

Briefing on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin, MNJTF operations and Regional Stabilisation Strategy implementation

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Tomorrow (8 April), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will receive a briefing on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin and the operations of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the region.

Following opening remarks by Ambassador Jainaba Jagne, Permanent Representative of the Republic of The Gambia to the AU and stand-in Chairperson of the PSC for April 2024, Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) is expected to make a statement. As per the usual practice, the Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), Mamman Nuhu, is expected to brief the PSC.

The last time the PSC received a briefing on this issue was on 30 January 2024 when it renewed MNJTF's mandate for one year until 1 February 2024. At that meeting, the PSC requested the AU Commission and the LBC to renew the provision of AU support to MNJTF for one year and to report regularly on the activities of the MNJTF. Tomorrow's session could focus on the state of operation of the MNJTF, the security situation in the Lake Chad Basin and the implementation of the regional stabilization strategy.

On the security front, despite the progress registered by the

MNJTF over the past years in degrading Boko Haram, the threat in the Lake Chad Basin from the two main Boko Haram splinter groups, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS) and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), remains high. Boko Haram-related incidents have reportedly surged recently resulting in an increased number of civilian casualties. As [a recent research report](#) on the two Boko Haram splinter groups highlighted, the militant groups still command thousands of fighters and hold swathes of territory. In terms of territory, JAS controls much of Lake Chad and the Mandara mountains and ISWAP has strong control, particularly in rural areas of central Borno and eastern Yobe state in Nigeria.

The continued insecurity in the region has also exacerbated the humanitarian situation with more than 11.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, including over 5.5 million people facing acute food insecurity and some 758,000 children experiencing severe malnutrition, according to the UN. Additionally, most schools in the conflict-affected areas are dysfunctional due to the level of insecurity, thus denying children access to education. The region is also host to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people, refugees, and returnees. This situation has been further compounded by the ongoing conflict in Sudan, which has increased the number of displaced people crossing into Chad.

MNJTF has been playing an important role in fighting Boko Haram and stabilizing the region to allow the free movement of people and revive socio-economic activities. The joint task force has recently announced operational successes in neutralizing several Boko Haram elements and capturing many others. It also reportedly disrupted the group's supply lines capturing a lot of weapons and ammunitions. Some MNJTF soldiers paid the ultimate sacrifice in this process, while others suffered injuries.

However, despite continuing military operations particularly by Nigeria under the MNJTF, there remain concerns about the

level of effective coordinated operation by all members of the MNJTF. It was reported that the MNJTF operation planned for 2023, Lake Sanity 2, did not take place. Additionally, the MNJTF continues to face several other challenges. One of the challenges it faces relates to political instability facing some of the contributing countries such as Niger. Apart from the souring of relations with Nigeria after the July 2023 coup, Niger declared suspension of its participation in the MNJTF. According to the UN Secretary-General's Report to the UNSC in January 2024, following Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sanctions on the Niger, 'the de facto authorities in the Niger prohibited Multinational Joint Task Force troops based at Mallam Fatori, Nigeria, from crossing the border, and the Force Commander of the Task Force from visiting the Niger. They also temporarily suspended some reporting to the Task Force headquarters.'

The MNJTF also faces, similar to other operations on the continent, the lack of adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding. Therefore, the task force needs the continued support of the region and the international community. The lack of adequate resources to support recovered areas is a further challenge that complicates the situation. A recent UN assessment in the region concluded that 'economic hardships continued to drive vulnerable young persons towards illegal activities, including joining extremist groups' and that 'insecurity had disrupted traditional transhumance routes, affecting local economies and exacerbating resource competition, food insecurity and displacement.'

In this connection, the implementation of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery, and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region developed by the LCBC with the support of the AU is expected to be another focus of tomorrow's PSC meeting. The LCBC has been benefiting from the support of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) which since 2019 has been facilitating the

implementation of the strategy through its regional stabilization facility. Through the regional stabilization facility, more than 1.36 million people reportedly benefitted from stabilization interventions including more than 76,000 people who received vital livelihood support through grants, capacity-building opportunities, and cash-for-work initiatives, according to UNDP. Additionally, health and education services have resumed; infrastructure has been rehabilitated; access to energy has expanded; and more than 400,000 displaced persons have returned home. The first phase of the regional strategy's implementation was concluded last year and the second phase has started this year.

