

Discussion on the Impact of Foreign Terrorist Fighters on Peace and Security in Africa

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Tomorrow (20 October) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to hold its 957th session to discuss the impact of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) on Peace and Security in Africa.

After the opening remarks by the Chair of the month, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security Smail Cergui is expected to deliver a statement. The Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) are scheduled to brief the Council. Moreover, Emmanuel Mouya from the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) and Tarik Sharif from the AU Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL) are also expected to brief the Council.

Initiated under the Chair of the PSC for October, Egypt, the agenda of this session focuses on the implications of FTFs on peace and security in Africa and more particularly on the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. The session among other issues envisions discussing mechanisms of identifying and locating FTFs as well as measures to improve the collection and sharing of information and evidence. The session is also expected to address issues related to measures aimed at strengthening relevant prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies and to deliberate on the gender aspect and child rights issues in relation to FTFs.

The AU PSC has addressed the issue of FTFs in Africa at its 749th session held under the theme 'Towards a Comprehensive Approach to Combatting the Transitional Threat of Terrorism in

Africa', which was held at the Heads of State and Government level under Egypt's Chairpersonship in January 2018. The PSC has expressed its concern on the return of FTFs back to the continent. The communiqué issued following the meeting stated the possibilities of FTFs seeking 'refuge with other terrorist groups on the ground'. Thus, it requested 'the AU Commission and partners to continue to assist Member States in building and further strengthening their national capacities'. Moreover, the Council called on its subsidiary body, the Sub-Committee on Countering Terrorism, once operationalized, to prepare in close collaboration with the AUC 'an African watch-list composed of a database of persons, groups and entities involved in terrorist acts, including FTFs, for use by law enforcement, border security, customs, military, and intelligence agencies in addition to AFRIPOL'.

Moreover, the PSC's 812th meeting, held on 23 November 2018, recognized the role of ACSRT, CISSA and the AU Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL), in compiling 'the list of persons, groups and entities involved in terrorist acts, including FTFs'. The Council has also urged the international community 'to share with AU Member States, the lists of persons, groups and entities involved in terrorist acts, including their nationals identified as FTFs'.

Various AUC Chairperson's reports have addressed the issue of FTFs within the broader context of terrorism and violent extremism in the continent. While not addressing the phenomenon of FTFs in detail, the AUC Chairperson's Report on Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa – presented at the 455th meeting of the PSC convened on 2 September 2014 – made reference to the phenomenon. The report identifies the instability in North Africa as one of the factors contributing to the spread of terrorism in Africa. In this regard, it is stressed that North African youths that have been recruited and radicalised constitute a large group of foreign fighters in terrorist groups fighting in Syria and Iraq and anticipates

their return as a security threat not only to the North African region, but also to the whole of Africa.

In a more recent report by the AUC Chairperson on AMISOM and Somalia presented at the 865th session of the PSC in August 2019, references have also been made to FTFs. The report indicates that Al-Shabaab remains a serious threat to security and stability across Somalia given its capacity to continue its recruitment, training and deployment of fighters, both local and foreign.

At the international level, the scale of the phenomenon became apparent and concerning following the international community's observation that terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and ISIL/Da'esh (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant), were attracting an estimated amount of 40,000 individuals from 110 countries who travelled to join them at various territories under their control. FTFs generally impose a threat to peace and security in the State of destination, transit and neighbouring States, and upon their return, they become security threat to their State of origin. Some FTFs also relocate to third States instead of returning to their State of origin, thereby being a risk to peace and security in such States.

African countries including Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Somalia, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia and recently, Mozambique have been particularly affected by the operation of terrorist elements which include FTFs. In the African context, certain factors are closely inter-linked with the phenomenon and require serious attention. Among these, the lack of strict maritime regulatory rules at the continental and sub-regional level is worth mentioning. Weak maritime regulations have highly contributed to terrorism in general and opened the way for free movement of FTFs as well as their criminal activities such as smuggling of goods and people, drug and arms trafficking. In this regard terrorism has been intimately linked with organized crime particularly when there are

natural resources and strategic points such as ports, which can be easily controlled due to government's limited capacity.

Coastal African States with weak maritime governance including Somalia and Mozambique have been particularly vulnerable to these activities. For instance, in Somalia, IS-Somalia continues to import weapons and fighters from IS-Yemen through the northern port town of Qandala. In Mozambique, Ansar al-Sunna coordinated its attacks against government forces by first controlling the north-eastern coast of the country, Cabo Delgado. These trends clearly indicate the need for African States, particularly coastal States, and the AU in general, to strengthen maritime safety and security.

At the level of the UN, the UNSC has adopted various resolutions directly addressing the threats and risks of FTFs. UNSC Resolution 2178(2014) and 2396(2017) focused on halting the flow of FTFs attempting to travel to conflict zones by requesting Member States to strengthen screening procedures including collection and analysis of travel data. It has also made a decision for States to ensure that their domestic laws and regulations establish serious criminal offenses sufficient to provide the ability to prosecute and to penalize their nationals that are directly involved or financially support FTFs.

In addition, the 2015 Madrid Guiding Principles on FTFs and its 2018 Addendum were adopted by UNSC following the UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee's deliberation and identification of principles imperative for guiding States in their efforts to stem the movement of FTFs.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may underline that the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the continent requires addressing root causes of conflict and crisis. It may reiterate its previous calls and urge Member States to strengthen the data collection and analysis capacity in terms of compiling the lists of persons, groups and

entities involved in terrorist acts, including their nationals identified as FTFs. It may urge Member States to increase their capacity in border control and security and to work closely and in coordination with neighbouring countries through information and intelligence sharing. It may also request institutions such as AFRIPOL, CISSA and ACSRT to enhance and support efforts around the development of a database of persons, groups and entities involved in terrorist acts. The conclusions of the meeting are expected to be presented to the Assembly in February 2021 as part of the PSC report.