to the December 2026 Security Council negotiation to conclude a transition compact. This agreement should preserve minimal essential logistics through a re-configured support mechanism, financed by Africans and willing partners and delivered by the UN, while setting clearer, enforceable benchmarks for Somali ownership, federal-state coordination and security sector accountability.

The choice, as currently understood, should not be between an indefinite international mission and an abrupt unsupported handover. And none of this is workable with a divided Somalia. Every option in this paper, including the compact, depends on strong Somali leadership visible enough to regain the confidence of the AU and the Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs).

The more viable and constructive path is a phased transition that pairs a firm, cut-off date with enforceable benchmarks: linking logistics, financing, and political settlement. In today's trust deficit, open-ended "conditions-based" language discourages Somalia's partners. Partners hear indefinite dependency, and Somali actors infer conditions that can always be moved. An accelerated exit with a benchmarked drawdown is a credible, achievable target, even within the tight five-month negotiation window. The operational mechanics are set out in the recommendations section.

Box 1 - A mission built on borrowed pillars

Under Article 24 of the UN Charter, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) holds primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Adhering to its doctrinal boundary of not deploying UN peacekeepers where there was “no peace to keep,” the UN deferred to its 1990s UNOSOM experience to limit direct intervention.

In January 2007, the UNSC endorsed a substitute through UNSC Resolution 1744. The African Union would deploy, for an initial six months, on the Council’s behalf. AMISOM, later ATMIS, now AUSSOM, thus stood from inception on four separately owned pillars, none financed through Africa’s own institutions:

TROOPS	LOGISTICS	STIPENDS	ENABLERS
African TCCs — Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia; Sierra Leone in earlier years; Egypt yet to deploy under AUSSOM.	The UN — UNSOA (2009), then UNSOS. Fuel, rations, medevac, air. Assessed contributions.	The European Union — voluntary. Cut 20% in 2016; paused Dec 2024; partial return Apr 2026.	Bilateral partners — US, UK, Turkey and others. Training, equipment, air support.

These borrowed pillars have weakened in succession. The EU cut troop allowances by roughly 20 percent in 2016, from $1,028 to $822 per soldier per month. Its financing for AU troop allowances expired on 31 December 2024, creating a funding gap that persisted until voluntary contributions resumed in April 2026 under the European Peace Facility (EPF). UNSC Resolution 2719, designed to move AU missions onto predictable UN financing, failed to materialize for AUSSOM following U.S. opposition in May 2025. The logistics pillar broke next: Washington withdrew funding for its 25 percent share of UNSOS (roughly $130 million) in 2025, before the 1 July 2026 note announced it would block UNSOS’s renewal altogether. AUSSOM, meanwhile, inherited $93.9 million in unpaid TCC arrears and received barely a quarter of its 2025 budget.

The bottom line is that a six-month compromise became nineteen years, and every pillar failed in plain sight. The 2026 crisis was no ambush. It is the predictable collapse of a nineteen-year improvisation.

Introduction

The African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) was created to support Somalia after the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), with greater emphasis on Somali ownership, stabilization, and the gradual transfer of security responsibilities.[1] The mission was expected to be leaner and more politically sustainable than earlier African Union (AU) deployments, but it was never designed to operate without a support architecture. The United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) has provided logistical support to successive AU missions through UN assessed contributions since 2009.[2] It has supplied the basic operational backbone that allows AU troops to deploy, move, receive medical support and remain in the field.

The 1 July 2026 U.S. position changed the policy debate. In earlier discussions, the main question was whether AUSSOM would be renewed, reduced or reconfigured. The current question is more precise and in many ways more consequential: can an AU mission continue in Somalia if the UN support package that sustains it is removed? If no credible replacement is agreed before December, the risk is not simply a smaller mission. It is an irreversibly degraded mission, one that would be practically unable to support Somali forces and hold areas against al-Shabaab.

As we argued in our policy brief, Securing Somalia's Future: The Strategic Framework for AUSSOM, the Post-ATMIS Mission in Somalia (August 2024), the success of AUSSOM depends on Somali ownership at both federal and regional levels, sustained international support and a realistic exit strategy. That argument is now more urgent. A mission can only transition responsibly if the political, security, and financial conditions needed for transition are aligned. This paper assesses the implications of the U.S. decision in Somalia's current political and security context. We take the position that Somalia's security transition cannot be solved by mandate language alone. It requires a political settlement, a financing plan, and a practical logistics mechanism that can survive donor fatigue.

