

Briefing on the Situation in Somalia and the Future of AMISOM

Automatic Heading TextDate | 9 February, 2021Briefing on the future of AMISOM and the upcoming elections in Somalia

Tomorrow (9 February) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 978th session on the situation in Somalia and the activities of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The PSC is expected to consider the AU Commission Chairperson's Report on Situation in Somalia and AMISOM.

The Chairperson's Report, prepared in accordance with the communiques of the 848th and 923rd sessions of the PSC and paragraph 36 of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2520(2020), is expected to be introduced by the Peace and Security Department. Francisco Madeira, the Special Representative of the AU Commission Chairperson (SRCC) and Head of Mission of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), is also expected to provide update to the Council. As per the practice of the Council, it is expected that the representative of Somalia and Sudan, as Chairperson of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) will also make a statement during the partially open segment of the session. In addition the A3 members of the UN Security Council, UN Office to the AU, European Union and United Kingdom are expected to deliver their statements.

The session comes at a very delicate moment in the political situation in Somalia. The national elections scheduled to take place in 2020/2021 were set to be a key milestone in the stabilization and peacebuilding of the country. Although the initial ambition envisaged in the Constitution was to hold the

elections on the basis of a direct vote by the electorate for the very first time, over the course of 2020 this ambition was lowered. It is to be recalled that after intense negotiation among the various political forces, a compromise was reached in August 2020 for using a revised national election model known as the "Electoral Constituency Caucuses".

Despite the National Consultative Council agreement of 17 September 2020 on the holding of elections, Somalia's political forces could not proceed to convene the elections as planned. The parliamentary election scheduled to take place in December 2020, meant to kick start the election season, was postponed at the very last minute. Similarly, the collapse of negotiations between President Mohamed Abdullahi "Farmaajo" and other stakeholders held in early February 2021 (negotiation the AU and other partners welcomed) meant that the presidential election scheduled to take place on 8 February could not be held.

President Formajo, whose term expired on 8 February is said to have requested the support of the Somali Parliament to extend his term, but the Parliament ruled out the possibility of such an extension. The international community, including the African Union (AU), in their statement issued on 4 February 2021, had warned against any alternative outcomes, including a parallel process or partial elections, or other measures short of an agreed electoral process.

The situation has plunged the country into a constitutional crisis and a political limbo. Puntland's leadership is reported to have said that it will no longer recognize the leadership of President Formajo after his term expires. Similarly, the Council of Presidential candidates, an umbrella group of Somali opposition leaders issued a statement announcing that they could not recognize President Formajo as Somalia's president after the expiry of his term of office on 8 February. Indeed, the end of the term of the president without political agreement and the lack of a deal on a plan

for an inclusive election is considered a major setback for the transitional process and peacebuilding in Somalia.

It is to be recalled that Parliament had adopted a resolution even at the expiry of mandate of both parliament and president the incumbents remain in place until successors are elected. Although it does not totally address the grave political uncertainty, this is expected to ensure a semblance of continuity of government and to forestall the emergence of a power vacuum.

At its 949th meeting and its last session during 2020 on the situation in Somalia, Council welcomed the review of the Somalia Transitional Plan (STP). A communique of the Somali Partnership Forum held on 7 December underlined that Somalia also needs to complete ongoing revisions to implement the Somalia Transition Plan (STP). While a revised STP document has been developed and the draft of this transmitted to the AU Commission, the document has as yet to be endorsed at the National Security Council and the high-level Security and Justice Committee. The adoption of the revised STP set the stage for the AU Commission to implement the request of the PSC for revising AMISOM's Concept of Operation (CONOPs) for 2018-2021 to ensure they are aligned with the revised STP.

The security situation remains very concerning. Al Shabaab continues to intensify the perpetration of its attacks. According to a recent report on the activities of terrorist groups in Africa, there was a 33 percent increase in violence involving Al Shabaab from 1,310 in 2019 to 1,742 in 2020. Series of deadly terrorist attacks have been perpetrated by the group recently in Mogadishu and several other regions claiming the lives of many innocent civilians. Early this month, Al-Shabaab's attack targeted Hotel Afrik in Mogadishu that left many people dead or injured. Despite progress made in building the Somali security forces, the mounting threat that Al Shabaab continues to pose presents a challenge to the

planned drawdown and eventual withdrawal of AMISOM by end of 2021.

