

AFRICA DIGEST

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Transitioning Peace: The African Union's New Mission in Somalia

The African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) are planning a new AU-led peacekeeping mission in Somalia, set to replace the current African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) when it concludes at the end of 2024. This upcoming mission, named the [AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia](#) (AUSSOM), is designed to continue the work initiated by ATMIS while adapting to evolving regional dynamics.

AUSSOM will maintain the core objectives of ATMIS, including providing security for Somali citizens and degrading the terrorist group al Shabaab. The new mission's [force size](#) will be similar to that of ATMIS, which has reduced its personnel from over 20,000 in 2022 to 12,626 in 2023. AUSSOM is expected to field a force of [11,911 personnel](#), organized into four geographical sectors. These sectors will either consolidate ATMIS areas or transition them to Somali control.

The AU has emphasized that AUSSOM will focus on peacebuilding, leaving state-building tasks to the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and international partners. Peace-building efforts aim to strengthen national capacities for conflict management, thereby reducing the risk of future conflicts. However, the AU has also acknowledged that there is significant overlap between peacebuilding and state-building, particularly in enhancing the capacity of Somali forces, supporting reconstruction, and fostering civil-military relations.

The AU has called for increased assistance to the FGS to support these broader state-building goals. A notable development in

the new mission is Egypt's planned participation. For the first time, Egypt will [contribute troops](#) to the AU mission in Somalia. This decision, confirmed by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi during Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's visit to Cairo in August 2024, reflects growing ties between Egypt and Somalia. Egypt's involvement is likely motivated by a desire to strengthen its position in the Horn of Africa, particularly concerning its disputes with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

While Egypt has confirmed its participation, four of the five current troop-contributing countries, including Ethiopia, have not yet confirmed their continued involvement. Ethiopia, which contributes at least 3,000 troops to ATMIS and has additional forces in Somalia under bilateral agreements, faces potential challenges due to its controversial port deal with Somaliland. Despite these uncertainties, Ethiopia is expected to maintain a military presence in Somalia, as its forces serve as a critical buffer against al Shabaab. The funding for AUSSOM will come from UN-assessed contributions, marking a shift from reliance on specific donors. This will be the first application of a new UN resolution allowing assessed contributions for AU-led peace and security operations. However, concerns about long-term financing and sustainability have led to debates among Western partners.

As the transition from ATMIS to AUSSOM progresses, the AU has warned of the risks associated with the drawdown of forces. Al Shabaab has already exploited these transitions, launching attacks on bases handed over to Somali forces. The AU has called for an internal assessment of the

ongoing drawdown by September to mitigate the risk of a security vacuum. This transition period is critical for Somalia's stability, with regional powers and international partners closely watching the developments. The success of AUSSOM will depend on effective coordination among the AU, UN, SFG, and other stakeholders, as well as the continued commitment of troop-contributing countries.

DRC's Copper Makes Its Debut in the US through Lobito Corridor

The initial shipment of copper from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) via the Lobito Atlantic Railway has been completed. A load of copper cathodes arrived at Angola's Lobito port on 19 [August](#). The United States is making a strategic investment in the Lobito Corridor, a century-old railway being modernized to transport critical minerals across Africa from the DRC to Lobito port in Angola. This ambitious project, estimated to exceed \$10 billion, encompasses not only the railway but also associated infrastructure such as roads, bridges, energy, telecommunications, and agribusiness. It represents a broader US effort to regain influence in Africa, countering the expanding presence of China, Russia, and other global powers. The Lobito Corridor aims to provide an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has dominated African infrastructure development for years.

China's BRI, a \$1 trillion global infrastructure venture, has significantly boosted Beijing's influence in Africa through financing and constructing infrastructure, particularly in mineral-rich countries essential for defense, renewable energy, and electric vehicles. In contrast,

the Lobito Corridor seeks to establish a more efficient route for exporting these minerals to the US and Europe, aiming to reduce Africa's dependency on China for critical economic activities.

A consortium of European firms has secured a 30-year concession to manage the Lobito Atlantic Railway (LAR), upgrading 1,300 kilometers of rail tracks and operating the mineral port. This project also includes extending the railway into Zambia's Copperbelt province, further integrating the region's mineral resources into the global market. The [corridor](#) is expected to be faster, more cost-effective, and environmentally friendly, with an initial target of transporting 200,000 tonnes of minerals in its first year and eventually reaching 2 million tonnes.

Angola, with an economy heavily reliant on oil and significant debt to China, stands to benefit from this diversified investment. The country has borrowed \$45 billion, with \$17 billion still owed to China, mostly through oil-backed loans. President João Lourenço is keen to balance relationships and avoid dependence on any single global power, be it the US or China. The US is positioning the Lobito Corridor as a flagship project and a model for future economic corridors, as part of the broader [Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment](#) (PGII), through which the US and its G7 allies aim to deploy \$600 billion by 2027 as an alternative to China's BRI.

However, challenges persist. The DRC's involvement has been tepid, and there are concerns about Angola's ability to manage such a large-scale project. Additionally, political dynamics in both the US and Africa could affect the long-term success of the Lobito Corridor. Nevertheless, the

project represents a significant US effort to reassert its influence in Africa and compete with China in the critical minerals sector.

