

PSC Meeting on Mali/Sahel

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Tomorrow 23 March 2018, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to consider the situation in Mali and the Sahel. The Council will receive the report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Mali and the Sahel. The AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel and Head of the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL), former Burundian President Pierre Buyoya will brief the Council on the political and security situation in Mali and the Sahel region. Representatives of the G5 Sahel member states, the United Nations, the European Union and the Africa 3 members of the Security Council will also make statements.

The session will consider the security situation in Mali and implementation of the Algiers peace Accord and recent security developments in the Sahel region. As part of the renewal of the mandate of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, the Council will also consider developments made towards the operationalization of the Joint Force.

On the situation in Mali

Despite progress being made with the 2015 Algiers Accord For peace and Reconciliation in Mali, the delay in the implementation of some key aspects of the Accord remains to be a significant concern for the AU. In the report to the AU Assembly in January 2018, the PSC identified differences of opinion among the stakeholders as the main factor for delays in implementing the agreement. As part of the implementation effort, the Mediation and the Follow-up Committee of the Agreement (CSA), the main follow-up mechanism to the 2015Algiers Peace Accord, designated the Carter Center as the independent observer responsible for overseeing the implementation of the peace agreement. Following the meeting of the CSA in December 2017, an agreement has been reached in

the determination of the criteria and quotas for the integration of ex-combatants into the new Malian army subject to validation by the National Council for Security Sector Reform (CNRSS). Only limited progress has been made in terms of the other critical areas of the agreement, namely establishment of transitional regional authorities in Northern Mali, decentralization, the operationalization of the Operational Coordinating Mechanism (MOC) and the process for the integration of ex-combatants into Malian army and the demobilization and reintegration of others into society. The PSC session will examine progress made and efforts required to remove the obstacles.

The regional, local and communal elections scheduled for April 2018 is expected to be another matter of immediate importance during tomorrow's PSC meeting. It is to be recalled that the elections were postponed from the initial schedule of December 2017 due to concerns over the weak security situation in northern Mali, the delay in the operationalization of the interim authorities, the status of refugees and the non-finalization of review of the Code of local Communities and the Law on the Free Administration of Territorial authorities. Despite expression of agreement by the parties to finalize discussions on conditions for the organization of peaceful and credible elections scheduled for next month including specifically in relation to the issues that caused the delay, the progress from these discussions remains unclear. In this regard, PSC members would be interested to know whether the necessary preparations for holding the April elections would be finalized timely and how the AU could help in this regard. Another separate but related issue that may feature in tomorrow's meeting is how the elections in April will affect the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for July 2018.

The security situation in the wider Sahel region

Mali and the region remain unstable and suffer from the

sporadic attacks by the numerous armed groups active in the region, which take advantage of porous borders and ungoverned territories. The notorious Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and others including smaller groups like al- Murabitoun and Ansar ed-Dine, continue to stage asymmetric attacks across the region.

There is no sign of improvement to the gravity of the security threat that the presence of these various armed terrorist groups and organized criminal networks pose to the region. Apart from criminal activities including trafficking in weapons and migrants, the groups are involved in targeting of civilians and humanitarian organizations, bombings of hotels and restaurants in capital cities of the countries of the region, ambushes on military bases and personnel including those of the French Operation Barkhane and UN's MINUSMA. According to the UN, with close to 150 deaths since 2013, its peacekeeping mission in Mali, MINUSMA has become the deadliest UN peacekeeping mission in its history.

It would be recalled that the ambush that took place on 4 October 2017, in Tongo Tongo, in Niger, resulted in the loss of dozen of Nigerien and American soldiers. The latest such attack took place in Burkina Faso and Niger. On 2 March the al-Qaeda affiliated Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM) orchestrated an unprecedented attack in Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou daringly targeting the army headquarters and the French Embassy. In this attack that directly challenged the center of power 30 people lost their lives and 85 others were wounded. The same group also took responsibility for the February 21 attack near the border with Niger, which killed 2 French soldiers and left a third injured. A clash on 19 March 2018 between the Fulani and Dogon communities in central Mali further highlights the insecurity adding an inter-communal dimension.

The G5 Sahel Joint Force

In 2017, the countries of the region making up the G5 Sahel (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania) established a Joint Force with the aim of neutralizing the rising security threat that these groups pose. While condemning the recent attack in Ouagadougou, the AU Commission Chairperson Mussa Faki Mahamat underscored 'the urgency of a more sustained international action in support of the efforts of the countries of the region, particularly through the G5 Sahel Joint Force'. The G5 Joint Force is envisaged to work alongside the 4,000 French troops deployed in the region since 2013, and the MINUSMA mission which commands 12,000 peacekeepers.

