

# Briefing on status of implementation of the Common African Defence and Security Policy and the operationalization of the African Standby Force (ASF)

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Tomorrow (22 June), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1159<sup>th</sup> session at a ministerial level to receive briefing on the status of implementation of the Common African Defence and Security Policy and other relevant instruments on defence and security on the continent with Special focus on: Update on the Operationalisation of the Africa Standby Force (ASF).

Frederick Shava, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Zimbabwe and chair of the PSC for the month of June, is expected to preside over the session. Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) is expected to brief PSC members on the progress made and pending issues in the full operationalization of the ASF, while the various Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) are expected to provide update on their respective efforts to attain full operational capability of their Regional Standby Brigades.

The last time PSC met to follow up on the operationalization

of the ASF was during its 1069<sup>th</sup> session held on 10 March 2022. In that session, which adopted a Summary Record as its outcome, the PSC discussed capacity gaps that continue to constrain the deployment and employment of the ASF. During its 1124<sup>th</sup> session, convened on 1 December 2022, PSC also considered the outcome of the inaugural lessons learned forum on AU Peace Support Operations (PSOs) and the ASF, which was held in November of last year in Abuja, Nigeria. The 1124<sup>th</sup> session tasked the Military Staff Committee of the PSC to review and submit for its adoption. The [conclusions](#) of the inaugural forum was accordingly submitted to and adopted at PSC's 1129<sup>th</sup> session. Apart from adopting the conclusions, a key decision taken in that meeting was the direction given by the PSC for the AU Commission to 'utilize the ASF framework in the mandating, implementation, management, and oversight of all AU PSOs'.

This decision is against the context that the RECs/RMs are deploying regional forces outside of, and even without making references to, the ASF framework except for SADC, which has so far made three deployments (in Lesotho (SAPMIL), Mozambique (SAMIM), and most recently in Eastern DRC) purportedly within the ASF framework. This obviously raises the question of coordination and harmonization of decision-making and mandating process between the AU and RECs/RMs. Beyond coordination, even SADC's claim of these deployments as ASF deployments could not be considered as ASF deployments to the extent that their deployments were made without the authorization of the PSC. When they were referred to the PSC, it was post-facto. The ASF, as the peacekeeping and intervention outfit of the AU, is established under the PSC Protocol and is envisaged under the Protocol to be deployed in pursuit of a decision of the PSC for the promotion of peace and security. The purported use of ASF outside this framework envisaged in the PSC framework or the resort to ad hoc coalitions constitute an aberration that endangers the

fragmentation and erosion of AU's peace and security order. Such fragmentation creates vacuum that encourages the use of all manners of external security arrangements on the continent that are not necessarily for a multilateral-based peace and security interest of the continent as envisaged in the PSC Protocol.

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*Infographic 1: PSC sessions on the ASF and key outcomes*

Moreover, as highlighted during the inaugural lessons learned forum, there is also a need for 'reconceptualization and alignment of the ASF with the current PSO practices and realities' on account of two main grounds. The first is that the ASF was envisaged to be a continental force coordinated and utilized by the AU. Yet, contrary to the PSC Protocol's conception of the ASF, the prevalent practice is that it has been regionally facilitated and the forces raised by the regions are claimed to be 'owned' by the RECs/RMs. The second is the current security dynamics of the continent taking trans-regional character going beyond one REC/RM and requiring speedy and robust deployment necessitates the ASF is both well resourced and equipped and equally flexibility in the deployment of ASF capabilities without the need for such deployment being tied to a particular region but within the multilateral and continental framework of the AU.

One of the milestones achieved since 1069<sup>th</sup> session is the adoption of the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

between the AU and RECs/RMs on the ASF during the Ministerial meeting of the 15<sup>th</sup> Specialized Technical Committee of Defence, Safety and Security (STCDSS) that took place on 12 May in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The MoU clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the AU and RECs/RMs in the preparation, employment, deployment, and post-employment of the ASF. Considering that the issue of the operationalization of the ASF as envisaged in the PSC Protocol is in significant part a political issues, it would be of interest for members of the PSC to explore whether the attempt made in the MoU to clarify the modalities of use of the ASF and respective roles of RECs/RMs would be enough to effect the much discussed full operationalization of the ASF in practice.

