

The Unified Role of the African Members of the UN Security Council (A3) in the United Nations Security Council

Automatic Heading TextDate | 04 March, 2021

Tomorrow (04 March) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 983rd session on the unified role of the African three elected members (A3) of the United Nations (UN) Security Council (UNSC). The timing of this session is not accidental considering that Kenya, which serves in both the PSC and the UNSC, has just joined the UNSC as the newest member of the A3.

The Permanent Representative of Kenya to AU, Jean Kamau is expected to make an opening remark. The PSC is expected to receive update from the AU Commission, including through the AU Permanent Observer Mission to the UN. Apart from the inputs from the representatives of members of A3, namely Kenya, Niger and Tunisia, representatives of Amani Africa and the Institute for Security Studies are scheduled to present briefings to the PSC. Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the UN Office to the AU, H.E. Madam Hanna Tetteh may also make statement.

The last time the PSC convened a dedicated session on the issue was at its 595th meeting held in April 2016. However, the Council also convened its 937th session held on 24 July 2020 to discuss with the A3 members as part of the coordinating efforts between the two. At that session, the A3 coordinator briefed the Council on the initiatives taken to

promote and champion African common positions in the UNSC.

As highlighted in the concept note for the session, tomorrow's session serves to take stock of the progresses made and the challenges over the years in respect of the A3 channeling African common positions in the decision making process of the UNSC on matters that are of concern to the continent and explore ways and means of strengthening the coordination and cooperation among the A3 and between them and the PSC with the view to enable them discharge their 'special responsibility' of reflecting African common positions in the UNSC.

The statements from the A3 and the briefings are expected to highlight not only recent experiences of the A3 in representing the position of the AU and in facilitating coordination between the PSC and the UNSC but also emerging good practices in the coordination within the A3 and between the A3 and other role players including the PSC. Some of the practices that will receive mention for further consolidation include organization of joint meetings including Arria Formula meetings, making joint statements, joint press statements and stakeouts and presenting/initiating joint draft resolutions, and, to a limited extent, assuming the role of pen-holding or co-pen holding.

Another issue that is expected to receive attention is how to deal with the dynamics in the UNSC. Though African matters used to be less contentious in the UNSC, both deepening divisions among the P5 and Africa's changing geopolitics affecting how the UNSC deals with African files and importantly the cohesion of the A3. As highlighted in Amani Africa special report on the relationships between the UNSC and the PSC, the 'deepening polarization of members of the P5' and the enormous pressure coming from them African matters is increasingly testing the unity of the A3 and at times, causing split. This is more so in a context where there is discord between sub-regional arrangements (RECs) and the AU (PSC). A good example in this respect is the diverging position taken

by AU and SADC in response to the announcement of the provisional results of the Presidential election in DRC in January 2019, also causing a split between members of the A3 on how the UNSC should respond to the disputed result.

Of a particular interest to the PSC at its tomorrow session is means of strengthening coordination and cooperation between the PSC and the A3. One of the positive steps which needs to be further capitalized is the annual high-level seminar on peace and security in Africa. Convened on annual basis since its inaugural in 2013 at Algiers, the seminar is serving as an important platform for the A3 and PSC members to share experiences and institutional memories, understand and exchange views on peace and security issues in the continent and foster common position. As captured in Amani Africa's fifth special report, it is high time to revamp the 'high-level interest' in the seminar as well as explore ways of follow up to the implementations of the conclusions of the high-level seminars regarding coordination between the A3 and the PSC.

The briefing from the AU Commission is also expected to highlight about the role of the AU Permanent Observation Mission to the UN, in New York and the progresses achieved in terms of discharging its central role in facilitating communication between the A3 and the PSC. The capacity of the office, which is serving as the Secretariat of the A3 and its institutional memory, needs to be strengthened. In this regard, PSC decision during its 478th session to adequately staff the mission with experienced and high-ranking officers and mobilize more funding is long overdue for full implementation.

The PSC is also expected to explore means of enhancing its direct engagement with the A3 through increased regular consultations and the latter's more involvement in its sessions as the Council is expected to provide sufficient support and timely guidance to the A3 in discharging their

responsibilities. The participation of A3 in the PSC sessions would improve A3's capacity in shaping the discussions and decisions of both the PSC and UNSC, which eventually bridges the gap between the two counterparts in Addis Ababa and New York in the maintenance of international peace and security. With the A3 taking part in its meetings, the PSC can scan the dynamics in the UNSC on agenda items under its consideration, at the same time would inform the A3 about its views and positions which they need to reflect in the UNSC.

Two issues are likely to feature in tomorrow's session within the context of increasing the capacity and leverage of A3 in the UNSC: the pen holder system and mobilizing support from other members of the UNSC.

Taking shape around 2010, the P3 have established the 'pen holder system' where they divide the role of drafting UNSC outcome documents among themselves including on African matters. France serves as pen holder for most of the Francophone African issues while US and UK leads on Sudan and Somalia, respectively. The implication of this practice is that the A3 members are marginalized from taking the lead and shape outcome documents meaningfully on matters of concern to the continent.

Despite PSC's call in its 478th session for the A3 members to be given the status of pen holder and co-pen holders, progress remains limited. The PSC is expected to explore further options to enhance the role of the A3 in pen holding or co-pen holding.

Representatives of the A3 are likely to discuss efforts made in mobilizing support from other members of the UNSC. An interesting development in this regard is the alliance created with Saint Vincent and the Grenadines since it took its two-year seat in January 2020, forming the A3+1. The A3 and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines were able to deliver joint statements on several occasions. Building on this experience,

the A3 are expected to broaden the scope of alliance in the future, particularly with the Caribbean group in the UNSC with the aim to amplify African voices in the Council.

The expected outcome is a communique. The PSC is expected to congratulate Kenya for its election as non-permanent member of the UNSC and commend Republic of South Africa as an outgoing member as well as Niger and Tunisia as sitting members of the Council for the role played in articulating, coordinating, promoting and defending African perspectives and common positions in the UNSC. In light of emerging challenges that the division in the UNSC is posing to the role of the A3, the PSC may reiterate its call for the A3 to stick to the decisions and positions of the AU in all circumstances and further strengthen cohesion and coordination among themselves and with the PSC. In this respect, the Council is likely to make reference to the Decision of the Assembly adopted by the 26th Ordinary session held in January 2016 which states the 'special responsibility' of the A3 in reflecting the PSC decisions in the decision making process of the UNSC. In terms of enhancing its coordination and cooperation with the A3, it may urge the AU Commission to take all steps to ensure that the AU Permanent Observer Mission to the UN is fully capacitated and resourced. With regards to boosting the capacity of the A3 in shaping the dynamics in the UNSC, the PSC may commend the efforts of the A3 in reaching out to other members of the Council with the aim to foster a unified position with the A3 and may further encourage them to broaden alliance with other members, notably from the Caribbean group. The Council may also reiterate its call for members of A3 to be given the status of pen holder or co-pen holder on peace and security issues in Africa. The Council may finally look forward to the convening of the upcoming high-level seminar on the peace and security in Africa, which is slated for November according to the indicative annual program of the Council, and encourage A3 and PSC members as well as the AU Permanent Observer Mission to regularize consultations and exchange of

information.