

Briefing on the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)

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Tomorrow (5 December) the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU) will receive the Report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin and on the renewal of the mandate of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). The PSD is expected to make a statement introducing the report. The representatives of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and representative of the troop contributing countries (TCC) of the MNJTF Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Benin are expected to participate.

The session will examine the security situation and operational capabilities and future mandates of the task force, which the PSC has described at its 702nd meeting held on 19 July 2017 as 'a reference model of multinational cooperation that could serve positively other regions in Africa and beyond to address similar security challenges'. The session also presents an opportunity for the PSC to be updated about the regional strategy for the stabilization, recovery and resilience of the Boko Haram affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin region jointly developed by the AU and the LCBC.

There have been significant developments in the situation in the Boko Haram affected areas since the PSC renewed the mandate of the MNJTF at its 738th meeting held on 7 December 2017. The briefing is happening against the backdrop of rise in Boko Haram attempts at orchestrating attacks.

The past years saw significant reduction in the capabilities and territorial scope of Boko Haram operations following series of coordinated military campaigns by the MNJTF and the security forces of the individual members of the LCBC. The campaigns degraded the military capacity of the group,

weakened its economic and recruitment base and pushed it out from its strongholds. Boko Haram was forced to abandon its seizure of territories.

Yet, as the Chairperson's report notes Boko Haram remains a serious threat. Operating in a decentralized arrangement based on semi- autonomous groups, it has resorted to relying heavily on asymmetric guerilla and suicide attacks on isolated locations, soft civilian targets like markets, religious spaces and public gatherings.

Additionally, over the past months an upward trend in the activity of the terrorist group has been observed. There were more than 17 attempts by the group to overrun army bases since July 2018, and on 29 November 2018, the Nigerian army announced recent attacks by the Boko Haram killed 39 soldiers in northeast Nigeria. According to the statement of the Nigerian army reased use of drones 'in the last two to three months, we have noticed daring moves by the terrorists, (involving) increased use of drones against our defensive positions and infusion of foreign fighters in their ranks.'

These dangerous developments prompted President Muhammadu Buhari, Chairperson of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), to convene meeting of the LCBC on 29 November at the headquarters of the LCBC in N'djamena, Chad. The meeting examined measures to enhance the capacity of the MNJTF to address the recent setbacks, and permanently neutralize the notorious group.

The report will also examine the progress made in the implementation of the Renewed Support Implementation Agreement (SIA) and the Memorandum of Understanding between the AU Commission and the MNJTF TCCs for streamlining the AU additional support to MNJTF and the renewed Concept of Operations (CONOPs). At it's meeting on 7 December 2017, the PSC requested the commission to assist the MJNTF to fill its capability gaps. Tomorrow's meeting will provide update on the

efforts of the AUC to support the MNJTF in filling some of the gaps in its capabilities. In this respect, attention would be drawn to the delivery of various materials including level III medical services and financial contribution for implementing quick impact projects. Other challenges include the use and implementation of effective strategy for promoting surrender of Boko Haram fighters and for the handling of surrendered and/or captured Boko Haram fighters.

In the light of the rise in the threat from Boko Haram activities and as a follow up to the LCBC summit, tomorrow's session will review the challenges facing the MNJTF. In this respect, the persisting gaps in the capability of the MNJTF as highlighted in the Chairperson's report will receive particular attention. These gaps include lack of Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) equipment, lack of effective and robust communication strategy, and lack of more robust maritime capabilities to enhance MNJTF mobile operations in and around the Lake Chad.

Although not the main focus of the report, reference is made to the dire humanitarian situation in Boko Haram affected areas. As noted in the report, over 20 million people in the affected areas are exposed to acute need of humanitarian assistance. Of these 2.4 million people consisting of IDPs, refugees and returnees, all with about 490,000 children, are under threat of severe malnutrition. Continued attacks by the terrorist group have resulted in additional displacements, further exacerbating an already dire situation.

Also of note is the impact of the terrorist group Boko Haram on women and girls. They have been disproportionately affected having been used as suicide bombers, subjected to forced marriage and sexually exploited among the 2.4 displaced persons. After they are freed or escaping from Boko Haram, returnees often face stigmatisation.

The issue of the Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development

(PCRD) efforts in the areas affected by and liberated from the Boko Haram will be one of the top issues in tomorrow's briefing. Restoring the security, livelihood and social fabric of the millions displaced by the activities of Boko Haram and the campaigns against it will need huge resources and political commitment from the countries of the region and the international community. With the AU led Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin, which was adopted by the Council of Ministers of the LCBC on 30 August 2018, the session can use the Strategy as a useful framework for disbursing the 672 million dollars pledged by donors for emergency assistance and reconstruction at the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin region held almost two years ago.

The expected outcome of the briefing is a communiqué. Apart from renewing the mandate of the MNJTF for a period of 12 months effective 31 January 2019, the communiqué may call for the mobilization of all recovery and reconstruction efforts to be mobilized within the framework of the same strategy as has been adopted by the members of the LCBC. It could also address the need for developing workable approach to address the existing gaps in the capability of and in the pursuit of legally sound strategy by the MNJTF including in terms of the handling of surrendered or captured Boko Haram. With respect to the humanitarian situation, the PSC could also consider establishing an expert group that can propose ways and means of effectively operationalizing its mandate in respect to humanitarian action with particular attention to the situation in Boko Haram affected areas.