

# Consideration of the Report of AUC Chairperson on MNJTF and mandate renewal

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Tomorrow (30 January), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1195<sup>th</sup> session to consider the report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against the Boko Haram Terrorist Group and the renewal of the force's mandate.

Following opening remarks of the Chairperson of the PSC for the month, Amma A. Twum-Amoah, Permanent Representative of Ghana to the AU, Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) is expected to make a statement. Mamman Nuhu, Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and Head of Mission as well as Major General Ibrahim Sallau Ali, MNJTF Commander are also expected to brief the PSC.

The PSC last renewed MNJTF's mandate at its 1126<sup>th</sup> session, for a one-year period, starting from 01 February 2023. It is also to be recalled that the PSC requested the AU Commission and the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) Commission to renew their MoU and the Support Implementation Agreement (SIA) that regulates the provision of AU support to MNJTF for a one-year period running from 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2024. Further to providing a summary of the challenges and achievements of MNJTF during the reporting period, the Chairperson's report could also highlight some of the major trends noted in the operations of Boko Haram as well as other terrorist groups in the LCB region.

During the reporting period, MNJTF undertook one major operation code named Hrbn Zuma and some smaller ones against Boko Haram targets as part of its campaign to downgrade the terror group. These operations registered gains including in inflicting some loss on the group in terms of eliminating fighters and the capturing of both members of the group and fighting materials such as trucks and anti-aircraft guns. Various reports including the 2023 Global Terrorism Index Report have also indicated that Boko Haram attacks have shown a major decline not seen in over a decade.

The MNJTF, within the framework of its mandate, has also conducted humanitarian work to provide assistance to affected communities within the LCB region in the course of 2023, contributing to the realisation of the Humanitarian Assistance pillar of the Regional Stabilization Strategy (RSS) for areas in LCB Region affected by Boko Haram. The provision of trainings to MNJTF troops on human rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) norms have also been an important activity carried out in 2023, an intervention meant to facilitate compliance.

It is worth noting that the decline in Boko Haram attacks and capacity is not merely due to the success of the military operation by itself. It is in significant measure also attributable to the effective implementation of a multidimensional regional strategy that has a focus on governance, livelihood rehabilitation and support, humanitarian and development interventions. This offers instructive lessons, as our [special research report](#) established, for continental response to the threat of terrorism on the need for putting premium on such political, socio-economic and human security instruments that military tools need to accompany.

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Despite the encouraging progress and Boko Haram's weakened capacity, it by no means implies that the terrorist group or its splinters are no longer in a position to orchestrate deadly attacks. Indeed, Boko Haram continues to be a major threat to peace, security and stability in the region. In one of its latest gruesome operations for example, Boko Haram killed 20 people in north-eastern Nigeria in early November 2023, who were returning from the burial of their family members executed by the same terrorist group, for resisting their usual extortion of payments.

It also remains critical to note that while Boko Haram's capacity is notably declining, other terrorist groups such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) are taking the upper hand and intensifying their insurgency, such as notably in Nigeria. In the last few months of 2023 for instance, the ISWAP expanded its activities and successfully carried out attacks particularly in north-eastern Nigeria, targeting farmers in the area. In the last week of September 2023, ISWAP was reported to have killed over 10 farmers in less than two-weeks, in the areas of Borno state.

One emerging trend over the past couple of years has also been the competition and power struggle among terrorist groups in the LCB. Multiple clashes between ISWAP and Boko Haram have specifically been recorded in the course of 2022 and 2023. According to ACLED's latest records, six incidents of insurgent infighting were documented in the Extreme-North

region and Nigeria's bordering Borno state, in November 2023 alone. Although government forces of the affected member states and the MNJTF consider this as a strategic advantage for their operations against the insurgent groups, these clashes nonetheless continue to devastate the overall regional stability and security while compounding the dangers faced by civilians in the affected areas.

The continuing proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons in the LCB is another concerning trend worthy of tracking and addressing. Not only is the illicit transfer of weapons in the region escalating conflict and violence, it also impedes social and economic development. In addition to porous borders, diversion from regional and national stockpile not only through raids and theft, but also due to corruption, is also major avenue through which arms and ammunition are illegally transferred in the LCB.

The increasing demand of civilians for arms on account of insecurity and the resultant resort to self-defence has also been the cause for proliferation of vigilante groups. Illicit weapons and weak provision of security by the state have also made banditry possible. A direct impact of the absence of effective state security apparatus, this situation entails grave consequences not only in terms of the immediate effect it has on fuelling illicit transfer of arms, but also what it could mean in the long run for disarmament efforts and for consolidation of state security.

Another trend worth paying attention to is the increase in the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and the associated adverse impacts of such increased use. The number of IED attacks and the resultant fatalities in the AU report shows that compared to 2022, the use of IEDs in 2023 have shown 138% increase. Similarly, this spike in the use of IEDs led in 2023 to more than 78% and 171% increase in military and civilian fatalities respectively than in 2022. Not surprisingly, similar to other forms of attacks, this increasing use of IEDs

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The humanitarian consequences of ongoing fighting in the LCB also continue to be of concern. Recent OCHA reports indicate that the continuing insecurity in the region is driving up population displacement while also causing direct civilian harm including death. As of May 2023, OCHA recorded 3.2 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in the region with almost 70 percent (2.2 million) of these residing in Nigeria while 428,000 and 381,000 live in Cameroon and Chad, respectively. The region is also faced with major food insecurity hosting over 75 percent of the severely food insecure population in the sub-region. This is further complicated by climatic upheaval in the LCB which fuels intercommunal violence that contributes not only to the high level of insecurity but also to humanitarian needs. The war in Sudan is another recent development igniting further humanitarian crisis due to the spike in refugee flows, particularly in the eastern parts of Chad.

Aside from deliberating on these and other developments in the region, it may also interest the PSC to reflect on the status of implementation of the RSS, along its 9 pillars of intervention. Given that 2024 marks the end of the first phase of implementation of the RSS and the commencement of its second phase, tomorrow's meeting provides the opportunity to take stock of the success obtained towards stabilisation of the region and factors that should be considered in the second phase of implementation, for ensuring sustainability of efforts. As noted during the 4<sup>th</sup> Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum which took place in July 2023, in N'Djamena, Chad, one priority area towards fully realising the goals of the RSS, aside from the provision of urgent assistance to millions of

people struggling with food insecurity, is rebuilding schools in the region which have overwhelmingly become dysfunctional due to repeated attacks, depriving thousands of children access to education.

The expected outcome of the session is a Communiqué. The PSC is expected to take note of the key trends and developments underscored in the Chairperson's report and commend MNJTF and the troop contributing countries for their continued efforts to degrade terrorist groups in the LCB region and for the progress achieved thus far towards restoring relative security. The PSC is also expected to renew the mandate of the MNJTF for a further one year period and in this context, may request that the AUC and LCBC to renew their MoU and SIA. Having regard to the continuing threat that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons imposes in the region, the PSC may urge the concerned member states to strengthen and enhance their national and regional regulatory frameworks. It may further emphasise the significance of reinforcing regional efforts and collaborations to stem the flow of illicit weapons coming from other parts of the continent. The PSC may also underscore the importance of elevating support to displaced populations in the LCB and of rehabilitating infrastructures for social services such as schools within the framework of the RSS. It may also reiterate its earlier call for enhancing support for MNJTF and its contributing countries with respect to their efforts for supporting affected communities and facilitating including through negotiation and reconciliation, the desertion, rehabilitation and reintegration back to normal life of members of terrorist groups.