

Ministerial Meeting on Terrorism and Violent Extremism

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23 September 2022

Tomorrow (23 September), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1107th meeting which will be a ministerial session on “strengthening regional organizations for the maintenance of peace and security in Africa: preventing and fighting terrorism and violent extremism in the continent”. The session is expected to take place in a hybrid format, with the in-person meeting to be held in New York.

The session is expected to have an open and closed segment. In the first, open segment, Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Republic of Ghana is expected to deliver opening statement as the Chairperson of the PSC for the month of September 2022. This will be followed with remarks by Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU Commission and a statement by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) Office of Counter-Terrorism. In the second, closed segment, Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) is expected to deliver a presentation on “the impetus of a robust Continental Early Warning System in the context of implementing the May 2022 Malabo Declaration to effectively Counter Terrorism”. This will be followed by interventions from PSC member States and Executive Secretaries/Commissioners of the Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs).

While Council decided to institutionalise ‘preventing and

combating terrorism and violent extremism' as a standing annual agenda item at its 957th session of 20 October 2020, the theme has featured more regularly on the agenda of the PSC over the years since at least as far back as 2010. The regularity and the level at which this item is dealt with by the PSC has shown notable rise in recent years. In 2021, Council dedicated three ministerial sessions, demonstrating the increasing recognition of the growing threat that terrorism has come to pose for increasing number of AU member states. Indeed, the 'Report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on Continental Efforts in Preventing and Combating of Terrorism in Africa' to the PSC at its 1040th ministerial session highlighted the very worrying spike in attacks and in the spread of terrorism and violent extremism as well as emerging trends in the manifestation of terrorism on the continent.

In terms of the scale of increase in the threat of terrorism, the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) reported that Africa has witnessed a 400% and 237% rises in attacks and deaths respectively between 2012 and 2020. As pointed out in Amani Africa's [special report](#), the trend in the growing threat of terrorism witnessed in recent years and the data from the 2022 Global Terrorism Index indicate that Africa has become the epicentre of global terrorism. The region accounts for about 50% of global deaths due to terrorism while four of the ten countries globally to have experienced increase in deaths from terrorism in 2021 are also in Africa, namely Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali and Niger.

The geographic expansion of the threat of terrorism also continues to pose a serious concern. Demonstrating the expansion and spread of terrorism in the continent, Ghana, the only country along the Gulf of Guinea which has for long remained least affected by terrorism, is now feared to be target of the expansion of terrorism from the Sahel to the

littoral states of West Africa. Other coastal west African States are already experiencing attacks as the terrorist groups push south wards from the Sahel, particularly via Burkina Faso. For instance, on 11 May, Togo experienced its first deadly jihadist attack perpetrated by the Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in a town along Togo's border with Burkina Faso, which killed 8 and wounded 13 Togolese soldiers. Côte d'Ivoire has also been experiencing recurrent cross-border attacks from neighbouring Burkina Faso perpetrated by armed groups linked to Al-Qaida. In addition to its expansion to littoral States of west Africa, the threat of terrorism has also spread to other sub-regions of the continent including the Great Lakes Region, East Africa and Southern Africa.

The terrorism menace in Africa has far reaching social, economic and political consequences that go beyond the security realm. During the past few years, it became a major factor behind the occurrence of military coups. This has been particularly the case in countries such as Mali and Burkina Faso. The humanitarian toll from terrorist attacks also continues to grow. According to the ACSRT's 2022 Mid-Year Africa Terrorism Trends Analysis, 433 out of the 699 terrorist attacks perpetrated during the first half of 2022 were launched against civilians and out of the 5,412 deaths that were recorded during the period, 3,517 were civilian deaths. In some of the most affected countries such as Burkina Faso, the displacement rate has continued to show an unabating increase. According to the UN, over 19,000 Burkinabe citizens have fled into Côte d'Ivoire in 2021 alone, due to extremist attacks. This has been a 50% increase as compared to the previous year of 2020. In 2022, the situation has shown further deterioration with the multiplication of violent attacks in the country driving more people to flee between January and July 2022 than during the entire year of 2021. Across the wider Sahel region extending over Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, over 4.8 million people are

estimated by the UN to have fled their homes due to violence including jihadist attacks and communal conflicts. In northern Mozambique, after a respite in violence between mid-July to late August, attacks have resumed displacing over 38,000 people according to the latest data.

The threat of terrorism in Africa is expanding at an alarming rate not because the investment for fighting against it and in counter terrorism operation is lacking. Indeed, indications are that the threat is expanding at an exponential rate despite the increase in counter terrorism instruments. As the AU Commission Chairperson noted in his address to the AU summit held in Malabo at the end of May, from Somalia to the Sahel and Mozambique the AU and regional bodies deployed various military operations. Analysis of the policy decisions of the AU both at the level of the AU Assembly and that of the PSC show that between 2010 and 2022, some nine hard security mechanisms have been initiated to deal with terrorism hotspots across the continent. The AU has also established key institutions such as the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL) and ACSRT. There has also been notable increase since 2015 in the deployment of various international multilateral and bilateral security instruments in the Sahel.

