

AFRICA DIGEST

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Egyptian troops to join the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia

On 23 December, Egypt's Foreign Minister noted that Egyptian troops are going to be deployed to an African Union-backed peacekeeping mission, at the request of the Somali government and approval of the African Union Peace and Security Council. The mission, known as the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), will replace the current African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). AUSSOM is expected to take effect from 1 January 2025 and last till 2029. [Media reports](#) note that AUSSOM's operational concept envisions deploying around 12,000 military personnel from mostly African Union (AU) member states to continue defending the Federal Government of Somalia against the al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabaab.

This development comes at a time when both Egypt and Ethiopia are vying to remain relevant in Somalia's security transition as Mogadishu turns over a new chapter with a fresh AU-backed mission. Earlier in the year, tensions flared in the Horn of Africa region following Ethiopia's maritime deal in January 2024 with the breakaway region of Somaliland over Ethiopian ambition to gain access to the Red Sea. Under the [agreement](#), Ethiopia was granted a 50-year lease on 20 kilometers of Somaliland's claimed shoreline in return for Ethiopia recognizing Somaliland's independence.

This naturally pushed Mogadishu closer to Addis Ababa's regional rival Cairo and spurred Somalia to call for excluding Ethiopia from AUSSOM. Badr Abdelatty, Egypt's foreign minister, [affirmed](#) "Somalia's sovereignty over (its) entire national soil" and rejected "any dictates or unilateral measures affecting Somalia's unity, sovereignty and safety." He noted that both Egypt and Somalia are working to develop their strategic partnership. The deployment of Egyptian forces to AUSSOM would represent Egypt's most expensive military support to Somalia till date, and its largest foreign deployment since the 1991 Gulf War. Earlier in September 2024, Egypt had delivered a cache of weaponry including anti-aircraft guns and artillery to Somalia to support and build the capabilities of the Somali army following their joint security pact signed in August 2024. Egypt continues to be at odds with Ethiopia for years over Addis Ababa's construction of a vast hydro dam, known as the [Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam \(GERD\)](#), on the headwaters of the Nile River.

For Cairo and Mogadishu, deploying Egyptian troops to Somalia is a deliberate snub to Addis Ababa. While the AUSSOM force is a critical component of limiting the encroachment of al-Shabaab, it is not the sole component. Security sector reforms are essential, but it requires significant political capital. By seeking to replace one country's troops with another, it is becoming apparent that politics, and not security, is getting more prominence within the Somali federal government's agenda.

Mauritius' ultimatum to United Kingdom over Chagos deal

The [agreement](#) between the United Kingdom (U.K.) and Mauritius signed on October 3, 2024, via which sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago, including Diego Garcia will be transferred to Mauritius was indeed historic. It was due to the persistent efforts from Mauritius which resulted in a landmark [2019 International Court of Justice opinion](#) which found that Britain's retention of the Chagos archipelago was illegal under international law. Between 2022 and 2024, numerous rounds of negotiations took place, but the Conservative governments of Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak were unable to break the deadlock. The responsibility then fell on Keir Starmer's new Labor government in the U.K. As the October 3, 2024, deal notes, "[the United Kingdom will agree that Mauritius is the sovereign over the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia.](#)" Now, both the U.K. and Mauritius are expected to commence the treaty negotiations.

This is where some uncertainties about the agreement have emerged. Firstly, the agreement lacks any specific timeframe for the transfer of sovereignty to Mauritius. Because the deal is subject to the finalisation of the treaty, the negotiation process is unfortunately getting protracted. Secondly, no details on the finances are given concerning the payments Mauritius expects in return for leasing Diego Garcia to the British, and by extension to the Americans. Although the joint statement mentions that Britain will provide

Mauritius a "[package of financial support](#)", the dollar figure and whether the Americans will contribute, is unclear. Third, Mauritius is also a signatory to the [African Nuclear-Weapons-Free-Zone Treaty](#) (Pelindaba Treaty) which prohibits the development, stockpiling and possession of explosive nuclear devices. Finally, the questions surrounding the return of Chagossians which has historically been opposed by the Americans and the British need to be resolved.

Since the signing of the agreement, Mauritius now has a new Prime Minister – Navin Ramgoolam who scored a decisive victory in the Mauritius' November 2024 parliamentary elections. His administration now wants to [renegotiate](#) some of the terms of the agreement. Some sources are reporting that Mauritius is demanding around [\\$1 billion or more per year in reparations](#) and presently, the talks remain [stalled](#) over the amount of money involved. Keir Starmer's Labor government is facing mounting calls back home in the U.K. to abandon what critics have described as the "surrender" of the strategically significant archipelago. Only time will tell if both parties are successful in negotiating the financial terms of the deal which has been previously described as "seminal".