Ukraine Foreign Minister's fourth African tour

From 4 to 8 August 2024, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [visited Malawi, Zambia and Mauritius](#) to shore up support in the prevailing conflict against Russia. These are the same African countries that had participated in the Summit on Peace in Ukraine held on 15 to 16 June 2024 in Switzerland. The meetings focused on developing bilateral relations and ensuring the participation of African nations in “global efforts to restore a just peace for Ukraine and the world.” In Malawi, discussions revolved around Ukraine’s role in ensuring food security through the exchange of technologies in the field of agriculture and its humanitarian program called “Grain from Ukraine”. In Zambia, the focus was on political dialogue and cooperation within international organisations while in Mauritius, the focus was on attracting investments and the participation of Mauritian business in the reconstruction of the Ukrainian economy. Many African countries have publicly remained neutral and abstained from voting against Russia at United Nations meetings.

Ukraine’s diplomatic counteroffensive against Russia’s efforts to woo African states is facing several challenges. On 5th August, Mali [cut diplomatic ties](#) with Ukraine following revelations of Ukrainian involvement in recent fighting in northern Mali. Andriy Yusov, a military intelligence spokesperson, boastfully admitted that Kyiv provided Malian rebels with crucial intelligence for a rebel assault that killed many Russian Wagner Group mercenaries and Malian soldiers. The statement caused

immediate backlash. Although the Ukrainian government tried to deny its involvement, Mali and its ally Niger decided to cut all diplomatic ties with Kyiv. Moreover, Senegal also summoned Ukrainian ambassador posted in Dakar following indications of Ukrainian involvement. Despite establishing nine new embassies across the continent, this development has harmed its reputation in the continent, especially in West Africa. Jeopardising the security and territorial integrity of other nations in the name of weakening Russia is not going to win Ukraine diplomatic support in the African continent. Instead, it must strive to balance its strategic goals and engage African nations in an equal and mutually beneficial manner.

Islamist violence in Burkina Faso continues unabated

On 24 August 2024, al-Qaeda linked armed group Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) fighters attacked the locality of Barsalogo, located near the province of Kaya which resulted in the [alleged killing of at least 200 people](#). The attacks took place where dozens of civilians and members of Burkina’s Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP), a nationwide self-defense militia, were helping the soldiers build defensive trenches and positions. Burkina Faso’s ruling military junta is struggling to combat the ever-growing jihadi threat from both JNIM and the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP). Ever since the military overthrew the civilian government in 2022 claiming poor management of security, it has severed ties with France and the United States and has instead befriended Russia and bought Russian arms. However, the government has failed to secure any gains on the security front.

Under the military regime of Ibrahim Traore, Burkina Faso has increasingly been dependent on the VDP to stymie JNIM's advance. Subsequently, JNIM fighters are increasingly targeting VDP positions and formations across the country. Although the use of ex-Wagner forces is not as conspicuous as in northern Mali, Russian mercenaries in Burkina Faso are assisting in various capacities, mainly used to train Burkinabe troops. It is estimated that about 50 to 60 percent of Burkina Faso's territory is now outside the control of its government despite massive recruitment by the VDP. Burkina Faso's military junta continues to believe it can still regain territory. However, amid the growing security crisis, frustration is beginning to build among soldiers. This is [fueling rumors](#) of possible dissent against Burkina Faso's military government. Whether the country is heading towards another mutiny remains to be seen. But what is certain is that insecurity in Burkina Faso has worsened under Traore's regime. The massacre in Barsalogo is a stark reminder of JNIM's capacity for violence inside Burkina Faso. This unfortunate attack signals the continued deterioration of the Burkinabe state and serves as a barometer of the Sahel region as a whole.

Mpox epidemic spreads to thirteen African countries

On August 14, 2024, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared an international public health emergency in response to a surge in cases of Mpox (formerly known as monkey pox) on the African continent. Mpox was once confined to Central Africa but has now become a global threat with cases emerging in Sweden and Thailand. In Africa, it has affected countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda,

Burundi, Uganda, and Kenya. As per data from the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), DRC has reported the highest number of suspected or confirmed cases. As of 23 August 2024, a total of [20,720 cases](#) and [582 casualties](#) have been reported from African countries.

There was an outbreak of the virus back in 2022 which triggered global alarms. Unfortunately, despite the disease being endemic since past three years, the international response has been slow, echoing the inequalities seen during the Covid-19 pandemic. The [first batch of 10,000 mpox vaccines](#) are finally due to arrive in the last week of August 2024. The failure to ensure timely delivery of the anti-mpox shots sheds light on the prevailing inherent inequalities within the global healthcare systems.

Before buying and distributing the vaccines, the process of getting approval from WHO is long and cumbersome. This has forced individual African countries and the continent's public health agency – the CDC – to request donations of vaccine shots from rich countries. Africa CDC has suggested that the continent may require 10 million doses to cope with the outbreak. To deal with this challenge, the Africa CDC in collaboration with Bavarian Nordic is strategising to enhance vaccine manufacturing capacity within Africa with the target of delivering 10 million doses by 2025. The Africa CDC and WHO worked together to develop an interim guidance document on Mpox diagnostic testing which was released couple of months earlier. Moreover, the Africa CDC in partnership with the National Institute of Biomedical Research in DRC launched a hands-on training on molecular testing, sequencing, and reporting of mpox cases.