

## Book Review

# **BLACK HAWKS RISING: THE STORY OF AMISOM'S SUCCESSFUL WAR AGAINST SOMALI INSURGENTS, 2007-2014.**

**Opiyo Oloya**

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*Prof. Hussein Solomon*  
*Department of Political Studies and Governance*  
*University of the Free State*

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The hawk occupies pride of place in many African cultures. It symbolizes the welfare and protection of people. Amongst the Zulu, the hawk symbolizes courage, honesty and to fight for the right cause. Amongst ancient Egyptians, meanwhile, the hawk is believed to unite the people and protect the kingdom. *Black Hawks Rising* tells the riveting tale of the origins, deployment and evolution of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The peerless scholarship is clearly evident in this erudite volume as the author painstakingly assembles primary materials, secondary sources and hundreds of interviews conducted over seven years to war-ravaged Somalia. The result is a book which reads like a crime thriller and tells the amazing stories of the selfless men and women who make up AMISOM.

Whilst the book focuses on the period of the AMISOM deployment between 2007 and 2014, the author does historically contextualize his subject matter by beginning his story in the 1960s moving effortlessly to the fall of the Somali

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strongman Mohammed Siyaad Barre in 1992. The ensuing power vacuum saw the rise of various warlords, clan militias and the Islamic Courts Union which, following the Ethiopian invasion, morphed into the Al Qaeda-aligned *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen* or commonly referred to as Al Shabaab (The Youth). The author's incisive analysis regarding the future of Al Shabaab is best demonstrated in him quoting the words of Somali Professor Ibrahim Mohammad Abyan, who stated: "*All of us are nomads or descendants of nomads. A nomad does not know if tomorrow the water well will dry up or his goats will be eaten by hyenas. This gives us an intrinsically pragmatic approach to life*" (p.28). In other words, the dogmatic fundamentalism of Al Shabaab is at odds with the pragmatism demanded of Somali daily life.

The decision to deploy a regional force into the Somalian imbroglio was something first mooted by Dr. Bashir Hamad Attalla, the Executive Secretary of the regional body the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) whose members included Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda and Kenya. From the very beginning it was clear that major powers, notably the United States, was initially opposed to such a deployment. Chapter 3 provides epic testimony to the determination of Dr. Attalla to get such a force deployed and equipped as he rightly feared that instability in Somalia will soon spread into other IGAD member states.

The author believes that one of the key ingredients of the success of the AMISOM mission lay in the leadership of senior officers of troop contributing countries. Lieutenant-General Katumba Wamala, the Commanding General of Uganda's Land Forces was one such officer. He visited rank and file soldiers every fortnight listening to their concerns, finding solutions to problems they brought to his attention and in the process boosted morale. Whilst trumpeting the success of AMISOM, Oloya is also aware of its shortcomings. From the beginning, mission clarity did not exist. AMISOM was not clear whether it was a peacekeeping or a peace enforcement mission. It took three years for clarity to evolve. Once clarity emerged and officers were clear as to their mission, the offensive against Al Shabaab could begin in 2010. It also took some time for AMISOM to reach troop

fighting strength as some countries refused to participate in the mission whilst others provided only token assistance. The author rightly believes that the African Union (AU) should look at a mechanism to assess troop contributions from member states.

Likewise, what initially hampered the mission was the fact that not all soldiers deployed were professionally trained, disciplined or experienced enough to take on Al Shabaab militants. African countries have much to do to ensure that their armed forces are of sufficient standard to partake in UN and AU missions. Another major problem hampering AMISOM was the issue of command and control. Kenyan forces, whilst part of AMISOM, functioned autonomously from Mogadishu in Lower Juba whilst Djibouti's armed forces took its orders directly from Djibouti. The author makes clear that this is a recipe for disaster and correctly articulates that command and control of the Force Commander must not be diluted and that contingent commanders must implement the orders of the Force Commander. Such contingent commanders must have autonomous control over their troops while executing the mission ordered by the Force Commander, but not the freedom to choose whether they will or will not participate in a mission.

Despite these problems, AMISOM has been an African success story as Al Shabaab militants have been pushed back from the outskirts of Mogadishu to the deep rural areas of Somalia. This is a book which deserves to be read by every African officer and should be part of the curriculum in every Military Academy.