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Somali troops 'retake' key port city of Merca from al-Shabab

6 February 2016 | Africa



The African Union said it made a tactical withdrawal from Merca on Friday

The Somali military, backed by the African Union (AU), has retaken Merca

from al-Shabab militants who seized the port city on Friday, residents say.

Battle to rebuild Somalia

Civilian casualties were reported after what residents said was light resistance from the militants.

Al-Shabab wants IS to back off in East Africa

The AU on Friday denied it had lost control of Merca, saying it had made a tactical withdrawal.

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A Somali military official told AFP news agency: "The Somali forces and Amisom [AU] peacekeepers secured control of Merca again and now the situation has returned to normal.

"There was brief exchange of gunfire, but the militants have fled."

He said "several" al-Shabab fighters and one Somali soldier had been killed in the fighting. A resident told AFP that four civilians had died in his part of the city.



AMISOM

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Our troops will from time to time re-adjust their positions for tactical purposes to guarantee defeat of terrorists. #Somalia

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8:22 AM - 5 Feb 2016

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Residents on Friday said Amisom and government personnel left the city at midday, and soon after heavily-armed al-Shabab militants marched in, raising their flag over the police station and administrative headquarters.

Amisom later tweeted that it was still in control of Merka and suggested its troops were "re-adjusting their positions for tactical reasons".

Some Somalis have taken to social media to demand an explanation as to why Amisom abandoned the city and to ridicule Friday's tweet, using the hashtag #SomeoneTellAmisom.

Merka, also spelt Marka, is located around 100km south-west of Mogadishu and is both the state capital of Lower Shabelle and the third largest port in southern Somalia.

The fighting in Merka comes three weeks after al-Shabab overran an AU military base outside the southern Somali town of el-Ade, saying they had killed about 100 Kenyan soldiers.

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