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An important aspect of tomorrow's briefing will be the reception of update from the RECs/RMs on capability generation. AU has been complaining over the 'hesitancy and reluctance' by the RECs/RMs to confirm capabilities pledged and how they are to be made available as this would be critical to assess readiness for rapid deployment. At its 1069<sup>th</sup> session, the Commission informed the PSC that it was only the Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF) Secretariat that had provided a verification report pursuant to the request of the AU Commission in July 2021 for RECs/RMs to verify their pledged capabilities using the 2019 ASF Pledged Capabilities Verification Guidelines. PSC members are likely to be interested to hear which of the regional brigades other than the EASF were able to submit the verification report and what specific challenges are hindering the rest from submitting the

reports. Of interest to the PSC in this regard is the recent request during the 15<sup>th</sup> STCDSS meeting to declare that the North Africa Regional Capability (NARC) is operationally ready for deployment as part of the ASF. Based on this request, the Commission is expected to undertake a verification for the declaration of NARC's readiness for deployment.

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### *Infographic 2: Declarations on the ASF's full operationalization*

PSC may also receive update on the status of the utilization of the AU Continental Logistics Base (CLB) in Doula, Cameroon. The CLB has been put to use for storing and managing equipment for PSOs including some donated to SAMIM and to the Multinational Joint Task Force against the Boko Haram (MNJTF). Despite its important utility, the CLB faces challenges, including shortage of funding for the recruitment of substantive staff because of which the CLB has been functioning through officers seconded by AU Member States. On a positive note, the 36<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly, held in February of this year, approved structures with an estimated cost of USD\$ **4,717,606.45** for 2024. The recruitment for the approved structured is however conditioned on the availability of fund. In addition to the funding, lack of capacity in the continent to airlift equipment donated from the CLB in Doula to their intended place of use has been the other challenge. This was apparent from AU and SADC's struggle to airlift the donated equipment to Mozambique for the use of SAMIM.

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. PSC is expected to welcome the Ministerial meeting of the 15<sup>th</sup> STCDSS

and its outcomes, including the adoption of then MoU between the AU and RECs/RMs on the ASF and express its expectations of the contribution of this in advancing the operationalization of the ASF and addressing some of the challenges arising between AU and RECs/RMs in relation to decision-making and mandate processes for the deployment of ASF. On capability generation, PSC may note the request made during the 15<sup>th</sup> STCDSS meeting to declare operational readiness of NARC for deployment, and it may request the AU Commission to conduct a verification in that regard. Furthermore, PSC may urge RECs/RMs that have not yet done so, to submit reports verifying their pledged capabilities and ensure that their deployments are conducted within the ASF framework. It may also commend RECs/RMs that have attained their full operational capability (FOC) and encourage those RECs/RMs that are yet to achieve FOC, to scale up the capabilities of their Regional Standby Brigades and work towards operationalizing their respective Regional Logistic Depots. On the reconceptualization of the ASF, PSC may echo the 15<sup>th</sup> STCDSS meeting and request the AU Commission to conduct a strategic review of the ASF and report to the 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the STCDSS for consideration. The PSC may in this regard underscore the imperative of adapting the ASF concept to the prevailing realities of conflict dynamics that are not tied to one region and hence could not be addressed under one Regional Standby Force but through the use of the ASF under the AU as envisaged in the PSC Protocol. Taking its earlier decision of the 1129<sup>th</sup> session calling for all AU PSOs to be deployed under the ASF to the next level, the PSC may assert the need for all deployments under the ASF to be authorized by the PSC in accordance with the PSC Protocol. On the Continental Logistics Base, while welcoming the structures approved by the 36<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of the Assembly, PSC may appeal to Member States to support the efforts for the mobilization of the required budget of USD\$ 4,717,606.45 for the approved

structures.