

Development and deradicalization as levers to counter terrorism and violent extremism

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Tomorrow (7 October), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1111th session at a ministerial level. The session is convened under the theme of 'development and deradicalization as levers to counter terrorism and violent extremism'.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation, and Moroccan Expatriates of the Kingdom of Morocco, Nasser Bourita, is expected to preside over the session as the Chairperson of the PSC for the month of October 2022. Following an opening remarks by the chairperson of the month, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, will deliver statement. The Secretary-General of the Rabita Mohammadia of Ulema, Dr. Ahmed Abaddi, is also scheduled to make presentation while Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, Vladimir Voronkov, is expected to deliver statement.

Tomorrow's session becomes the 24th session of the Council dedicated to the issue of terrorism and violent extremism, making the item the most discussed thematic issue by the PSC since its operationalization in 2004. Seven of these sessions have been addressed at the ministerial or summit level, also showing the increasing high-level interest on the subject on account of the increase in incidents of terrorist attacks and its geographic expansion. Since the extraordinary summit held

in Malabo in May 2022 on terrorism, the PSC met at a ministerial level on 23 September on the sidelines of the 77th session of UN General Assembly with a focus on strengthening the role of RECs/RMs in combating the scourge of terrorism.

The last time Morocco chaired the PSC, the 883rd session held at ministerial level focusing on the nexus between conflicts in general and development, it reaffirmed 'the essence and fundamentals of human security, in line with the Common African Defense and Security Policy and the AU Policy Framework on Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD), as a multidimensional notion of security encompassing socio-economic and political rights.' As it did during that session, tomorrow's session is also expected to emphasise 'the need for the consideration and conception of an integrated, inclusive, holistic and multidimensional approach regarding the interdependence between peace, security and development, aiming at enabling the African Union and the RECs to respond effectively to the challenges imposed by conflict cycles in Africa', albeit with a particular focus on addressing the scourge of terrorism.

Tomorrow's session, among others, affords Council the opportunity to exchange views and share best experiences including from the Kingdom of Morocco, which is presented as a success story in the fight against terrorism. The first lesson is the multidimensional nature of Morocco's counterterrorism strategy. According to Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2022 report, Morocco ranked 76th among countries impacted by terrorist threat globally, making it one of the safest countries in the world. What contributed for Morocco's positive performance is not because the country is less targeted by terrorists, but because of its blend of counterterrorism efforts often described as 'tri dimensional counterterrorism strategy' –largely aimed at addressing terrorism threats through security, socio-economic development

policies and religious education—adopted following the 2003 Casablanca bombings. The same report attributes Morocco's success in fighting terrorism to the 'country's understanding of the threat; the interconnectedness of its counterterrorism methods; the application of combined soft and hard measures; the facilitation of information sharing practices; and the promotion of international cooperation as the sine qua non of counterterrorism'.

Indeed, unlike most previous engagements, tomorrow's session shifts the focus away from the dominant hard security oriented policy approach towards the socio-economic and governance factors that make the emergence and expansion of terrorism and violent extremism possible. As outlined in various Amani Africa works (reports [here](#) and [here](#)), the dominance of the hard security approach to terrorism has crowded out investment in the political, development and environmental factors. Indeed, as demonstrated in our report, the year-on-year increase in the incident of terrorist attacks and the geographic spread of the threat highlight that it is not possible to win over terrorism by increasing throwing of weapons at it.

While security measures remain critical in addressing the immediate security threat posed by terrorists, it has become evident that no amount of force would fundamentally change the terrorism landscape in Africa without addressing the structural socio-economic and political deficiencies on which terrorism thrives. Amani Africa's special report made the case that 'the political and socioeconomic governance pathologies and the grievances and vulnerabilities that such pathologies produce on the part of the affected communities are the core conditions that open the space for the emergence and growth of terrorist groups.' As such, 'given the inadequacy of the security heavy approach to countering terrorism, it is of paramount significance that the PSC gives consideration for the AU and RECs to invest as much in the socio-economic,

development, governance and humanitarian dimensions of the underlying and driving factors of terrorism as, if not more than, they invest in security-heavy instrument of counter terrorism’.

Taking the passing references in the various PSC outcome documents to socio-economic, political, environmental and humanitarian dimensions of terrorism and the 22 October 2021 report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission that admitted the imperative of moving ‘beyond predominantly military action to include soft approaches, by promoting inclusive good governance, accountability as well as socioeconomic developments’ a step further, our [special report](#) provided analysis on how this policy shift can be achieved. First, in territories affected by terrorism, this needs to focus on provision of life saving assistance for the displaced and those facing food insecurity and the creation of conditions including through the implementation of protection measures for the return and rehabilitation of IDPs as well as the provision of psycho-social support that is tailored to and in harmony with the traditions and practices of affected communities. Second, investing in the rehabilitation of and providing support for the expansion of existing sources of livelihoods and making them more economically and ecologically sustainable and productive. Third and fundamentally, the rolling out of legitimate local governance structures along with enabling them in the delivery of key social services including health care, access to water, education and justice. Additionally, it is of particular significance that the AU PSC in its engagement on the theme of terrorism engages bodies such as Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social (HHAS) Development, African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) and the African Development Bank (AfDB). In terms of deradicalisation, attention should be given to the use not only of counter-terrorism narratives and sensitization measures but also political and diplomatic instruments such as negotiation and reconciliation that provide pathways for the

reintegration into and peaceful participation political and social life of society by members of society recruited into the ranks of terrorist groups.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a communique. Council may reiterate its grave concern over the rising tide of terrorism and violent extremism in Africa. Recognizing the different factors associated with terrorism such as governance deficits, socio-economic challenges, and marginalization, Council may emphasize the need to adopt a multidimensional comprehensive counterterrorism strategy that combines security and law enforcement, socio-economic development policies, and counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs to tackle the scourge in a holistic and sustainable manner. The PSC may reiterate its request of 883rd session for the AU Commission, to 'further enhance the collaboration and coordination between the different departments within the AU Commission and AU Specialized Agencies to support the PSC, taking into account the interdependence between peace, security and development, whilst carrying out its mandate.' In this context, Council may emphasize the need for fully harnessing the role of African governance and developmental institutions such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) AUDA-NEPAD, the AfDB and AU Department of HHAS in addressing the governance and socioeconomic challenges. The PSC may also call for effective implementation of the AU Policy Framework for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) and the mobilization of the role of the PCRD Centre. Finally, Council may take tomorrow's session as an opportunity to follow up on some of its previous decisions regarding terrorism and violent extremism, notably the development of a comprehensive Continental Strategic Plan of Action on countering terrorism in Africa as well as the establishment of the Ministerial Committee on Counter Terrorism ([16th extraordinary summit](#) on terrorism and unconstitutional changes of government held in May 2022), the

formation of counterterrorism unit within the African Standby Force (PSC [960th](#) session), establishment of a Sub-Committee on Counter-terrorism (PSC [249th](#) session), and the establishment of an AU Special Fund for Prevention and Combating of Terrorism and Violent Extremism ([Assembly/AU/Dec.614 \(XXVII\)](#)).