

Consideration of the MNJTF Mandate Renewal

Automatic Heading TextDate | 28 November, 2019

Tomorrow (28 November) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to hold a session on the security situation in the Lake Chad Basin region and to consider the mandate renewal of the Multi- National Joint Task Force (MNJTF).

The representative of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) is expected to brief the Council. LCBC member states as well as Benin are also expected to deliver their statements. The AU Department of Peace and Security (PSD) and UN0AU representative may also make an intervention.

It is to be recalled that the PSC at its 816th session has renewed the mandate of the MNJTF for 12 month effective from 31 January 2019. The communique LCBC requested the LCBC Secretariat to provide biannual briefing on the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization. It is to be recalled that the LCBC briefed the PSC at its 838th session in April 2019 and the Council called for a 'comprehensive and rapid implementation of the Regional Strategy'. As a follow up to this, it is also expected that the LCBC presents an update on the implementation of the strategy. The Strategy, drawn up with the support of the AU PSD as part of post conflict reconstruction and development work, was adopted by the LCBC member states on 30 August 2018 and later on 5 December 2018 by the PSC.

It is expected that the briefing is to provide highlights of the activities that were undertaken since the last PSC session on the matter. The LCBC briefing may include the outcome of the second meeting of the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum

held in Niamey, from 17-18 July 2019. The meeting, which brought together eight regions of the Lake Chad Basin countries affected by Boko Haram primarily aimed at enhancing cross-border cooperation and the implementation of the Regional Strategy. One of the key outcomes was the pledge made by donors where they committed around 60 million USD to the establishment of a stabilization facility that will coordinate the implementation of the Strategy. The PSC may request an update regarding the establishment of the facility as well as the practical measures taken in implementing the Strategy.

In accelerating the implementation of the Regional Strategy, the PSC may also recall its previous decision, which tasked the AU Commission to support the LCBC secretariat to 'develop a clear roadmap for the implementation of the strategy', a resource mobilization strategy and the convening of a solidarity conference under the Africa Solidarity Initiative. The statement by the PSD may provide details on the support provided and on the remaining tasks.

The briefing may make reference to the 2020-2024 eight-point action plan in combatting and eradicating terrorism adopted at the ECOWAS extraordinary summit in Ouagadougou on 14 September 2019. It is expected that the mandate renewal will consider the priority areas that were identified by the ECOWAS meeting which range from coordination, training, financing and dialogue. The action plan, which is expected to serve as resource mobilization tool is expected to be finalized and adopted at the ECOWAS ordinary session on 21 December 2019. The framework may also offer guidance for the PSC in assessing not only the military operation of the MNJTF but also in examining the deliverables against the comprehensive set priority areas in the Regional Strategy.

The MNJTF has recorded operational successes in many of the offensives undertaken in the region including the liberation of occupied territories and in reducing the capabilities of the group. But various factors continue to enable

proliferation of terrorist groups in the wider region. It is reported that new members coming from Libya and Syria have joined the ranks of terrorist groups in the region including North East Nigeria.

Despite the success the MNJTF registered, the insurgency remains to be capable of orchestrating attacks and providing support for other groups. The UN Secretary General Report on West Africa and the Sahel indicates that in the first six months of 2019, 'despite counter-terrorism efforts, the "Islamic State West Africa Province" faction of Boko Haram expanded its area of operations'. The armed group continued to use suicide bombers against civilians and security and defence forces. Between January and April alone 189 terrorist attacks took place in the northern states of Nigeria, resulting in 453 deaths and 201 kidnappings.

In a dangerous development, the group has increased the use of suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (IED) against national security forces and the MNJTF in the countries of the Lake Chad region. In the past six-month there has also been renewed attacks on army deployments and civilians.

It is also critical for tomorrow's session to not only highlight the military efforts that aim at addressing immediate security concerns but also to ensure that there is adequate deliberation on addressing root causes and restoring sustainable peace, which are key elements identified in the Regional Stabilization Strategy. Indeed, the presidential statement of the 8592nd meeting of the UN Security Council, held on 7 August 2019, underlined 'the need for security efforts to be aligned with political objectives, to enable the restoration of civilian security, the establishment of effective governance to deliver essential services, and the revival of local economies to provide livelihood opportunities for surging youth populations'. These are also key elements identified in the Regional Strategy. The upsurge of terrorist

groups in the region have added urgency to the imperative of enhancing national ownership and prioritizing political strategies, notably active and sustained engagement of national leaders in the affected areas and strengthening state institutions and bolstering the legitimacy of local structures of government in those areas and others susceptible to penetration of terrorist groups.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may commend the LCBC member states and Benin in their counter-terrorism efforts. It may welcome the outcome of the meeting of the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum on the implementation of the Regional Strategy. It may call for increased efforts in realizing the objectives of the Strategy. It may task the AUC to support member states in developing implementation tools to monitor and track progress by also aligning it with the 2020-2024 ECOWAS counter-terrorism action plan. It may also reiterate the need for the convening of a solidarity conference. The PSC could also express concern on the volatile security situation in the region despite the sustained efforts of the MNJTF and may in this regard urge the prioritization of political processes that facilitate the enhancement of legitimate structures of governance at the local levels and the delivery of social services. Considering the political and security developments in the region, it may renew the mandate of the force for another 12 months.