As Amani Africa's [special report](#) highlighted and the AUC Chairperson admitted, the threat of terrorism continues to grow despite the increase in the investment in and the use of these and other hard security tools including border control, intelligence exchange, and criminal justice. One explanation, AUC Chair highlighted in his address, is the lack of adequate support to make the use of these hard security instruments effective. Indeed, as Amani Africa's report also admits, there are gaps that limit the effectiveness of the hard security instruments that are deployed for countering terrorism on the continent. As such policy interventions, including continental and international support instruments, have to be designed and geared towards facilitating the building of not just the

fighting capacity of national forces but also importantly their legitimacy and professionalism, including both in terms of strict adherence to human rights and international humanitarian law standards and protection of civilians and their skills and mindsets in assisting local communities in finding ways and means of addressing the issues facing them.

However, it would be of interest for the PSC to take note of the existence of more than enough evidence both from elsewhere in the world and most importantly from the recent experiences from Somalia to the Sahel that no amount of force irrespective of its effectiveness would constitute a recipe for success against terrorism. Amani Africa's [special report](#), challenged both the diagnosis of and the policy response measures to the threat of terrorism in Africa. The dominant view about terrorism in Africa is based on a misdiagnosis of the nature of the phenomenon. There are two aspects to the misdiagnosis. The first is that it considers groups identified as terrorists to be the core of the problem. Second, it also erroneously states that these groups are mainly ideologically driven by global jihad. The report showed that terrorist groups, rather than being the core of the problem, are the symptom of the main problem. As our report put it, 'the political and socio-economic governance pathologies' and the grievances and vulnerabilities that such pathologies produce on the part of affected communities are the core conditions that open the space for the emergence and growth of terrorist groups.

These two aspects of the misdiagnosis also led to faulty policy responses. Rather than focusing on approaches that prioritize addressing 'the political and socio-economic pathologies', the responses focused on eliminating the symptom of the problem. As such, both the policy discourse on and the policy tools often deployed in response to terrorism are predominantly centred around the use of hard security instruments (namely combat operations, law enforcement measures, border control, intelligence cooperation and sharing

etc). 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 instruments of counter terrorism. This necessitates that AU and RECs/RMs expand their capacity and develop relevant instruments for initiating and supporting efforts of local communities both for deradicalization, reconciliation, inter-communal dialogue and for implementing measures for addressing the humanitarian and socio-economic needs of affected populations. Not any less important is the role of AU and RECs in supporting the development of governance and development oriented political strategy backed by full commitment of national actors as the basis for countering terrorism. In terms of the mobilization and deployment of resources as well, the AU and RECs/RMs need also to build the capacity to develop strategies for channelling resources for addressing the underlying conditions that facilitate the emergence of terrorism.

In terms of the use of AU and RECs instruments, it is also critical for the PSC that the AU and RECs/RMs bring to the centre their policy response, and add to the security-oriented instruments usually referred to in their policy decisions (such as the ACSRT, the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) and AFRIPOL as well as the PSC Subcommittee on Terrorism), their governance and development structures. This means that RECs/RMs and the AU need to harness and bring to the centre of counter terrorism the role of African Governance Architecture (AGA), ACHPR, APRM, the Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), the African Development Bank etc. Similarly, the AU and RECs can also play a role in initiating and delivering targeted technical support to national security institutions with a

focus on enhancing their compliance with human rights and humanitarian laws and on the use by these security institutions of **civilian counter terrorism measures** including community dialogue, building or rebuilding of local or community governance structures, rehabilitation of the livelihood of communities affected by or vulnerable to violent extremism and terrorism and in facilitating humanitarian assistance and psychosocial support.

Among the key decisions of the Malabo Summit was the development of a comprehensive Continental Strategic Plan of Action on countering terrorism in Africa. Considering the lessons from the experiences thus far, it is of particular significance for tomorrow's ministerial meeting of the PSC to ensure that the strategic plan is premised on the primacy of politics and the need to invest as much in building and mobilizing relevant policy intervention tools and resources for addressing the governance and socio-economic deficits underlying the emergence and expansion of terrorism as in sustaining the military, rule of law, intelligence instruments for countering terrorism. Such a balanced approach would position the AU and RECs/RMs engagement to be more effective and successful.

The outcome of tomorrow's session is expected to be a Communiqué. Council is expected to express grave concern over the growing expansion of terrorism and violent extremism in the continent. It is also expected to underscore the importance of strengthening capacity of and horizontal collaborations among various RECs/RMs in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. Apart from highlighting the importance of upscaling the role of RECs in mobilizing coordination among affected countries in responding to the threat of terrorism, the PSC may underscore the importance of AU and RECs focusing their attention on developing and deploying tools for addressing the governance and development deficits that terrorist groups take advantage of. It may also

emphasise the need to enhance collaborations among ad-hoc counterterrorism coalitions, RECs/RMs and relevant AU organs. Council may further highlight the importance of developing a strategy for coordination of efforts between the AU and various RECs/RMs on maintenance of peace and security. It may also follow up on the status of implementation of the decisions of the 16th Extraordinary Summit of the AU Assembly conducted in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, on 28 May 2022, particularly on the establishment of the Ministerial Committee on Counter Terrorism and the development of a comprehensive Continental Strategic Plan of Action on countering terrorism in Africa. Council may also take note of the centrality of governance and development deficits as the cause and driver of the growing threat of terrorism and emphasise the importance of advancing the use of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and other AU governance and development instruments and mechanisms in responding to the threat of terrorism in the continent.