[1] AMISOM operated from February 19, 2007, to March 31, 2022 [15 years, 1 month, 12 days]. It was succeeded by ATMIS (African Union Transition Mission in Somalia), which operated from April 1, 2022, to December 31, 2024 [2 years, 8 months, 30 days]. The current follow-on mission, AUSSOM (African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia), assumed operations on January 1, 2025 [1 year, 6 months, 14 days and counting as of July 2026].

[2] For the comprehensive framework of United Nations and African Union security operations in Somalia, see "Mandate," United Nations Support Office in Somalia, https://unsos.unmissions.org/en/about/mandate. The UN logistical framework evolved from UNSOA (2009–2015) [6 years, 9 months, 24 days] into UNSOS (2015–present), which provides integrated logistical packages to AU forces as well as to the Somali Security Forces (SSF) since 2013 [12 years, 8 months, 10 days and counting]. UNSOS also directly sustains the UN's parallel political missions: the former UNSOM (2013–2024) [11 years, 4 months, 28 days] and its direct transitional successor, UNTMIS (operating November 1, 2024, to October 31, 2026)

Somalia’s Current Political and Security Context

A fractured political landscape

The UNSOS debate is unfolding at the most sensitive point in Somalia’s political cycle. The federal government is managing constitutional disputes, electoral tensions and increasingly strained relations with opposition actors, while its electoral process and timetable are contested. Relations between Mogadishu and Federal Member States (FMSs) have deteriorated drastically. Puntland and Jubaland have formally suspended cooperation with the Federal Government, accusing it of constitutional overreach. This outcome has been predictable, as political disagreements increasingly overlap with questions of security command, resource sharing and the status of regional forces. The most recent fighting in Mogadishu between government forces and opposition aligned actors was another vivid illustration of how quickly political disputes acquire a security dimension.

There is also a pattern in how resources are mobilized that partners have not failed to notice. When security forces have been mobilized in political disputes in Baidoa, Ras-Kamboni, and reportedly in Puntland, the Federal Government has demonstrated an ability to identify the funding, logistics, and personnel required to deploy and sustain them. In the fight against al-Shabaab, by contrast, the FGS requests international support. The contrast points to mismatched priorities and a dependency that is, at least in part, chosen. Partners, here, read the revealed priorities and not stated ones.

This context matters because AUSSOM does not operate in a vacuum. Its effectiveness depends on cooperation among FGS, FMSs, TCCs, and local security structures. When federal and state authorities are divided, operations become delayed, if not impossible; coordination and intelligence sharing becomes difficult, and any stabilization plans weaken. Political fragmentation also allows al-Shabaab to present itself as a more predictable authority in areas where state institutions are absent or contested. This was, notably, the stated rationale of the U.S. note verbale itself, which cited “internal rivalries and political infighting” as the reason international support has not translated into progress.

A deteriorating security baseline

Somalia's security environment is more fragile today than at any point since 2022. Al-Shabaab's 2025 offensive reversed most of the territorial gains of the 2022-23 campaign. This was underscored by the fall of Adan Yabaal in April 2025, along with Moqokori and Mahaas. Al-Shabaab continues to hold influence across large rural areas and has shown the ability to exploit gaps created by political disputes, uneven force deployment, and weak local governance. The response and fallout following the al-Shabaab offensive demonstrated precisely what happens when political will and coordination are lost and holding forces lose sustainment. Positions in districts transferred to Somali forces during the ATMIS drawdown were among the first to fall.
Further, Somalia's threat landscape is no longer defined by one front alone.[3] ISIS-Somalia is smaller and more geographically concentrated, but its presence in Puntland and its external links mean it cannot be treated as a marginal issue. Additionally, Puntland's rupture with Mogadishu means the response to it is now institutionally disconnected from any national counter-terrorism effort.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has escalated its unilateral military engagement even as it withdraws multilateral support. Since February 2025, it has conducted more than 111 airstrikes, more than doubling the total number carried out during the entire previous administration. Washington is not disengaging from Somalia; it is changing the model, from multilateral sustainment to bilateral leverage and kinetic strikes. Strikes, however, can disrupt leadership targets, but they cannot hold ground, run supply lines or evacuate casualties.

