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Insights on Peace & Security Council

PSC Briefing on the RCI-LRA

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Tomorrow (18 September), the PSC will have a meeting on the status of implementation of the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA) and the future of the mandate of the regional operation. The session will receive a briefing from the Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui. The meeting will also listen to member countries of the RCI-LRA, South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Uganda.

Commissioner Chergui's briefing is expected to focus on the state of peace and security in the LRA affected areas, the state of the LRA and the future of the counter-LRA operations. UN figures show that at the peak of its activities around 2013, the LRA caused more than 100,000 deaths, abducted 60,000 and displaced more than 2.5 million people in the DRC, CAR and South Sudan. According to the LRA Crisis Tracker, an NGO that follows the LRA activities, there were more than 40 registered LRA attacks in CAR since Uganda left the regional military operation in April 2017. The attacks killed nine people and kidnapped more than a hundred civilians. In September 2018, the LRA militants killed two police officers, abducted 30 people and looted food, medical supplies Bas-Uele province. These sporadic and isolated attacks and raids are indeed insignificant compared to the crisis the group caused few years back. However, the LRA still causes havoc.

The RCI-LRA, which was authorized by the PSC on 22 November 2011 has three components. Chaired by the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, the Joint Coordination Mechanism (JCM) is the political management body of the RCI-LRA that leads the strategic coordination and communication between the AU, the LRA affected countries and the international partners. Ministers of Defense of the LRA affected countries are also members of the coordination mechanism that works closely with the AU Chairperson's Special Envoy for LRA issues. With an authorized force of 5,000 troops from the LRA affected countries, the Regional Task Force (RTF) is the military wing of the regional cooperation. The force has been behind series of operations to eliminate the LRA, limit its movement and capture its leadership. Though the LRA is still roaming the remote forests of the region, the military operations have significantly degraded its fighting capacity and its size. Based at Yambio, the headquarters of the RTF, the third component of the regional cooperation, coordinates the logistics of the operation.

On 16 May 2018, the PSC renewed the mandate of the AU RCI-LRA for three months, until 22 August 2018. Although this session was on the agenda of the August program of work of the PSC, that meeting was postponed. The Council is meeting almost a month after the expiry of the mandate. The last decision for the extension of the mandate of the operation of the regional force was taken in expectation of the outcomes of a ministerial meeting of the Joint Coordination Mechanism of the RCI-LRA. With no change in the operational and financial situation of the mission, the JCM meeting did not take place. Tomorrow's meeting is expected to decide on whether the current

conditions warrant continuing with further extension of the mandate of RCI-LRA. As things stand now and with no prospect of support for the operation, the expectation and the assessment in the AU is that there is no point in continuing with the extension of the mandate.

The biggest international partner and major source of logistical support, the US significantly reduced its role in the fight against the LRA in March 2017 saying the LRA had been 'reduced to irrelevance.' The assessment was also shared by the biggest troop contributor to the operations of the Regional Task Force (RTF), Uganda, as it pulled its operations and withdrew its troops the next month noting the LRA no longer posed any significant threat to Uganda's security. The two decisions significantly reduced the capacity of the force and raised concerns at the PSC which in May 2017 states that the 'LRA has not yet been eliminated and still maintains the potential to rejuvenate itself'. The regional initiative has been suffering from financial and operational challenges. Indeed, the decision to suspend the military operation was the result of financial and logistical constraints.

Tomorrow's meeting is expected give recognition to the fact that the RCI-LRA and affirm *de jure* the end of the mission in its current form. The decision could close-down the military operations by the regional force, and leave the rest of the task to fight and eliminate the LRA to the security forces of the LRA affected areas within their national borders. The session will discuss and pass decision on how remaining responsibilities would be handled in moving forward and look at what kind of approach and arrangement of cooperation can

be made between the LRA affected countries in their respective campaigns against the LRA.

The exit strategy would also require the stabilization of LRA cleared areas, and ways to avoid resurgence of the LRA. Accordingly, the session expected to discuss the stabilization and rehabilitation of the LRA affected areas within the framework of the AU Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD). The role of the AU in the post military operation phase of the regional cooperation can also be devolved to its liaison offices in the affected countries, including in continuing the monitoring the movement of LRA, and support stabilization efforts. As part of the exist strategy, the PSC could also discuss the possibility of convening a pledging conference for supporting the post-RCI-LRA stabilization plan.

The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué.



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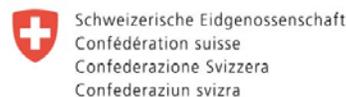
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