

Consideration of the mandate of the MNJTF

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Tomorrow (12 December), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1126th session to consider the renewal of the mandate of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram as one of the two agenda items that PSC is set to consider during this session.

The permanent Representative of Nigeria to the AU and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of December, Victor Adekunle Adeleke will make opening remarks. AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye is expected to present the Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on MNJTF against Boko Haram terrorist group and the European Union (EU)-AU support to the force. The Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and Head of Mission MNJTF, Mamman Nuhu and the Commander of the MNJTF Major General Abdul Khalifah Ibrahim will also deliver statements.

The session is convened in the context of the upcoming mandate expiry of the MNJTF on 1 February 2023. It was during its 1057th session held on 14 January 2022 that the PSC renewed the mandate of the MNJTF for additional one year effective from 1 February 2022. It is also in accordance with the PSC request of the AU Commission, in coordination with the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) Secretariat, to report to PSC regularly on the activities of the MNJTF, in line with the relevant provisions contained in the Communique PSC/AHG/COMM.2(CDLXXXIV) of 29 January 2015.

The last time that PSC considered the situation in the Lake

Chad Basin (LCB) was on 31 May 2022, at its 1086th session, where it assessed the security and humanitarian conditions of the region, as well as the implementation of the Regional Stabilization Strategy (RSS) for Boko Haram affected countries.

Tomorrow's session comes on the heels of the 16th Summit of the LCBC, which took place on 29 November in Abuja, Nigeria. In his opening remarks, the outgoing chairman of the Summit, Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari noted the success recorded by MNJTF that brought about relative stability to the region, but also raised the alarm over the influx of weapons posing fresh challenges. He was [quoted](#) saying that '...the situation in the Sahel and raging war in Ukraine serve as major sources of weapons and fighters that bolster ranks of the terrorists in the Lake Chad Region'. He further stated that 'a substantial proportion of the arms and ammunition procured to execute the war in Libya continues to find its way to the Lake Chad Region and other parts of the Sahel'. Not completely surprisingly, 'weapons being used for the war in Ukraine and Russia are equally beginning to filter to the region', according to the President. On account of the looming risks of heightened proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their implication to the peace and stability of the region, Buhari called upon his counterparts for more vigilance and tightening of security around the borders of the six member countries. In tomorrow's discussion, members of the PSC could be interested to hear more about the reported influx of weapons to the region from near and far and could use the opportunity to reiterate their request for a continental strategy for the fight against illicit small arms and light weapons.

MNJTF has undertaken around six major operations since its authorization by the PSC in 2015, which significantly degraded the operational capacity of the terrorist groups (Boko Haram and Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP)). Three of

these operations were conducted following the decision of the extraordinary summit of the LCBC in December 2018 consequent on the deteriorating security situation in the region. The latest of such operations, Operation LAKE SANITY, saw MNJTF troops making unprecedented incursions deep inside the Lake Chad Islands and settlements known as 'Tumbuns'. Plan to undertake the second phase of Operation LAKE SANITY is also currently underway. Major General Abdul Khalifa Ibrahim, the Force Commander of MNJTF, in his recent [article](#), noted that the military pressures have led to the shrinking of operational space for the terrorist groups and their activities have been successfully confined to opportunity and limited attacks. The military intervention has also improved the security conditions of the conflict affected areas, paving the way to increasing humanitarian assistance, returning of displaced people to their homes, and surrendering of terrorists in large number. Despite these achievements, both Boko Haram and ISWAP have continued to pose security risks as they are adopting new technics, including the increasing use of Vehicle Borne Explosive Devices attacks.

In terms of support to MNJTF, AU and EU have continued providing critical supports that enhance the operational capability of the Force for the effective discharge of its mandate. For instance, EU has been providing USD 20.8 million financial support for this year, which is in addition to the various supports that are instrumental in filling the operational capability gaps of the Force. AU, on its part, has deployed around 14 staff at the AU and MNJTF Headquarters to facilitate the delivery of support in the areas of utilization of funds, delivery of fuel, and human rights and humanitarian law compliance, among others.

While MNJTF's military success is an encouraging development, members of the PSC are expected to stress that the scourge of terrorism in the region or other parts of the continent cannot be sustainably tackled without addressing the underlying

conditions that create conducive environment for terrorists. This certainly requires anchoring military operations on political strategies and accompanying non-military measures such as creating opportunities for the youth, increasing the provision of development projects, and (re)establishing the legitimacy and effectiveness of local state administration infrastructure and the delivery of basic services. It is within this context that the region, in partnership with the AU, developed a Regional Strategy for Stabilization (RSS) based on the recognition of the need for a comprehensive approach that goes beyond military action and encompass development efforts for addressing the root causes of terrorism in the region. As such, it is important for members of the PSC to pay equal attention to the implementation of the Strategy while discussing the activities of MNJTF.

In this regard, the finalization and launching of the Territorial Action Plans (TAPs) during the third LCB Governors Forum in October last year is a major step forward in the implementation of the RSS. This was further complimented by the development of priorities for regional intervention in the Regional Action Plan for 2022-2024 and its subsequent endorsement by the Steering Committee of the RSS – a key platform for review, decision-making, and strategic direction for the RSS – during its 3rd meeting held on 10 June 2022 in Douala, Cameroon. Cross-border interventions are accordingly prioritized to improve cross-border human mobility and trade in the region. Mobilizing the required resources for the execution of the Plans remain critical towards the full implementation of the Strategy.

It is to be recalled that the PSC, during its 1086th session, requested the AU Commission to take the lead in mobilization of the needed resources for the implementation of the Strategy. In relation to resource mobilization, it is worthy to note that the 3rd meeting of the Steering Committee endorsed

the request by the LCB to apply for the allocation of UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), but there is also interest to explore the possibility of using AU's Peace Fund.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a communique. PSC is expected to commend the MNJTF and troop contributing countries for the progress made in the fight against terrorist groups and the restoration of relative stability in the region. Despite the progress, PSC may note the continued security threat posed by the terrorist groups and highlight the need to sustain the role of the MNJTF to consolidate the gains and address remaining security concerns. In that context, PSC is expected to renew MNJTF's mandate for another one year. Echoing the statements of the outgoing chairman of the LCBC, Nigeria's President Buhari, PSC may express concern over illicit flow of arms leaking from the conflicts in Libya, the Sahel, and the war in Ukraine. As part of the effort to strategically address the problem not only in the LCB but also in the rest of the continent, PSC may reiterate the request made at the 1086th session for the AU Commission to initiate a draft Continental Strategy for the fight against illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons as well as other emerging weapons used by terrorists. PSC is also expected to stress the importance of anchoring MNJTF's military engagement on solid political strategy geared towards resolution of the main factors behind the terrorist threat facing the region and complement the security measures with non-military measures that would address the governance, development and humanitarian deficits that make the emergence and growth of terrorist groups. In that regard, PSC may highlight the need for the full implementation of the RSS and intensifying developmental interventions in line with LCBC's territorial and regional action plans. The PSC may also highlight the need for elevating support for affected populations including in terms of protection of IDPs and refugees including from sexual and other violence and acts of abuse, the provision of

humanitarian assistance and the delivery of livelihood support interventions. The PSC may also emphasize the imperative of compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law as critical element of the protection of civilians and call on the MNJTF to work closely with the AU Commission to strengthen its human rights, IHL and conduct and discipline compliance monitoring and reporting system. The PSC may also call on members of the MNJTF to ensure that reports of violations of IHL, human rights and breaches of other standards of conduct are independently investigated and publicly dealt with.