Despite some of these positive developments, however, challenges abound underscoring the need to accelerate and adjust the implementation of the regional strategy which is considered the key to addressing the underlying causes and drivers of extremism, violence, and underdevelopment. It is to be recalled that following the fourth meeting of the steering committee for the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region, in Abuja, Nigeria on 27 September 2023, the Regional Strategy was extended for a further period of one year. Additionally, the meeting directed the LCBC to consider an adjusted regional strategy for validation by the Council of Ministers in August 2024. It would thus be of interest for the PSC to learn about the progress being made in developing the adjusted regional strategy and how the adjustment would advance the effectiveness of the MNJTF.

At tomorrow's meeting, the PSC may call for the mobilization of international assistance to support the implementation of the regional strategy to promote peace, security and development in the Lake Chad Basin. The Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum for Regional Cooperation on Stabilization, Peacebuilding, and Sustainable Development was held in N'Djamena from 5-7 July 2023 and highlighted the need to

support socio-economic development and enhance community-based reintegration and transitional justice initiatives across the region. The Forum also expressed continued support for the Multinational Joint Task Force, while underscoring the need to adhere to human rights standards in security operations. Furthermore, they stressed the imperative of finding durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons in the region.

Another issue that would be of interest to PSC members in tomorrow's session is the role of the MNJTF in providing support in such areas as the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the rebuilding of state authorities in areas recovered from terrorist groups. In terms of the role of the MNJTF beyond its kinetic activities, it would be of interest for PSC members to receive updates on its decision from its 1126 session. It is to be recalled that the PSC called for 'restructuring of the MNJTF into a multidisciplinary force with robust police and civilian components that takes into consideration a comprehensive approach to addressing terrorism'.

Another important focus of tomorrow's PSC meeting is the adverse effects of climate change in the Lake Chad Basin with worsening drought and receding water levels in Lake Chad. This has weakened the livelihood of the people of the region and exacerbated communal violence. The LCBC has been supporting regional countries in mitigating the impact of climate change, preserving biodiversity, and managing scarce water resources. Tomorrow's PSC meeting will be held in advance of the third annual international forum on the development of the Lake Chad Basin which is scheduled to take place in N'Djamena from 28-30 May 2024. This forum is supported by the World Bank which funds the Lake Chad Region Recovery and Development Project (PROLAC). The forum seeks to promote and strengthen regional cooperation between the Lake Chad Basin countries in mitigating the adverse effects of climate change, promoting

socio-economic development, and fostering regional integration. Several topics are expected to be discussed during the upcoming forum, including how to enhance community resilience and strengthen inclusive management of natural resources.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a communiqué. The PSC is expected to express concern over the continued threat posed by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin region. While commending the MNJTF for its successful operations against the terrorist group, the PSC may underscore the need for reinforcing the close coordination and active participation of all the participating countries of the MNJTF. With respect to the conduct of military operations by the MNJTF, the PSC may call for enhanced compliance with human rights and IHL rules to avoid civilian casualties that undermine the effectiveness of such operations. The PSC may welcome steps taken by ECOWAS and Nigeria to ameliorate tension with countries affected by coups and may in this respect call on Niger to continue its collaboration and active participation in the MNJTF to avoid reversal of gains achieved through the MNJTF. It may emphasize the critical role of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience for supporting affecting communities and restoring state authority in newly recovered areas. The PSC may also recommend a summit of the MNJTF countries for reinvigorating the MNJTF and the implementation of the Stabilization Strategy. The PSC also may call for ensuring comprehensive plans are put in place for the socio-economic revival of affected areas including within the framework of the Stabilization Strategy. The PSC may also welcome the upcoming convening of the third annual international forum on the development of the Lake Chad Basin. Having regard to the adverse impacts of climate change in the region, including aggravating insecurity and instability, the PSC may underscore the importance of investing in measures for mitigating the impacts of climate change including through the provision of

humanitarian and adaptation support for affected communities.