A final feature of the current context deserves careful consideration. As AUSSOM's future has dimmed, discussion has grown in some external policy circles about an eventual negotiated track with al-Shabaab. Whatever position Somali actors ultimately take, one principle should frame that debate. Talks pursued from a position of collapsing logistics are negotiations conducted from a position of weakness. The sequencing, therefore, is not a technical detail but a strategic one.

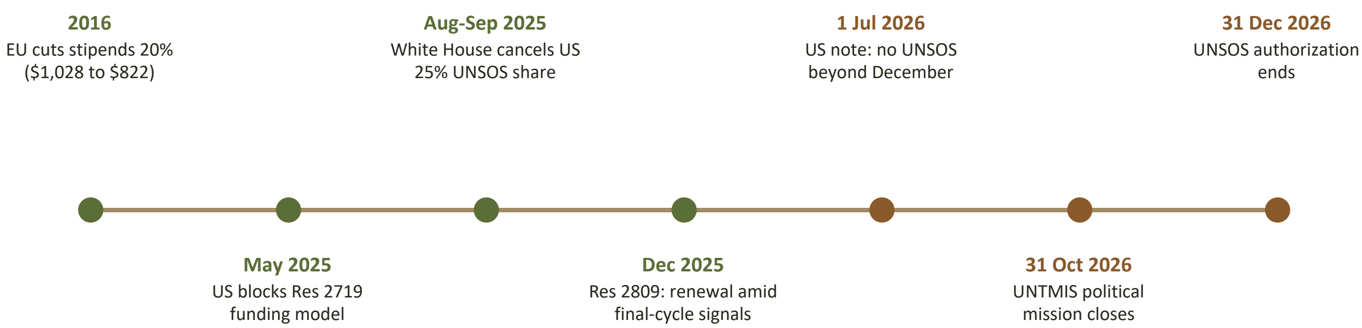
[3] Read our brief, Somalia's Fight Against Violent Extremism: Al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia (April 2025).

Donor fatigue is structural, not cyclical

The current context also includes international fatigue. Partners are under pressure to reduce long-term security spending and to demand stronger Somali ownership. The U.S. position reflects that broader mood. Washington's message is not only about UNSOS costs. It is also a political judgement that international support has not produced sufficient Somali unity, security sector reform, or sustained progress against militant groups.

Outside Somalia, the U.S. FY2026 budget request proposed eliminating UN peacekeeping funding entirely, with U.S. peacekeeping arrears now totaling approximately $2.4 billion. The UN Secretary-General has ordered mission-wide 15 percent expenditure cuts. The EU, which stopped providing stipends in December 2024, is historically AUSSOM's largest funder, having channeled nearly €2.8 billion to AU missions in Somalia since 2007. The EU provided limited support in April 2026 with a €75 million European Peace Facility package. Somalia therefore faces a dual test. It must preserve the support it still needs while demonstrating that external assistance is being converted into credible national capacity.

The collapse was foreseeable — and foreseen



Eighteen months of warnings produced no contingency plan. That failure — is the one Somalia and the AU can still correct.

Why UNSOS Matters

UNSOS is often treated as a technical support office. In practice, it has been a strategic enabler. It provides the support without which an AU force cannot operate at scale in Somalia's difficult security environment. The main functions include fuel, rations, and water supply; CASEVAC, MEDEVAC and medical services; aviation support and strategic air mobility; communications; engineering; accommodation; and reimbursement for contingent-owned equipment. These are not administrative elements. They determine whether AUSSOM can exist, protect itself, support Somali forces and respond to threats.

UNSOS also delivers non-lethal logistics to Somali National Army and Somali Police Force personnel engaged in joint operations financed through the voluntary Somali Security Forces Trust Fund but distributed through UNSOS infrastructure. The mandated ceiling for the Somali National Security Forces is up to 20,900, but roughly 17,400 were actually supported until recently. That pipeline is already broken with the trust fund empty. UNSOS halted regular supply deliveries to Somali forces in December 2025, and just recently resumed the provision of rations. Through the gap, only casualty evacuation has been consistently maintained. CASEVAC is thus both the last function still running and the first that any successor arrangement must protect. UNSOS closure would remove the delivery vehicle for Somali forces' support even where donor money may remain available.

The proposed UNSOS budget for the 2025-2026 financial period was US$537.2 million, an increase of US$37.4 million from the previous US$499.8 million budget. The increase reflected expanded operational needs and the cost of sustaining a mission that remains exposed to active insurgent threats. Even if the AU mission's own budget is lower, the mission depends heavily on the wider UN support platform to function.

