

Briefing session on international and regional initiatives in the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel Regions

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Tomorrow (9 April) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to a briefing session on security in the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel. This session is set to have two segments. The first segment focuses on counter terrorism and violent extremism in the Lake Chad and the Sahel regions, with particular attention on strengthening AU support to the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) and G5 Sahel Joint Force. The second segment is on the renewal of the mandate of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. It is expected that the Chairperson of the AU Commission will present his report on Mali and the Sahel.

It is anticipated that Commissioner for Peace and Security, Ambassador Smail Chergui, will introduce the Chairperson's report. Representatives of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the G5 Sahel Secretariat, member states of the two regional arrangements and Nigeria as the Chair of the PSC are also expected to make statements.

In terms of the focus of tomorrow's session, the Chairperson's report is expected to provide update on the security situation in the Sahel and Lake Chad. Notwithstanding the plethora of security actors in the region, which was the subject of the 818th session of the PSC, in the Sahel the security situation continues to exhibit deterioration. According to the UN, 125 security incidents were registered from 1 July to 15 September, approximately double the number of incidents

registered throughout the whole of 2017. Attacks against civilians, Government officials and security and defense forces, particularly in northeastern Burkina Faso and the Niger, show that the terrorist threat in the Sahel is spreading.

In Burkina Faso, attacks by armed groups against security and civilian targets, previously concentrated in the north, have spread to the east and southwest. The attack in Mali on 23 March

2019, the deadliest in the region since 2013 since 2013, by a Dozo hunting militia killing at least 160 Fulani in central Mali near the border with Burkina Faso, indicates the multidimensional character of the sources and manifestations of insecurity, with inter-communal tensions erupting into major acts of violence. With respect to the security situation in the Lake Chad Basin, the operational tactics of Boko Haram appeared to be changing from attacking mostly civilian targets to direct attacks on military targets. Despite increased military operations, Boko Haram continues to orchestrate increasing, occasionally, large-scale attacks. 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 '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.'

On the MNJTF and AU's support to the Joint Force, it is to be recalled that the 816th session of the PSC requested the AU Commission to collaborate with the LCBC plus Benin to address the threat posed by the increasing use by Boko Haram of the drones. The PSC also tasked the Commission to mobilize additional support to fill in the shortfall in MNJTF capabilities 'in terms of Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices

(C-IED) equipment, Amphibious equipment, communication equipment, and for the Task-Force to have, at its disposal, the necessary resources for effectively implementing Quick Impact and Peace Consolidating Projects, as well as to provide humanitarian support to the affected population in need.' 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 and address the new challenges facing it from the changes in tactics of Boko Haram.

The operationalization of the G5 Sahel Joint Force is another subject expected to receive attention in both the Chairperson's report and the interventions from the G5 Sahel. It is to be recalled that the attack on the headquarters of the G5 Joint Force in June 2018 destroyed critical infrastructure and communications equipment, resulting in the temporary suspension of Joint Force operations. The G-5 Sahel Defense and Security Committee in its meeting of 25 October in Niamey decided to relocate the Joint Force headquarters to Bamako. Progress has been observed in terms of the deployment of the pledged forces making up the G5 Joint Force.

The G-5 Sahel member states have deployed more than 80 per cent of their troops, manned all sector headquarters and completed the transfer of authority for all command posts. There remain major challenges for the full and effective operationalization of the G5 Joint Force. Major equipment shortfalls, capability gaps, insufficient infrastructure and a lack of secured operational bases continue to delay its full operationalization. In terms of funding, a briefing to the UNSC at the end of 2018, observed that almost 50 per cent of pledges made have not been earmarked, let alone disbursed. Despite the UNSC authorization under Resolution 2391 (2017) for the UN Mission in Mali (MUNISMA) to provide logistics support to the Joint Force, MINUSMA continues to face a funding gap of almost \$30 million for providing the expected support. In the light of the request of the UN Security

Council for options to overhaul the mission in Mali, the implication of this in terms of support for the G5 Joint Force is a major issue of interest for tomorrow's session.

In an attempt to address the challenges of predictability and sustainability of funding, the G5 countries and the AU have been seeking to secure a UN Chapter VII mandate and a support package akin to that offered to the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) based on UN assessed contributions. This has faced major objection particularly from the US. In the meantime, the AU can continue to assist in the mobilization of partner support to the MNJTF, particularly in terms of the release of the pledged funds. From the perspective of enhancing the AU support to the G5 Sahel and the MNJTF, a point of departure is the full implementation of the MoU signed between the AU Commission and the G5 Sahel Secretariat.

Possible additional options that could be explored in tomorrow's session for funding the G5 Joint Force and the MNJTF include the possibility of mobilizing further funding from the European Union's African Peace Facility and accessing funds mobilized from AU member states during 2017-2018 for the Peace Fund.

The second segment of the session will focus on the renewal of the mandate of the MNJTF. It is to be recalled that the PSC renewed the mandate of the MNJTF at its 759th session held on 23 March 2018 for additional twelve months effective from 12 April. The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué. It is expected that the PSC would reiterate its call on all countries and organisations that made pledges to honour to ensure the effective operationalization of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. It is also expected that the PSC would also call for greater complementarity and enhanced synergy among the various processes, initiatives and mechanisms addressing peace and security in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin regions. The PSC could also request to receive regular updates on the implementation of its previous decisions on the mobilization

of support to the MNJTF and the G5 Sahel Joint Force.