The PSC mandated the deployment of the Joint Force for an initial period of one year in the communiqué of its 679th meeting of April 2017. In authorizing the deployment of the Force, the PSC envisaged that the 5000 strong Force would comprise not only military but also police and civilian components. Apart from the Force headquarters, the Joint Force is organized in three sectors: Western (Mauritania and Mali), Central (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso) and Eastern (Chad and Niger).

In terms of the operationalization of the Force, the Force headquarters was set up in Sévaré, Mali at the end of 2017. On 31 October 2017, the Force undertook its first cross border operation, 'Hawbi', in the central sector involving Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. It has since undertaken its second operation in the same sector. Given the plan for the Force to achieve its full operationalization during this month, this session would review the progress made to this end. Two areas would in particular be of interest to the PSC, namely the establishment of the command and organizational structures of the Force and the provision of support including funding of the Joint Mission.

With respect to the command and organizational set up of the Joint Force, progress was reported in the establishment of Central Command Post of the Force. In this session, PSC is expected to hear about the full operationalization of the Central Command Post and its coordination with and setting up of sectors' command. Another area of interest is the mechanism required for ensuring coordination between the Joint Force and the various other regional and international operations in the Sahel, and with other Sahel countries outside of the G5, notably Algeria.

The PSC communiqué authorizing the Force stipulated the need for the participation of civilian capacity particularly with focus on ensuring compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL). Similarly, the UN Security Council Resolution 2391 (2017) requires the G5 countries and the Joint Force not only to take steps for avoiding civilian harm and follow due process in handling terrorist suspects including non-nationals but also to put in place a robust human rights and IHL compliance framework. As the experience of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has attested, the presence of civilian capacity with focus on protection of civilians is critical particularly in terms of avoiding the pitfalls that the planning and conducting military operations face with respect to civilian protection. Given the lessons from its various missions including AMISOM, it would be fitting for the AU to take active role in the establishment of the necessary civilian structures and tools for the proper integration of human rights and IHL in the processes and operations of G5 Sahel Joint Force.

In terms of the support required for the Joint Force, it is estimated that the annual cost of the Force is close to \$500 million. While each of the members of the G5 pledged \$10 million, the EU has increased its contribution from the initial \$61 million to 143 million during the 23 February 2018 pledging conference that the AU, G5 Sahel and the EU jointly

convened in Brussels with the participation of 30 leaders. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have pledged \$ 100 million and \$30 million respectively, with an additional \$60 million coming from the United States. About \$500 million have been pledged during the conference. In this regard, issues of interest for the PSC include the operationalization of the mechanism for the disbursement of international financial support and, as AU Commission Chairperson observed, how speedily these pledges will be felt on the ground. In terms of transparent management and relatively efficient utilization of the funds as well.

In reviewing the steps taken in the implementation of PSC's communiqué of 13 April 2017, another interesting development has been the resolution that the UNSC adopted on 8 December 2017 (2391). Consistent with the PSC communiqué, resolution 2391 adopted the provision of operational and logistical support to G5 Sahel Joint Force through MINUSMA, including medical and casualty evacuation capabilities, access to life support consumables, and engineering support. For Niger, it expects the PSC to call on partners to provide logistical support and speed up the delivery of the pledged funds.

While welcoming the contributions from partners, the council members are expected to discuss the leadership role that the members of the G5 in collaboration with the AU play for the initiative and the operations. Earlier meetings highlighted that the intervention by foreign partners should be 'a support based on requirements expressed by members of the G5 Sahel'. A major area of interest for the PSC is the level of involvement of the AU in the implementation of the G5 Sahel Task Force including in putting in place mechanisms for facilitating support for the Force and its reporting on the elements of PSC decisions mandating the Force. Some of the members of the PSC like Algeria could emphasize the importance of a political strategy on which security measures should be anchored. The primacy of the political could not be emphasized enough.

Experience in Africa and elsewhere in the world has shown that a military approach on its own could not be a recipe for success.

Algeria, which will attend the meeting both as PSC member and in its capacity as chair of the Monitoring Committee of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali would be interested to know where things stand in terms of follow up on the 13 April 2017 communiqué of the PSC. This include cooperation with Sahel countries that are not members of the G5 Sahel within the framework of the implementation plan of the concept of operations of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. In this respect, during the visit of the AU Commission Chairperson to Algeria from 10 to 12 March, discussions with Algeria underscored the need for reviving the Nouakchott Process on Enhancing Security Cooperation in the Sahelo-Saharan Region and ensure an effective coordination between the various initiatives underway in the Sahel region. Chairperson Faki told Algerian authorities AU's plan for convening, in Nouakchott, a meeting, at the end of the month, on the Sahel for promoting synergy between the various initiatives on the Sahel.

The PSC is expected to adopt a communiqué renewing the mandate of the G5 Sahel Joint Force for another 12 month period and identifying various areas for AU follow up and action including in relation to the elections in Mali and the full operationalization of the G5 Sahel Force.