The risk is therefore a mandate without logistics. Such a scenario would degrade troop morale, operational tempo, medical and casualty evacuations, force protection, and critically, the willingness of TCCs to remain deployed. Troop contributing countries will have to justify keeping troops in a harsh counterinsurgency theatre without reliable rations, life support, casualty evacuation and with troop stipends in arrears.

The arithmetic of dependency

$537m
UNSOS budget 2025/26 — the platform that sustains the mission

3x
UNSOS is three times the AUSSOM budget it enables ($166-190m)

11,826
authorized AUSSOM personnel — drawn from six TCCs

The financial architecture at stake is summarized below. The asymmetry in this table is the core of the problem.

	Item	Amount (USD)	Status / Source
1	UNSOS budget, FY 2025/26	US$537.2 million	Approved; US ~25% share withheld since the Aug–Sep 2025 rescission
2	UNSOS budget, FY 2026/27	US$481.7 million	Approved; –7.5% amid UN-wide peacekeeping cuts
3	AUSSOM annual budget	US$166.5–190 million	Largely unfunded; approx. ¼ received in 2025
4	Inherited ATMIS arrears to TCCs (2022–24)	US$93.9 million	Outstanding
5	Annual stipend requirement	~US$200 million	Partially covered by EU EPF package (€75m, Apr 2026)
6	Confirmed pledges for 2026	~US$120 million	AU PSOD briefing to Military Staff Committee, 3 July 2026

The UN support platform, which amounts to more than 500 million annually, has historically been financed through assessed contributions which was predictable up until now. The logistical support is also roughly three times the size of the AU mission budget that it enables, which ranges between USD 166.5 million and USD 190 million annually. The AU mission has relied primarily on voluntary contributions and has remained chronically underfunded.

Troop-contributing countries (TCCs)—Uganda (4,500 personnel), Ethiopia (2,500), Djibouti (1,520), Kenya (1,410), and Burundi, which has yet to complete its withdrawal and be replaced by Egypt (1,091)—have therefore subsidized the mission through months of unpaid stipends.

Removing the assessed pillar while the voluntary pillar is already failing collapses the mission's finances. The AU Military Staff Committee recognized as much during its extraordinary session on 3 July 2026, warning of serious operational constraints and initiating a consultation process that will proceed from military-technical review to the Chiefs of Defence, an extraordinary Peace and Security Council session, and ultimately an extraordinary summit of Heads of State.

The Policy Problem

The policy problem is not whether Somalia should eventually take full responsibility for its own security. That objective is uncontested, including by the U.S. note. The problem is how to reach that point without creating a security gap that al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia can exploit. A rapid loss of UNSOS support does not automatically translate to Somali self-reliance. It could instead expose the weakness of the current transition architecture. The ATMIS drawdown of 2023–24 already demonstrated that premature transfers produce reversals, not ownership.

Four gaps are most critical. **The first is the logistics gap.** Somali forces and AUSSOM do not yet have an agreed replacement for UNSOS at scale, and no actor currently possesses the procurement systems, air assets, and field infrastructure necessary to replicate it within the available timeframe. **The second is the political gap.** Federal and state actors have not fully aligned their security priorities, command arrangements and stabilization plans, with two member states no longer cooperating with Mogadishu. **The third is the financing gap.** There is no clear long-term funding mechanism that can sustain AUSSOM, support Somali forces and finance stabilization in recovered areas while donor support declines. **The fourth,** and one that is absent from many policy debates, is the **institutional gap**. UNTMIS closes on 31 October 2026, removing the UN political mission, its good offices function and its transition coordination role two months before the logistics platform follows it. Somalia may be undergoing three simultaneous withdrawals, two UN withdrawals and a possible AU withdrawal.

These gaps are also visible in Somalia's own planning documents. The Federal Government had set out a three-phase transition to full security sovereignty by 2032. The phases were consolidation (2026–2028), ownership (2028–2030) and sovereignty (2030–2032). The FGS assumed that during the first phase international partners would continue to provide critical enablers, including strategic mobility, intelligence support, medical evacuation and logistics support.

That assumption was invalidated on 1 July. The FGS has also argued correctly in its policy documents, albeit belatedly, that the transition must be "conditions-based, capability-driven, and carefully sequenced.However, the external environment has just become deadline-based. The FGS six-year national plan is colliding with a five-month funding clock, and no current policy reconciles the two.