Thousands displaced as post-election protests and violence grip Mozambique

Developments in Mozambique following the General Elections held on October 9, 2024, have raised serious concerns as thousands of people have been displaced and are fleeing to neighboring countries,

especially to Malawi and Eswatini. Daniel Chapo, the leader of Mozambique's ruling party – FRELIMO – won the Presidential election in a landslide victory by securing 71 percent of the vote share. He defeated his nearest rival Venancio Mondlane who managed to secure 20 percent of the vote share. With Chapo's win, FRELIMO has now extended its 49-year grip on power in the resource-rich southern African nation along the Indian Ocean coast. International observers raised serious concerns about the credibility of the electoral process which was marred by political violence, widespread irregularities and restrictions on freedom of expression. Mozambique has been in turmoil for quite a while.

Since October 2017, the humanitarian situation in northern Mozambique, particularly in the Cabo Delgado province, has been alarmingly deteriorating, triggered by armed Islamist insurgency led by the group Ahlu Sunnah-wa-Jama'a (ASJW), locally known as 'Al Shabbab'. The capture of the port city Mocimboa da Praia and the 2021 attacks in Palma, which is the center of [TotalEnergies' planned US\\$ 20 billion liquified natural gas \(LNG\) project](#) on the Afungi peninsula, has raised serious concerns. Initially, Rwandan troops were deployed to secure the peninsula followed by troops from the South African Development Community (SADC). However, the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), faced challenges like outdated military equipment, funding constraints and lack of coordination with the Rwandan forces. This eventually led to the decision to withdraw the mission in July 2024.

Since then, Daniel Chapo's administration has had to work hard to assure the country's LNG investors and partners about the safety of the project. Although the project is set for resumption according to some reports, the present displacement, protest, and unrest have raised another set of challenge. The country is still recovering from the devastating effects of Cyclone Chidi which hit Mozambique couple of weeks back. The chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat have [expressed deep concern](#) at the ongoing post-electoral violence and has urged security services to exercise restraint in the use of force. Neighboring countries like South Africa have also temporarily closed its busy border crossing with Mozambique due to the ongoing violence. Due to the gravity of the situation, opposition leader Mondlane is also considering to [temporarily halt the protests](#) in order to allow the entry of international organisations to investigate alleged human rights abuses by the Mozambican police.

The Impending Fragmentation of ECOWAS: A Turning Point for West Africa?

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is at a pivotal crossroads, grappling with the impending exit of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. This unprecedented development poses a grave challenge to the bloc's vision of regional integration, economic cooperation, and collective security. The three Sahel nations, citing dissatisfaction with ECOWAS's handling of governance and security issues, have opted to form the Alliance of Sahel

States (AES). While [ECOWAS](#) has offered a six-month grace period for reconciliation, the stakes remain high for the bloc's cohesion and future relevance.

The withdrawal of these countries, slated for January 29, 2025, marks a significant shift in regional dynamics. As founding members of ECOWAS, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have been integral to the bloc's identity since its establishment in 1975. Their departure reduces the bloc's membership from 15 to 12, stripping it of 76 million people and over half of its geographical land area. The move also threatens to disrupt one of ECOWAS's hallmark achievements the free movement of people, goods, and services across member states. The newly formed AES has sought to mitigate these impacts by announcing visa-free travel and residency rights for ECOWAS citizens, emphasising a spirit of friendship despite the split.

Tensions between the bloc and the departing nations stem from ECOWAS's strong opposition to military coups that have disrupted civilian governance in these countries. The coups—in Mali (2020), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) prompted ECOWAS to suspend their memberships and impose sanctions, demanding swift transitions back to constitutional democracy. However, the military regimes have remained defiant, accusing ECOWAS of aligning too closely with Western powers, particularly France, and failing to address deep-rooted socio-economic challenges. This perception has fuelled their pivot toward alternative

alliances, including closer ties with Russia and China.

The [economic](#) ramifications of this split are profound. ECOWAS's integrated framework has fostered regional trade and connectivity, which millions of citizens depend on for livelihoods and mobility. The withdrawal of the three Sahel nations jeopardizes ongoing infrastructure projects like the [West African Gas Pipeline](#) and the [Lagos-Abidjan Corridor](#), which rely on regional cooperation. Additionally, the countries owe substantial funds to ECOWAS financial institutions, raising concerns about the bloc's financial sustainability and its ability to maintain development initiatives.

Security concerns compound the crisis, as the Sahel is a hotspot for insurgencies and jihadist violence. The departure of these nations undermines coordinated efforts to counter these threats, weakening ECOWAS's collective security architecture. The AES aims to address security challenges independently, but the lack of a unified regional strategy risks leaving critical gaps in counterterrorism and border management.

Efforts to mediate the crisis continue, with Senegalese President Macky Sall and Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé leading negotiations. ECOWAS has emphasised its willingness to readmit the three nations should they reconsider their decision within the six-month transitional period. However, the military juntas have thus far declared their exit irreversible, viewing the AES as a platform better

aligned with their aspirations for sovereignty and regional self-reliance.

