

Session on the Common African Position on the Financing of AU led Peace Support Operations through UN Assessed Contributions

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Tomorrow (21 July) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to hold a session on the common African Position on the Financing of AU led peace support operations through UN assessed contributions. The Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye is expected to brief the council on the progress and state of development of the common position.

The AU Assembly in its decision of its 14th extraordinary summit requested the PSC to articulate a common African position on financing peace support operations in Africa, to guide the African Members of the UN Security Council (A3) in championing and mobilizing support within the UNSC for adoption of a resolution that will enable Africa to access UN assessed contribution for peace support operations in the Continent.

It is also to be recalled that the PSC at its 881st session held in September 2019 took a view that 'a better articulated and African owned common position' before a draft resolution on financing of AU peace operations through UN assessed contributions is tabled for consideration by the UN Security Council (UNSC). This decision was taken against the background of issues that emerged as the A3 members of the UNSC were seeking during 2018 and 2019 to secure a UNSC resolution

authorizing in principle under agreed upon conditions the use of UN assessed contributions for AU led UNSC authorized peace support operations on a case-by-case basis.

The A3 spearheaded by Ethiopia initiated a draft resolution on financing to be adopted in December 2018 under the Cote d'Ivoire Presidency of the Security Council. However, the US threatened to Veto the resolution. Following the introduction of a so-called compromise text proposed by France to accommodate the US, the vote on the A3 draft resolution was postponed (Please refer to the Amani insight on this issue). South Africa, who initially brought the issue of financing to the Security Council in its previous membership, made the issue one of the priorities of its tenure during 2019-2020. After holding consultations on the matter including a visit by the Permanent Representatives of the A3 to Washington, D.C. to engage with the United States, including the Congress, White House and the Department of State, South Africa introduced a new and slightly updated text from the initial A3 draft and the so-called compromise draft.

When the PSC finally reviewed the matter, it felt that the latest updated draft did not adequately reflect AU interests. The PSC opted for deferring the consideration of the draft text by the UNSC pending the holding of adequate consultation at the level of the AU leading towards a common position. This aims at providing greater clarity on various issues, including on the implementation of the 75/25 formula and on the operationalization of the AU Peace Fund and its role for burden sharing. The common African position elaborated by the Commission is expected to explain some of these issues in order to ensure greater understanding and consensus within the AU and help the discussion in the UNSC move forward.

During tomorrow's session Commissioner for PAPS, Adeoye, who revived the process for the adoption of the common position, is expected to provide update to the PSC on steps taken towards the elaboration of the common position and the

orientation of the common position that will be the basis for resuscitating the discussion on A3 sponsored resolution on financing AU peace operation through UN assessed contributions. The common position is expected to take stock of and build on the various efforts undertaken both at the level of the UN and the AU.

It is worth noting that the issue of predictable and reliable financing has been one of the longstanding subjects in the AU-UN relationships on peace and security in Africa. In 2008, the UN Panel led by former Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi on the subject recommended in its report the use of United Nations-assessed funding to support United Nations- authorized African Union peacekeeping operations for a period of no longer than six months. This was further reinforced by the UN's 2015 High Level International Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) Report, which recommended the use of United Nations-assessed contributions on a case-by-case basis to support Security Council-authorized African Union peace support operations including the costs associated with deployed uniformed personnel to complement funding from the AU and/or African Member States.

On the part of the AU, the Policy Organs had adopted milestone decisions in 2015 and 2016 on financing of the AU and the revitalization of the AU Peace Fund. Accordingly, the A3 were called upon to champion the financing of AU led peace support operations. This paved the way for the adoption of resolution 2320 (2016), facilitated by Senegal, which stressed 'the need to enhance the predictability, sustainability and flexibility of financing for African Union-led peace support operations authorized by the Security Council.' The subsequent resolution 2378 (2017), whose adoption was facilitated by Ethiopia, expressed the UNSC's intention to consider partially funding AU-led peace support operations authorized by the Council through UN-assessed contributions 'on a case-by-case basis.'

One of the factors for the delay in adopting the common

position related to the factors that impeded progress in the UNSC. In 2018, Cote D'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia proposed a joint draft resolution which tried to secure a clear commitment from the Council to decide in principle to finance AU led peace support operations. The draft text had received wider support within the UNSC and the broader UN membership. However, the US under Trump administration was not willing and ready to accommodate the AU request and, in fact, threatened to exercise its veto power if the African members decide to go ahead and table the draft text for a vote.

With the Biden administration in the US and its renewed multilateral engagement, there appears to be a new window of opportunity to revive the financing issue. Both Chairperson Moussa Faki and UNSG Antonio Guterres are also expected to exert reinvigorated efforts to enhance the AU-UN partnership in their new mandate by, among others, ensuring progress on the financing issue. This will certainly unleash the potential of the partnership across the whole spectrum of peace operations. Furthermore, the EU leadership seems to be much more committed and determined to enhance its partnership with the AU and may likely pull its weight behind the AU if there is readiness to resuscitate the discussion on this issue.

This said, however, it should also be understood that the discussion on this issue would not be easy. COVID-19 has had its own impact on the discussion on peacekeeping. Increasing financial pressures, among other reasons, is forcing the UN to downsize and/or draw down peacekeeping missions in recent years. Some experts are anticipating that the tendency in the future could possibly be to prioritise affordable alternatives, such as observer missions and civilian special political missions.

Even though the Biden administration could be favorably disposed to the discussion on the issue, there is a need for serious discussion to reach a shared understanding on the way forward. This necessitates engaging the Biden administration

in earnest, including the state department, National Security Council and the department of defense. It is also important for the AU to engage Congress and canvass the necessary support in the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations building on willingness of some congressmen to support the idea of financing AU led peace support operation as part of enhancing the role of the US.

The development of a common African position is indeed a step in the right direction and it is expected to facilitate a clear decision by AU, which will then pave the way for the A3 to resuscitate the file and try to secure a concrete commitment on the issue from the UNSC. The process will definitely take time and the necessary preparatory work for laying the ground work needs to be developed. The AU Commission and the UN Secretariat need to follow up on the implementation of their Joint Declaration of 6 December 2018, and work towards making tangible progress on some of the agreed issues as they relate to the financing issue, including the full operationalisation of the peace fund, reporting, oversight and accountability.

Most importantly, there is need to learn the right lessons from the experiences of 2018 and 2019. Ensuring greater clarity on the implementation of the AU Peace fund and demonstrating concrete commitment in sharing the burden would be vital. The full operationalization of the African Standby Force would go a long way in demonstrating AU's commitment to shoulder responsibility on matters of peace and security in Africa. It would be absolutely important that the AU common position is accompanied by a solid roadmap with clear time lines for holding consultations and mobilizing support from all the relevant interlocutors on this file while ensuring close coordination of the AU Commission, the PSC and the A3 throughout the process for having a UNSC resolution that adequately reflects the common position.

While no formal outcome is expected from tomorrow's meeting,

the PSC is expected to provide input both on what is expected to be contained in the common position and the timeline for finalising the drafting for fulfilling the request of the AU Assembly, particularly the decision of its 14th extraordinary session held on 6 December 2020.