In our previous brief, *Balancing Autonomy and Stability: UNSOM's Transition to a Country Office in Somalia (September 2024)*, we argued that transitions in Somalia should be tied to benchmarks rather than arbitrary timelines. The trust environment has changed, however. Where confidence between Somalia and its partners has broken down, "conditions-based" language no longer reassures. The workable option is neither a rigid deadline nor open-ended conditionality, but a combination of both.

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An immovable cut-off date paired with clear benchmarks that govern the pace and shape of the drawdown, with the mission reporting monthly to the AU Peace and Security Council on whether each benchmark has been met. A deadline without benchmarks produces the appearance of sovereignty while destroying the capacity to exercise it; benchmarks without a deadline produce a mission that is no different than the current one.

The immediate policy objective should therefore be to prevent a sudden logistics shock while using the pressure created by the U.S. decision to correct long-standing weaknesses. Somalia should not respond by simply asking partners to continue existing arrangements unchanged. Nor should partners use the decision to force an unrealistic handover. The task is to design a transition that is politically credible and feasible, financially realistic, and operationally safe.

A moment of maximum fragility

POLITICS

- Puntland and Jubaland have suspended cooperation with Mogadishu; armed clashes in the capital, June 2026
- Resources found for deployments against FMS — Baydhabo, Raaskambooni, Garoowe — while the al-Shabaab fight requests international airlift
- Partners read revealed priorities, not stated ones

SECURITY

- Al-Shabaab's 2025 offensive reversed most 2022-23 gains — Adan Yabaal, Moqokori, Mahaas
- Districts transferred during the ATMIS drawdown fell first
- US airstrikes at record tempo (111+ since Feb 2025) — strikes cannot hold ground or run supply lines

DONORS

- US FY26 budget proposed zeroing UN peacekeeping; arrears ~$2.4bn
- UN-wide 15% expenditure cuts ordered
- EU — the largest historical funder (EUR 2.8bn) — returned only partially in April 2026 (EUR 75m)

Policy Options

We present four policy options. None is cost-free and one is largely foreclosed. Each strikes a different balance between Somali ownership, international support, and operational risk.

Option one is to preserve UNSOS support beyond 2026 with stronger benchmarks. This would maintain the most reliable logistics platform and reduce immediate risk. It would also give Somali authorities more time to strengthen force readiness, payroll discipline, procurement controls, federal-state coordination, and stabilization delivery. Its weakness is political. It may be difficult to persuade major contributors to continue funding a support model that they increasingly see as open-ended and insufficiently linked to results. Also, after the July note, if unmodified this option survives only if American policy changes.

Option two is to replace UNSOS with an AU-led logistics and financing mechanism. This would respond to U.S. concerns by moving away from the UN support model. It could strengthen African ownership and create a more tailored support system for AUSSOM. However, the AU does not currently have the resources and a proven mechanism that can replace UNSOS at the required scale. Without predictable financing, procurement capacity and field infrastructure, this option carries a high operational risk.

The bilateral model, it should be recalled, is not hypothetical. It is where this mission began. When AMISOM first deployed in 2007, troop contingents were financed through a patchwork of bilateral and voluntary arrangements, including substantial support from the U.S. and European partners. UNSOA, UNSOS's predecessor, was created in 2009 precisely because that arrangement proved unpredictable, inequitable and unable to sustain a growing mission. A return to bilateral financing is therefore possible, but it would be a return to a model the UN support office was invented to fix.

A middle model also deserves mention: the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram, in which affected states contribute and largely finance national contingents in their own sectors under a joint headquarters, with AU strategic coordination and logistics support, including from the AU Continental Logistics Base in Douala, and EU funding channelled through the AU. Elements of this model are relevant to Somalia, particularly for frontline neighbours such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti already operating near their own borders. Its record, however, counsels caution: the MNJTF has faced chronic funding gaps, uneven coordination and vulnerability to member-state politics, and Somalia's contributor mix includes non-neighbours, Uganda and Egypt, for whom the self-financing logic does not apply.

Option three is to accelerate the transfer of security responsibilities to Somali forces while reducing AUSSOM's role. This is the most sovereignty-focused option. It may be politically attractive and could push Somali authorities to take stronger ownership. But in the current context, it is also the riskiest. Somali forces remain uneven in capability, coordination and sustainment. The 2025 reversals are the empirical record of what accelerated transfer produces under current conditions. This option also presupposes a degree of federal–state cohesion that does not presently exist. Forces cannot be transferred to a command architecture that some FMSs do not recognize. A rushed handover could create vacuums in areas where al-Shabaab is already probing for weakness.

