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POLICY BRIEF 05

AUSSOM's Funding Cliff: What Should Replace the Money the US Is Withdrawing?

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Executive Summary

On 1 July 2026, the United States told the African Union it would end all funding and logistical support for the UN Support Office in Somalia after 31 December 2026, and would not support renewing AUSSOM's mandate at the Security Council in December if it includes UN logistical support. That decision strips away the backbone of a roughly $500 million annual logistics apparatus sustaining a 12,000-strong force, with no replacement funding currently pledged for 2026 or beyond. Heads of state from Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Ethiopia, Egypt, Djibouti and Somalia met in Entebbe on 31 July and agreed the African Union should begin planning an orderly, coordinated and phased exit, but that agreement currently has no published benchmarks tying the drawdown to Somali security force readiness. Troop-contributing countries have already gone unpaid for up to fifteen months, and Ethiopia has already unilaterally withdrawn troops from militant-encircled Burhakaba, a sign that funding uncertainty is producing uncoordinated retreat before any formal phased plan takes effect. This brief examines the available financing options and recommends anchoring the agreed phased withdrawal to published readiness benchmarks and a guaranteed troop-stipend mechanism, rather than a calendar-only exit.

The Issue

AUSSOM's mandate runs to 31 December 2026, the same date the United States has set for ending its financial and logistical support to the mission's UN backbone. The mission has no funding pledged beyond that date. This is not a hypothetical future funding gap; it is a specific, dated cliff that African Union member states, troop-contributing countries and the Somali federal government must resolve within months, against a security backdrop in which Al-Shabaab is positioned to exploit exactly this kind of transition. The question is no longer whether AUSSOM's financing model changes, but whether the change is managed in a way that keeps pace with Somalia's actual security capacity, or outpaces it.

Background

The scale of the funding gap is substantial. The European Union has contributed approximately €2.8 billion to the mission and its predecessors over time, while the United States has provided roughly $1.6 billion in bilateral support to troop-contributing countries plus an additional $2 billion channelled through the UN

Support Office in Somalia. UN Security Council Resolution 2719 already provides a mechanism for Security Council-authorised African Union peace operations to draw up to 75 percent of their budget from UN assessed contributions, with the AU covering the remaining 25 percent, but successive US administrations, under sustained pressure from Congress, have resisted applying that mechanism specifically to AUSSOM; a Security Council vote to approve funding on this basis failed in May 2025 over US refusal to support it. In the absence of that mechanism, the EU has stepped in only partially: it approved €75 million for the mission on 21 April 2026 through the European Peace Facility, earmarked for troop allowances and non-lethal equipment, with indications it may eventually cover up to 85 percent of troop stipends specifically, a meaningful but partial substitute for the roughly $500 million annual total the mission requires. Troop-contributing countries, meanwhile, have borne the financial strain directly: forces went as long as fifteen months without allowances in late 2025, a liability the mission inherited in part from its predecessor, ATMIS, including outstanding reimbursements for contingent-owned equipment. On 31 July 2026, heads of state from Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Ethiopia, Egypt, Djibouti and Somalia convened in Entebbe and agreed the African Union should begin planning an orderly, coordinated and phased AUSSOM exit. Days before that summit, Ethiopia had already withdrawn its troops from Burhakaba after the town became encircled by militants, a unilateral move that predates and sits uneasily alongside the summit's language of coordination.

Analysis

Three distinct tensions define the current transition. The first is political: Resolution 2719 already provides the rules-based financing mechanism the AU has sought, but its application to AUSSOM specifically remains blocked by US congressional opposition that shows no sign of near-term reversal, meaning a strategy premised on waiting for this mechanism to unlock is not viable on the current timeline. The second is financial: the EU's €75 million pledge and potential 85 percent stipend coverage is a genuine bridge, not a substitute, for a funding gap an order of magnitude larger, and reliance on it without additional diversified sources leaves the mission structurally underfunded relative to its mandate regardless of troop numbers. The third is operational, and the most consequential for near-term stability: the Entebbe summit's agreement to an orderly, coordinated, phased exit is a political commitment without an operational architecture, no published benchmarks yet link any phase of troop drawdown to independently verified Somali National Army or police readiness, and Ethiopia's pre-summit withdrawal from Burhakaba demonstrates that unpaid, exposed troop-contributing countries will act unilaterally when funding uncertainty and battlefield risk combine, regardless of what coordination language the summit adopts. A phased exit that is phased only on a calendar, not against readiness, risks repeating a pattern regional security transitions have shown before: drawdown outpacing the security forces meant to fill the resulting gap.

Policy Options

- Continue pressing for UN Resolution 2719 to be applied specifically to AUSSOM through renewed Security Council diplomacy. The durable, rules-based solution the mechanism was designed for, but currently blocked by US congressional opposition with no clear near-term path to reversal.

- Treat EU bridging finance, the €75 million European Peace Facility pledge and potential 85 percent stipend coverage, as the primary near-term financing mechanism. Provides real, immediate relief, but covers only a fraction of the roughly $500 million annual gap and leaves the mission structurally underfunded if treated as sufficient on its own.
- Pursue AU self-financing through an expanded AU Peace Fund and new bilateral pledges from Gulf states already active in the region. Diversifies dependency away from any single funder, but the AU Peace Fund has historically fallen well short of its own funding targets, making this an uncertain primary strategy.
- Accept the Entebbe-agreed phased withdrawal and front-load Somali National Army and police handover with published, independently verified readiness benchmarks tied to each drawdown phase. The option most consistent with the current political trajectory, but requires benchmark discipline that previous AU-to-national security transitions in the region have often lacked.

Recommendations

- Tie every phase of the Entebbe-agreed drawdown to published, independently verified Somali security force readiness benchmarks, not calendar dates alone, so that troop reductions track actual capacity rather than a fixed timetable.
- Establish a guaranteed troop-stipend mechanism, potentially an escrow-style fund backed jointly by EU and Gulf-state pledges, specifically to prevent the kind of fifteen-month non-payment that preceded Ethiopia's unilateral Burhakaba withdrawal, since unpaid troops threaten an orderly transition faster than the headline funding gap itself.
- Pursue Resolution 2719 application to AUSSOM as a medium-term diplomatic goal through coordinated European and African pressure on Washington, while explicitly not making the near-term transition plan contingent on its success.
- Diversify funding sources now, Gulf-state bilateral pledges and expanded AU Peace Fund contributions in parallel, rather than treating the EU's partial pledge as a sufficient bridge on its own.
- Establish a joint AU-Somalia-troop-contributing-country monitoring mechanism that publicly tracks both funding gaps and readiness benchmarks, reducing the chance that further unilateral withdrawals happen, as Ethiopia's did, outside any coordinated framework.

Conclusion

AUSSOM's funding cliff is no longer a projection; it is a dated commitment from the mission's largest historical funder to withdraw support by 31 December 2026, with no replacement financing yet in place. The African Union and its partners have already agreed, in principle, that a phased exit is coming. What remains undecided is whether that exit is paced against Somalia's actual security capacity or against a funding timetable Washington set unilaterally. Ethiopia's early withdrawal from Burhakaba is a warning of what happens when troop-contributing countries are left to manage that gap on their own.

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