The briefing from SRCC is expected to provide update on the activities of AMISOM as outlined in the AUC Chairperson's report and issues relating to the existence of conditions for continuing with the timeline on the drawdown and withdrawal of AMISOM. The Chairperson's report notes that despite progress in SSF capabilities to conduct independent operations, the generation of forces specifically for the SNA remains slow. It is to be recalled that the PSC in its communique of the 923rd session, it has stressed the imperative need for a halt in further reduction of AMISOM uniformed personnel. In the context of the continued threat from Al Shabaab, the remaining gaps in the capacity of Somali security forces and the need for political consensus among Somali political forces and the development of a new electoral calendar on the one hand, tomorrow's session presents an opportunity for the PSC to reflect on the need for a reconsideration of the plan on the benchmarks and timeline for further drawdown and exit of AMISOM. In the context of the expiration of the current mandate of AMISOM next May, the Chairperson's report thus underscores the necessity to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the mission and the broader Somali environment.

It is to be recalled that the PSC had renewed the mandate of AMISOM for twelve months pursuant to its Communique adopted at its 923rd meeting held on 7 May 2020. However, the UNSC took a different decision extending the mission's mandate only for ten months until 28 February 2021. That is why the UNSC is expected to renew the mandate of the mission later this month and the Penholder, UK, is proposing a ten-month extension of the mission's mandate for the last time. On its part, the AU is in favor of a short technical extension for three months, to enable the AU to conduct its own independent assessment.

In its last meeting, the PSC, among others, urged the UNSC to agree on the modalities for an AU-UN co-leadership in

undertaking the independent assessment with a view to ensuring the effective integration of the African views vis-a-vis the policy options pertaining to post-2021 international engagements with Somalia. However, the UN went ahead with the independent assessment alone and the team under the leadership of General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz has already finalized and submitted its report. Accordingly, UNSC members have received copy of the report, which will inform their decision in the course of this month to decide on the future of AMISOM based on the options proposed by therein.

As noted in the Chairperson's report, the regional dynamics and the souring of diplomatic relations between Somalia and Kenya has further complicated the tense political atmosphere in Somalia. The IGAD Heads of State and Government who held their Extraordinary Summit in Djibouti in December last year, had discussed this issue behind closed doors. In this connection, President Guelleh of Djibouti was entrusted to verify allegations against Kenya of interference in the internal affairs of Somalia. The fact-finding mission visited both Kenya and Somalia and submitted its report. While Kenya accepted the outcome of the fact-finding mission, Somalia rejected it accusing the team of being "partisan, unfair, compromised and predetermined." On its part, Djibouti issued a statement underscoring its neutrality on the matter and defending the objectivity of the fact-finding mission.

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. The PSC may express serious concern over the prevailing political impasse and urge the Somali political stakeholders to work towards finding a compromise solution to preserve the gains made over the past decade and safeguard the security and stability of the country. In this respect, it may urge the need for Somali actors to avoid the emergence of power vacuum and to urgently agree on a new timeline and process on the holding of elections. The Council may express concern over the volatile security situation in Somalia and the continued

attack by Al-Shabaab. Underscoring the continued critical role of AMISOM, the PSC may also urge for the mobilization of support for AMISOM. With respect to the STP, the Council may reiterate its previous decisions for its comprehensive review and urge that this process is completed without further delay to recalibrate the priority areas for AMISOM's support and updating its CONOPS.

The PSC may condemn the latest attack in Mogadishu and express support and solidarity with Somalia. It may reiterate its position on halting further downsizing of AMISOM and appeal to the UNSC to consider its decision on the drawdown in light of the situation on the ground. The PSC may also underscore the need to review the timelines on the drawdown and exit of AMISOM in consultation with all stakeholders and having regard to the prevailing institutional capacity issues of SSFs, the political and security conditions in Somalia. To this end, it may request the need for conducting its own independent assessment with a view to formulate AU's own informed view to be submitted for the UNSC for due consideration and integration of the views of the AU and the PSC. It may, therefore, call on the UNSC for a technical extension of AMISOM's mandate for a further period of three months to allow time for discussion on the future of the mission and to ensure that the views of the AU are taken onboard.