

Operationalization of the African Standby Force

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Briefing on the ASF

Tomorrow (25 April), the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) will hold a briefing on 'the operationalization of the African Standby Force (ASF)'. The meeting will evaluate the state of readiness of Regional Standby Forces and progress made since the last briefing to the PSC. The meeting is a follow up to the decision of the PSC and Executive Council on regular updating of the PSC on the ASF.

The Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD) is also expected to provide updates to the PSC. The focus of this briefing will be on works done at the level of the AU including in respect to the implementation of the Maputo Strategic Work Plan on the Enhancement of the ASF (2016-2020). The five-year work plan for the ASF highlighted the changing security environment and threats on the continent and outlined the dynamism and changes needed into the design and structure of the ASF to respond to the challenges. The Council will examine the progress made based on the indicators, deliverables and timelines put by the work plan. It is also expected in particular to update the PSC on progress made in elaborating AU-RECs/RMs agreement on decision-making processes on the deployment of the ASF and the launch in January 2018 of the Continental Logistics Base in Cameroon.

In its last session on the ASF held on 21 July 2017, the PSC also anticipated to review the Report of the Commission on the verification, confirmation and validation of pledged capabilities of the ASF that Professor Ibrahim Gambari led. In the light of the discussion on adapting the design and

structure of the ASF with an objective of enhancing its deployment capabilities and mission effectiveness, the briefing session is expected to discuss the updates in this process.

With respect to the RECs/RMs, some member states expressed the need for the RECs/RMs to update the PSC themselves on the level of preparedness of their regional forces. In the Executive Council's Declaration on the 10th Ordinary Meeting of the Specialized Technical Committee on Defense, Safety and Security (STCDSS), RECs/RMs are urged 'to provide regular updates to the AU Peace and Security Council on their Regional Standby Forces and attend PSC sessions as required'. The PSC Secretariat has sent out invitations to the heads of the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs).

The main part of the briefing will be a progress report by the chairs and representatives of the five RECs/RMs. The Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), North African Regional Capability (NARC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) are expected to make presentations on the status of the regional brigades and the training, financing, and mobilization capacities of their respective regional forces. The statements and subsequent exchanges are also expected to cover training and exercises, airlift and mission support capabilities of the regional forces. The difficult issue of command structure and control, and matters related with logistics will also be topics that will feature in the meeting.

Despite regional differences and uneven developments of regional brigades by the regional mechanisms notably NARC, the ASF proved to be a great mechanism to build a permanent infrastructure for standardization, training and mobilization of peacekeeping in Africa. The ECOWAS, EASF and SADC are regions that showed relative progress while central and

northern Africa are significantly lagging.

However, the structure of the force, and its place in the APSA is a matter of ongoing conversation at the PSC. The AU member states are relying on ad-hoc regional coalitions and deployment arrangements and alliances even after the official declaration of the operationalization of the ASF. There are various issues that member states of the PSC would raise in regard to these developments. The first is the relationship of these ad hoc arrangements with the ASF framework. In its January 2018 Declaration on the meeting of the STCDSS, the Executive Council called for the harmonization enhance cooperation with all ad-hoc coalitions, namely, MNJTF, Group of Five Sahel Joint Force and RCILRA.

There is also the issue of African Capacity for Rapid Intervention in Crises (ACIRC). There are member states who see it as an initiative that diverts and distracts the attention, energy, resources and political focus of the continent from the ASF. Although the AU Commission or the RECs/RMs may not be in a position to provide full answer, a second and related issue for discussion is the harmonization of the activities of (ACIRC) with the Framework of the ASF.

Finally, there is also the issue of the mandating and deployment of the ASF for AU peace support operations including the ad hoc coalitions within the framework of the Constitutive Act and the Protocol Establishing the PSC. In this respect, the briefing in the PSC is expected to cover how new initiatives are being alienated with the processes envisaged in AU founding instruments. A recent major development has been the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security and Maman Sidiko, Executive Secretary of the G5 Sahel Secretariat on 25 March 2018.

The expected outcome of the briefing is a communiqué. It is anticipated to give guidance on the follow up to the various

decisions including notably the process of alignment, harmonization and coherence of decision-making and mandating process between AU and RECs/RMs and the finalization of the draft ASF Legal Framework.