Option four is a negotiated transition compact. This option would preserve minimal essential functions for a defined period through a hybrid mechanism: a re-scoped UN support arrangement financed by the AU, willing partners, and possibly the EU but administered through UN systems, all while creating a phased plan to transfer selected logistics, operational and stabilization responsibilities to Somali and AU mechanisms. It would include benchmarks, fiscal commitments, political dialogue, federal-state security coordination and monthly review. This is the most realistic option as it avoids both indefinite dependency and abrupt withdrawal and because its elements map onto what stakeholders have already signaled.

A pragmatic variant deserves particular attention. The AU does not have, and cannot build by 2027, the procurement systems, air assets, and field infrastructure that UNSOS operates. The UN is, in practice, the only entity able to deliver support at this scale. But precedent for creative financing of UN delivery is well established. In Cyprus, the host government has for decades paid roughly a third of UNFICYP's budget, some $18–19 million currently; in the Sahel, MINUSMA supported the G5 Sahel Joint Force on a reimbursable basis financed by the EU; and in Somalia itself, the SSF Trust Fund, with contributions from the United States, India, and others, has long channeled voluntary money through UN delivery systems under existing UN administrative rules.

The feasible middle path is therefore an African and willing partners financed, UN-delivered package. Somalia could pay a share, however modest, as a signal of goodwill. This would be politically transformative, while the AU and partners mobilize the remainder, prioritized around CASEVAC/MEDEVAC, fuel, rations, and evacuation lift, with the funds held in a UN-managed trust fund established by Security Council resolution.

The caveat is that such a resolution could still be blocked. But the politics would be transformed: the US note's stated objection is cost and burden-sharing, and an arrangement in which Africans and Somalia lead while the UN merely delivers answers that objection completely.

The compact should also state plainly what it protects beyond the mission. The security umbrella within which embassies, UN agencies, and humanitarian and development partners operate in Somalia. Without credible guarantees on that security infrastructure, the US decision risks triggering a wider international drawdown, creating a self-fulfilling collapse of presence.

African-financed, UN-delivered

CYPRUS
Host government has paid ~1/3 of UNFICYP's budget for decades ($18-19m/yr).

SAHEL
MINUSMA supported the G5 Sahel Joint Force on a reimbursable basis, financed by the EU.

SOMALIA
The SSF Trust Fund (US, India and others) already channels voluntary money through UN delivery.

Somalia pays a share — modest, but politically transformative

→ AU + partners mobilize the remainder (~$250m bridging year)

→ Funds held in a UN-managed trust fund, established by UNSC resolution

→ UN delivers — CASEVAC/MEDEVAC first, then fuel, rations, lift

The UN is the only entity able to deliver at this scale — and precedent for creative financing of UN delivery is well established.

Evaluation of Options

The options should be judged against three tests and one standing risk screen. The **first** test is legitimacy. Does the option carry a political mandate that Somali federal and state actors, the AU and the Security Council can all recognize? The **second** is technical capacity. Does it rest on solid logistics that exist rather than are hoped for? The **third** is regional consensus. Does it align the troop-contributing countries and Somalia's neighbors behind a common position, or fragment them into competing bilateral tracks?

Across all three runs the risk screen. Any option that creates sudden gaps in logistics, casualty and medical evacuation or holding capacity is dangerous as al-Shabaab's operational pattern thus far being to probe and exploit transitions. Applied in its current form, preserving UNSOS without modification fails the legitimacy test, having effectively been foreclosed by the prospect of a U.S. veto. Accelerated transfer fails the technical test, as ownership without capacity is not sustainable. Only the negotiated compact has a plausible path through all three.

One condition, however, is common to all four options and precedes them. None can work without a level of Somali leadership at both the federal and state alike, that is sufficient to regain the confidence of the AU and, most immediately, of the TCCs whose soldiers hold the line. TCCs cannot indefinitely justify keeping forces deployed, and the AU cannot mobilize finance or replacements, on behalf of a government whose politics suggest the mission matters more to its partners than to Mogadishu. Somali leadership is not one input among several; it is the multiplier on every option. Strong Somali leadership can make even the most challenging option viable. In its absence, all four options become substantially less likely to succeed.

