

PSC Heads of State and Government session on Libya and the Sahel

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Tomorrow (8 February) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene a meeting at the Heads of State and Government level on the situations in Libya and the Sahel. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat and the Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Cergui, are expected to brief the Council. President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, is expected to deliver a statement on behalf of the A3. Also expected to deliver a statement is President of Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso, the Chair of the AU High Level Ad Hoc Committee on Libya.

The fighting in Libya that intensified following the launch of an offensive by the opposition militia Libyan National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar against the internationally recognized Tripoli based Government of National Accord (GNA), led by Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj has worsened an already dire security situation in the country. Fragmentation of the country among warring factions has increased. Flow of weapons has spiked despite a UN Security Council arms embargo. Various reports show that over 218 civilians have been killed and over 289 civilians have been injured due to the ongoing conflict from attacks that use indiscriminate weaponry, being directly targeted, or being casualties to Explosive Remnants of War in conflict-affected areas including Tripoli and Murzuq. As a result of the renewed fighting, 2019 represented the highest level of displacement since 2014-2015, with a 305 per cent increase in new displacement from 2018.

Further compounding the situation and even making the resolution of the conflict in Libya nearly impossible is the intensification of regional and global rivalry and proxy war on Libya. Over the years, the Libyan conflict has increasingly transformed into a proxy war where a number of countries in the region and global powers have made the country a theatre for advancing their competing political, ideological and economic interests in the country by sending financial, political and military support for the warring parties in Libya.

On the one hand Al-Sarraj's administration is recognized and backed by the UN and other actors including the US, Turkey, Italy and Qatar. While Egypt and UAE are aiming at curbing the spread of GNA's faction affiliated with Muslim Brotherhood, Qatar and Turkey are supporters. On the hand Russia, France, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Jordan have provided support to Haftar. Mercenaries, which are considered to be affiliated with Russia, are involved in the fighting in support of the LNA. The rivalry over the control for the country's oil reserves among warring parties has also exacerbated the dire security situation. On 8 January, the two major actors in the conflict Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan initiated a truce in Libya commencing on 12 January. Although an attempt was made to bring both Haftar and al-Sarraj together to sign the ceasefire, this was not successful given that Haftar left Moscow without signing the agreement.

On 19 January, a high-level conference was convened in Berlin in an attempt to contain the heavy external interference in Libya. The Berlin Conference, in which the AU Commission Chairperson and the Foreign Minister of Congo participated, ended with the conference conclusions articulating the six baskets including: ceasefire, arms embargo, political process, security, economic and financial, international humanitarian law and human rights law matters. As part of the follow up

process Serraj and Haftar have each nominated five representatives to be part of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission, which was proposed by UN Support Mission to Libya (UNSMIL) towards the operationalization of the conclusions. In the midst of this highly complex external actors' involvement, the AU continues to urge for restraint of foreign powers and for a stronger African led political process. The AU PSC during its ministerial meeting held on 27 September 2019, has stressed the need 'for an effective and urgent involvement of the AU in the search for a lasting political solution to the crisis in Libya'. The Council also supported and reiterated the decision of the AU High Level Committee on Libya, taken at its meeting of 8 July 2019, on the appointment of a joint African Union/United Nations Envoy for Libya towards ensuring a more robust, coordinated and AU led peace process. Tomorrow's session may further reiterate the importance of AU's role in resolving the crisis. The session also follows the recently concluded 8th meeting of the AU High Level Ad Hoc Committee on Libya, held in Brazzaville, on 30 January. Three African Heads of State including the Chair of the Committee and the host of the meeting President Denis Sassou Nguesso, Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti, Chairperson of the PSC for February, and Mohamed Ould Ghazouani of Mauritania were in attendance. The committee decided to convene an inter-Libyan Reconciliation Conference in consultation

with Libyan parties, neighbouring countries and the United Nations. The committee condemned the continued external interference in Libya, although commitments were made during the Berlin conference, which was held ten days earlier.

Despite the effort by Germany in bringing the various stakeholders, there are still sharp divisions. Although Germany urged for a UNSC resolution supporting the outcome of the Berlin conference, the divergent position within UNSC, particularly between the US and Russia prevented the adoption

of a binding document. Moreover, the UNSMIL in a statement released on 25 January indicated the continuation of 'transfer of foreign fighters, weapons, ammunition and advanced systems to the parties by member states, including several who participated in the Berlin Conference'.