The geopolitical implications of this fracture extend beyond West Africa. The Sahel nations' alignment with Russia underscores a shifting balance of power in the region, as traditional partnerships with Western powers give way to new alliances. This realignment reflects broader trends of disillusionment with Western interventions and a growing appetite for diversified international relations. ECOWAS must navigate this evolving landscape carefully, balancing its principles of democracy and integration with the realities of changing member state priorities.

As ECOWAS approaches its [50th anniversary](#), the current crisis underscores the fragility of regional integration in the face of political, security, and economic pressures. To emerge stronger, the bloc must undertake meaningful reforms that address the root causes of discontent, including governance deficits, youth disenfranchisement, and inadequate responses to security challenges. A renewed commitment to inclusivity, adaptability, and dialogue is essential for ECOWAS to reclaim its role as a cornerstone of West African unity and progress. The coming months will be decisive. If ECOWAS can reconcile divergent interests and reaffirm its commitment to regional cooperation, it may yet turn this crisis into an opportunity for reinvention. Failure to do so, however, risks not only the bloc's fragmentation but also the erosion of its legitimacy as a driver of African integration and stability.

MONUSCO's Renewed Mandate: Navigating Challenges in the DRC's Quest for Peace

On 20 December 2024, The United Nations Security Council [Resolution](#) 2765 (2024) has extended the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) until December 2025. This extension underscores the international community's recognition of MONUSCO's critical role in mitigating conflict and addressing the worsening humanitarian crisis in the DRC's mineral-rich eastern regions. With nearly 11,000 troops and 1,750 civilian personnel deployed, MONUSCO remains a cornerstone of security operations in areas plagued by armed groups fighting for control over territory and resources. However, its continued presence has sparked controversy and public dissatisfaction, with many accusing the mission of failing to protect civilians and neutralize armed groups like the M23 rebels.

MONUSCO's legitimacy has come under scrutiny as protests against its perceived ineffectiveness have grown in the eastern provinces. While the Congolese government initially called for the mission's withdrawal, it later advocated a phased approach to avoid jeopardizing fragile security gains. This shift reflects the complexities of balancing operational mandates with public expectations in conflict zones. President Félix Tshisekedi and local communities have been vocal in their criticism of MONUSCO, highlighting broader challenges faced by UN

peacekeeping missions globally in gaining the trust of host governments and populations.

Regional actors have also stepped-up efforts to address the DRC's instability. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) [extended](#) its peacekeeping mission, SAMIDRC, by another year to support the DRC government's quest for peace. Despite such commitments, diplomatic initiatives like the Luanda Process, mediated by Angola's President João Lourenço, have faltered. The [collapse](#) of peace talks in December 2024 revealed entrenched mistrust between the DRC and Rwanda, with both nations blaming each other for the failure. Allegations of Rwandan support for the M23 rebels and Congolese collaboration with the FDLR have further strained relations, complicating efforts to reach a sustainable resolution. Meanwhile, the [Nairobi Process](#), led by Uganda, also collapsed due to resistance from both the M23 and the DRC government.

The conflict in the DRC is not only a domestic crisis but also a stage for geopolitical rivalries. External interventions and the involvement of private security firms, regional coalitions, and international actors in the resource-rich eastern provinces have added layers of complexity. These dynamics undermine MONUSCO's credibility and effectiveness, mirroring challenges seen in other conflict zones like Mali. The DRC's vast mineral wealth exacerbates the situation, attracting both armed groups and external actors, further destabilizing the region.

The challenges faced by MONUSCO highlight the urgent need for rethinking UN peacekeeping strategies. The "[Pact for the Future](#)," adopted by UN member states in 2023, emphasizes the importance of adapting missions to regional contexts and engaging local stakeholders to rebuild trust. For MONUSCO, this requires concentrating efforts on the most volatile areas, enhancing collaboration with regional actors like SADC, and addressing underlying drivers of conflict, such as governance deficits and economic inequalities. Rebuilding trust with host governments and local populations is essential to ensure the mission's relevance and effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate.

The extension of MONUSCO's mandate reflects the international community's recognition of its critical role, but it also underscores the immense challenges ahead. Stabilizing the DRC requires a multifaceted approach that integrates military, diplomatic, and developmental strategies. Strengthening regional cooperation through mechanisms like SADC and the Nairobi Process is crucial to complement MONUSCO's efforts. The lessons from MONUSCO's experience in the DRC serve as a blueprint for improving peacekeeping efforts worldwide. By fostering trust, addressing root causes of conflict, and enhancing regional collaboration, the international community can support the DRC in its quest for lasting peace and stability. This approach not only benefits the DRC but also underscores the need for innovative solutions in global peacekeeping efforts.