One further consideration collapses the remaining alternatives. The AU has internally weighed three courses. Finding replacement donors, shrinking the mission, or phased withdrawal. The first failed visibly in 2025; the second faces the same sponsorship problem at smaller scale; and the third contains a paradox rarely stated aloud, that even an organized withdrawal requires the logistics being cut. Force extraction and equipment repatriation for Uganda, Djibouti and other contributors in early 2027 cannot be executed without UNSOS-type lift, medical cover and convoy sustainment. The U.S. decision does not only make staying difficult; it makes leaving difficult. That is the strongest argument for a negotiated compact. Every alternative, including exit, runs through a functioning logistics mechanism.

The recommended option is therefore a negotiated transition compact, framed not as a rescue package for AUSSOM but as a security transition agreement that links logistics to reforms. Somalia would receive time and operational continuity, but in exchange it would commit to measurable steps. These steps should include a federal-state security coordination mechanism encompassing all Federal Member States; transparent force readiness assessments; tighter financial controls over payroll and logistics; and a clear division of responsibilities between Somali forces and AUSSOM.

This compact would differ from earlier frameworks, from the 2013 New Deal Compact to the 2017 Security Pact and the Mutual Accountability Framework, in one decisive respect: those arrangements exchanged Somali commitments for open-ended support, and non-delivery carried no consequence because support continued regardless. Here the default has changed. Support is ending on a date certain, verification is monthly rather than conference-to-conference, and for the first time non-performance carries symmetrical costs: partners lose the mission, and Mogadishu loses the lifeline. The compact does not assume better faith than its predecessors; it assumes the same faith under a real deadline.

The compact should be anchored by two controls that answer the trust deficit on both sides. First, an immovable cut-off date for the mission, with a phased reduction from 11,826 personnel to zero by an agreed date, such as December 2028. Secondly, monthly reporting by the mission to the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) on progress against agreed benchmarks ensuring that the exit is governed by evidence rather than by extension.

The compact is, by design, a time-bound bridge and not a successor architecture: a financing and logistics arrangement of roughly two years that exists to manage the transition it schedules, and expires with it.

For international partners, the compact would provide a way to avoid an unmanaged security shock while ensuring that continued support is not unconditional. For the AU, it would protect troop-contributing countries from being left with an unfunded mandate. For Somalia, it would provide a pathway from dependency to greater control without sacrificing the security gains that have been achieved.

Recommendations

With only a five-month window remaining, the recommendations below are sequenced against two clocks: the AU's internal consultation process and the Security Council negotiations expected in November–December 2026.

1. **The Federal Government of Somalia should treat the U.S. decision as a strategic warning.** It should convene, within weeks, federal-state security dialogue focused on AUSSOM, UNSOS and a national transition plan. This dialogue should include all federal member states, security institutions and relevant political actors. Its purpose should not be symbolic consultation. It should produce a short, agreed set of transition priorities before the next round of UN and AU negotiations as a single voice. It should also insert itself into any bilateral consultations with TCCs or risk being negotiated around in New York and in the region.

2. **The Somali government should also table a credible costed national sustainment plan before the next AU session.** This should identify which logistics functions can be gradually assumed by Somali institutions, which functions require AU or UN support, and which functions need bilateral assistance and from whom. The plan should be costed, sequenced and tied to force readiness. It should include stronger oversight, because no one will continue to fund a system that appears vulnerable to waste or political capture, and the US note has made that judgement explicit. The compact should include a negotiated transfer of UNSOS infrastructure, supply chains and sector hubs under a bridging arrangement, converting the ambitious build of Somali logistics from aspiration into a named receiving institution and should present current digital reform as the ready-made accountability benchmarks donors are demanding.

3. **Somali political leaders should return security to the center of national priorities.** Political disputes over elections, constitutional reform and federal power-sharing must be handled through dialogue, not coercive pressure. The fight against al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia cannot be separated from the quality of Somalia's political settlement. A divided political class will weaken every security plan, regardless of the number of troops deployed and appears to be the stated reason Somalia's most consequential partner has walked away from the table.

4. **The AU Peace and Security Council should decide, not defer.** The consultation ladder now underway - Military Staff Committee, Chiefs of Defence, extraordinary PSC session, and extraordinary Summit - must be compressed into a binding decision before the Security Council negotiation opens. The extraordinary PSC session should adopt a single costed proposal and a clear mandate for the AU's negotiators.

