

## Analyst Says Planned Africa Union Troop Surge in Somalia Would be Strategic Blunder

**J. Peter Pham says 8,000 troops to be deployed in Somalia are enough to protect borders, but not to defeat insurgency**

Yeheyes Wuhib | Washington D.C. 29 July 2010



Photo: AP

African leaders gather to pose for a group photograph near lake Victoria in the background at the venue for the opening of the African Union Summit in Kampala, Uganda, 25 Jul 2010. Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni is calling on Africa to band together to fight terrorism on the continent, just weeks after twin bomb attacks killed 76 people in Kampala.

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Somalia's government has hailed the recent decision by the African Union to beef up its force in Mogadishu in an effort to boost security in Somalia and the entire region. The African Union has agreed to add about 4,000 peacekeepers to Somalia -- for a total of about 8,000.

"The decision is a lifeline for the transitional government and is good not only for security in Somalia but for security in neighboring countries," says Abdulkadir Mohamoud Walayo, spokesperson for the Transitional Federal Government.

The AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has so far prevented al-Qaeda-inspired Shabaab insurgents from taking power.

Supporters say if peacekeepers can push al Shabaab out of the capital, it will give the government time to provide social services to the population and widen its support.

Recently, the US assistant secretary of state for African affairs, Johnnie Carson, called for strengthening the transitional government in Mogadishu and the ANISOM mission, especially after al Shabaab claimed responsibility for a bomb attack in Kampala, Uganda, a few weeks ago.

"This constitutes a threat," said Carson, "and I think the regional states are genuinely concerned about the capacity of Shabaab to do this, its ability to move in the region to do it, and its willingness."

## **Government's ability questioned**

But others say the government should be allowed to fall. They say eventually the business community will rise up against al Shabaab and other insurgents.

J. Peter Pham, senior vice president of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, says he doubts it will help the peace process in Somalia.

He says the AMSCOM mission is ill-conceived.



J Peter Pham senior VP of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy

The African Union, despite its best intentions and justifiable outrage over the terrorist attacks in Kampala, does not have the capacity to either send a sufficient number of troops to actually do something effective or to equip them,” says Pham.

### **Strategic blunder of the first order**

He explains his doubts by noting that in the 1990s, the UN failed to defeat warlords who were considered weaker than al-Shabaab is

today. International forces included 37,000 UNITAF (United Task Force) and then UNISOM (United Nations Operation in Somalia) troops that Pham says were well trained and equipped.

“So the idea that 8,000 or 10,000 ill-equipped African troops [today] are going to be able to defeat the insurgency is utterly delusional.”

The troop surge will cause more problems in Somalia, says Pham. “It will allow Shabaab to wrap itself up in the mantel of nationalism and garner public support among the Somalis for their cause that they will otherwise not be able to have.”

For Pham, “It’s a strategic blunder of the first order.”

### **Somalis themselves are key to peace**

“I would argue the Somalis themselves, left to their own devices, with sufficient forces to keep those who are a threat to regional security contained, will ultimately solve their own problems,” says Pham.



Al Shabab fighters under the mantel of nationalist garner public support among the Somalis for their cause

The international community has tried many times since 1991 to establish a national government in Somalia, he says.

“When we think of 14 failures in a row with this 15th government tottering, we should learn that the international community is incapable of imposing a government in Somalia [that the Somalis] themselves do not accept as legitimate,” says Pham.

Its leaders are accused of misusing the resources given to them by the international community, he adds, and they have failed to expand its narrow base both geographically and in terms of popularity.

Pham says, “It is time to let the cards fall where they fall. They are unable to gather up support for all this time themselves. It’s quite evident that they lack the legitimacy and inclusiveness that is necessary.”

### **A ray of hope**

Somalis are capable of governance either through the business community or through the clans, Pham says.

AP “Ironically while the TFG [Transitional Federal Government] is fighting for its life this week, in the northern Somaliland you have ethnic Somalis who over the course of the last decade and a half built a stable regime not recognized by the international community, but nonetheless stable and capable of having democratic elections where the incumbent loses gracefully. It’s only the fourth time in African history where this has happened, losing and conceding to a challenger. This is an example not only for the sub-region but for the whole African continent,” says Pham.

### **Al Shabaab’s effect on region**

Troops from Uganda and Burundi make up most of the AU forces in Somalia. Pham says because of that, Al Shabaab could go after Burundian as well as Ugandan interests. In Kenya, Al Shabaab could also be a destabilizing factor in the up-coming Kenyan referendum on a new constitution.

He suggests that the available security resources be used to contain disorder in Somalia by protecting Kenya’s borders and those of Somalia’s other neighbors.

Pham says, “The 8,000 troops ready to be deployed are sufficient for border security, they are not sufficient to defeat an insurgency in Somalia

Photo AP

Somaliland's incoming President Ahmed Mohamed 'Silyano' Mohamoud, center, and Vice President Abdirahman Abdallahi Ismai, right, wave after President Mohamoud was sworn in as Somaliland's fourth president, during a brief inauguration ceremony, 27 Jul 2010