The situation in the Sahel

The second agenda item that is expected to be discussed is the situation in the Sahel. Perhaps more than any other part of the continent, where the sound of the guns has become loudest is the violence region of the Sahel. The number of violent incidents in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger has increased sharply. In geographic scope as well, the violence in the Sahel has during 2019 spread across the region. As the UN Chief Representative for West Africa said in a briefing to the UN Security Council on 8 January 2020, this geographic expansion of terrorist attacks 'is increasingly threatening West African coastal States'. The other layer of violence that has also become recurrent and increasingly lethal in the region is inter-communal clashes. One of the key aspects to this security threat is the adverse effect of climate change and the failure of governments to put in place mitigating measures, thereby creating a situation for rivalry over increasingly depleting scarce resources to erupt into violent conflicts. Over the course of 2019, fighting and terrorist attacks in Mali forced more than 80,000 people flee their homes. Burkina Faso witnessed the most surge in violence in 2019, the number of people displaced increased by tenfold to over 560,000, with the figure predicted to skyrocket to 900,000 people by April 2020. Across the three affected countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, since the start of 2019, more than 670,000 children have been forced to flee their homes. According to UNICEF, between April 2017 and December 2019, the three countries witnessed a six-fold increase in school closures due to violence.

The instability in Libya has contributed to the deteriorating

security situation in the Sahel and the Lake Chad region. The ECOWAS extra-ordinary Summit held on 14 September 2019 has also underlined the effect of the crisis in Libya in the region by labelling it as the 'hotbed for terrorism in West Africa'. Towards preventing and combatting terrorism the Summit adopted a priority action plan for 2020-2024 on selected priority areas.

In addition to the activities of terrorist groups in the region, the PSC may also discuss on the kind of peace and security tools required to effectively address the crisis in the Sahel beyond and above the use of conventional military response and peacekeeping response, which has faltered to deliver contain the situation. President Macron and the G5 Sahel Heads of the State held a meeting in Pau on 13 January. While they agreed on "new political, strategic and operational framework" that is anchored in four pillars: the fight against terrorism, capacity building for states forces in the region, restoring state authority and development assistance, much of the focus remains on reinforcing military responses with France announcing to increase its military presence in the Sahel by adding 600 troops to its existing 4500 in Mali and the four other countries in the region.

Such security heavy approaches that have been dominant delivered little result. If anything, such approaches have worsened the situation. There is a need for national actors of affected countries and regional bodies to assume leading responsibility and foregrounding political and governance efforts including by addressing the lacklustre implementation of the 2015 peace agreement in Mali. The PSC may recall its previous 863rd session on the Sahel, which decided to undertake a joint field mission with the European Union Political and Security Committee (EUPSC), to assess the situation and to provide support. In order to provide political and diplomatic support to countries in the region particularly in light of the grave security situation endured

by the countries and to assess the presence of various actors the PSC may consider undertaking a mission to the Sahel region. This may also be timely if it takes place ahead of the expiry of the G5 mandate in April 2020. The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may reiterate its concern over the deteriorating security situation in Libya and its conviction that political process, rather than armed fighting, is the only solution to the conflict. It may propose based on its longstanding plan the establishment of truce and ceasefire and an AU led ceasefire monitoring mechanism based on the African Standby Force. The PSC may welcome the outcome of the Brazzaville meeting of the High-Level Committee on Libya and the planned inter-Libyan reconciliation forum.

In order to address the external rivalry aggravating the crisis, it may call on the UNSC to assume its responsibilities by enforcing the arms embargo as called for in the outcome of the Berlin Conference. Apart from reiterating the appointment of an AU-UN Envoy on Libya for elevating the role of the AU and pursuing these policy objectives, the PSC may call for the AU to be a coconvener of the international follow up committee on Libya.

On the Sahel the PSC may note that response to the crisis in the Sahel should not be limited to military operations and may call on members states in the region to foster political dialogue and negotiation as means to reach a lasting peace in the region. It may also welcome the action plan adopted during the Extraordinary Summit of ECOWAS on combating and eradicating terrorism. Given the dire humanitarian crisis unfolding in the region, the PSC may call for the convening by the AU of a high-level conference on the humanitarian situation.