5. **The AU should avoid accepting a mandate that cannot be implemented.** It should make clear as its own Peace Support Operations Division has warned that AUSSOM's authorization must be matched by a logistics and financing package. At the same time, the AU should propose a practical transition model that gradually reduces dependence on UNSOS where feasible. This may include joint AU-UN logistics planning, pooled procurement, regional transport arrangements and a clearer role for troop-contributing countries in operational planning. The TCCs should join the Commission in converting nineteen years of sacrifice into collective leverage for real Somali political and military commitments.

6. **The AU should manage the ending politically — and own the story.** History often remembers the final image rather than the preceding years of investment. Nineteen years in Somalia should not end with an image of abandonment. The AU Commission should appoint a small panel of senior experts and officials to draft the authoritative record of the AU's missions in Somalia highlighting what was achieved, what support was promised and never arrived, what limitations forced a drawdown without political settlement, and what it cost. In this regard, the Commission and the Federal Government could convene these stock-taking meetings jointly, so that the record is African and Somali rather than merely institutional. Endorsed by the PSC and delivered to the Security Council, that record becomes the instrument by which the AU hands back the file; the six-month compromise of 2007, formally returned to the body on which Article 24 of the Charter confers primary responsibility for international peace and security.

7. **The United Nations should support a benchmark-based transition rather than a binary debate over whether UNSOS continues or ends.** The UN Secretariat should define, before the mandate negotiation, the minimum operational functions whose loss constitutes mission failure, for example, CASEVAC, MEDEVAC, fuel, rations, and water. The UN should design a re-scoped support mechanism around them that can be financed outside the contested assessed budget if necessary. The Secretary-General's May 2026 report (S/2026/446) already points in this direction. The UN should also plan for the compounding effect of UNTMIS's closure in October, ensuring the residual country team retains a transition-coordination capability. Planning should also begin now for what follows UNTMIS. This could be a successor political presence with its own protection element, for which the existing UN Guard Unit in Mogadishu offers a working precedent, and a dedicated peace fund as the financing rail, so that the political and logistics transitions are designed together rather than sequentially.

8. International partners should not follow the U.S. decision and disengage from Somalia. AUSSOM and Somali forces still operate in a live counterinsurgency environment. Partners should be engaged within one coordination framework rather than through parallel bilateral tracks that import rivalries into Somalia's security architecture. Partners should redirect support toward high-impact enablers with realistic outcome tied conditions. On diversification, Turkey, Qatar and Gulf partners each bring distinct resources, but political decisions must precede any financing one. Engagement with Washington should aim to retain kinetic counter-terrorism pressure through the drawdown, as a bridge that buys time for the compact, not as a substitute for sustainment.

Eight Recommendations in Order of Priority

SOMALIA	1	Political leaders return security to the centre of national priorities
	2	FGS convenes federal-state dialogue within weeks — one national position
	3	FGS tables a costed national sustainment plan before the extraordinary PSC session
AFRICAN UNION	4	PSC decides, not defers — one costed proposal into New York
	5	Refuse any unfunded mandate — AU and TCCs as one bloc, converting nineteen years of sacrifice into leverage for Somali commitments
UN & PARTNERS	6	UN defines minimum functions (CASEVAC first) and designs the trust-fund mechanism
	7	Partners coordinate in one framework; US kinetic pressure as a bridge, not a strategy
THE STORY	8	AU records what nineteen years achieved and cost — and formally hands the file back to the Security Council under Article 24

Conclusion

The U.S. UNSOS decision has exposed a problem that has been obvious for years. Somalia's security transition has advanced faster on paper than in practice. Mandates have been renewed, missions renamed and timelines adjusted, but the deeper questions of logistics, political settlement and Somali-owned security remain unresolved. The decision is also a mirror held up to eighteen months of warnings that produced no contingency plan.

AUSSOM without UNSOS would not simply be a smaller mission. It could become a mission unable to perform the basic functions required of it. That outcome would be dangerous for Somalia, costly for troop-contributing countries that have carried the burden, and damaging to the credibility of international support. At the same time, continuing the current model without reform would only postpone the next crisis. The way forward is a transition compact that is honest about Somalia's needs and firm about Somalia's responsibilities. It should protect essential logistics while requiring measurable progress on federal-state coordination, security sector accountability and force readiness.

Somalia needs support, but it also needs a political class willing to convert support into national capacity. The question is not whether Somalia should own its security. It must. The question is whether the transition to that ownership will be planned carefully enough in the five months that remain to secure and sustain the gains of the past two decades.

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