

Session on the Horn of Africa

Session on the Horn of Africa Date | 26 November 2020

Tomorrow (26 November) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is set to discuss on the situation in the Horn of Africa, with a specific focus on how best to support the transitions in Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan. It is organized at the initiative of Ethiopia, as Chairperson of the PSC for the month, the session is intended to put the limelight on positive developments in these countries with a view to identify ways of consolidating conditions for expanding stability and peace in these situations. The session is expected to take place through VTC.

The AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui is scheduled to make a statement. The Chairperson of the AU High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) Thabo Mbeki is also expected to deliver a statement. Representatives of countries of the Horn of Africa under consideration, namely, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan are also expected to make statements. UN Special Envoy of the Horn of Africa, Parfait Onanga- Anyanga, representatives of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the European Union are amongst the speakers that will also be addressing the PSC.

The last time the Council convened a session on the Horn of Africa was at its 810th meeting, held on 22 November 2018, which among others requested the AU Commission to provide quarterly briefings on the regional developments, though it did not materialize as the Council rather held several country specific sessions on member states of the region. This session, convened after a two-year hiatus, is expected to shed light on the positive developments in the region, specifically the transitions underway in Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan, and explore ways and means to support these promising but fragile transitions.

The Horn of Africa region has indeed registered positive strides in recent times. Tomorrow's session is expected to capture the political transition underway in Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan with the potential to move the region along the road to sustainable peace. In relation to Somalia, the upcoming election is expected to dominate the Council's discussion given the fast-approaching electoral season with a decisive impact on the future of the country. It is to be recalled that the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Federal Members of States (FMS) achieved progress in September over the modalities of the election after rounds of negotiations and consultations. The parties were also able to reach a compromise on some of the outstanding issues. Among others, they agreed to shelve the universal suffrage (one-person-one-vote) in favor of the indirect voting arrangement; to hold the parliamentary elections from 1 to 27 December and the presidential election on 8 February 2021; and form a dispute resolution committee to address electoral disputes.

The positive steps are, however, fraught with challenges, which, if not properly managed, could spiral into violence and indeed reverse the progress achieved. A key challenge remains the fragile security situation for the election to take place. Al-Shabaab has continued to unleash its potent force as it stepped up attacks in recent months. Dozens are killed, including civilians, due to clashes between Al-Shabaab's fighters and security forces as well as roadside bombings. Tension may escalate in the run-up to the elections; and any delay from either side in the implementation of the compromises reached in September may risk conflict. Jubaland President Ahmed Madobe rejects the upcoming election from taking place in Gedo demanding withdrawal of federal government's force from the region. The standoff may further deteriorate in the coming weeks leading up to the election. The security situation of Somalia is further compounded with the prevailing humanitarian crisis accentuated by floods, locust swarm and COVID19. There is therefore a need for steps

to be taken for mitigating the adverse consequences of these persisting challenges, including ensuring through political and technical support that Somalia averts fiercely contested elections marred by irregularities and violence.

The other issue that will be discussed for consolidating stability in Somalia is the international security support for the country, notably the role of AMISOM. AMISOM's drawdown is planned to proceed with its mandate ending on 28 February 2021 to clear the path for Somalia to take the lead over its security matters. It is to be recalled that the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2520 (2020) to renew AMISOM's mandate until February 28 2021 despite PSC's decision to extend the mandate for 12 months from May 27, 2020 during its 923rd session. The session affords a good opportunity for member states to deliberate on the future of AMISOM in light of the political and security developments in Somalia and assess the readiness of the government of Somalia to assume full responsibility over its security by the end of 2021 in accordance with the security transition plan. For the PSC, it is also of interest that the AU articulates AU's views on the UN's strategic assessment on the security support needed to prepare Somalia to take lead in security by end of 2021, and to take decisions on AMISOM's reconfiguration envisaged under Resolution 2520.

Sudan has seen the most promising positive developments in the Horn of Africa region. Further positive developments emerged as the PSC convenes its 952nd meeting on the situation in Sudan held on 6 October and since then. It is to be recalled that the Transitional Government of Sudan, the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) and Sudan Liberation Movement of Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) clinched a landmark peace deal on 3 October in Juba, a step welcomed by the Council in its 952nd session. The peace deal sets out that rebel leaders will take seats in the sovereign council while their armed factions integrated into the national army. As the first step to give

effect to the terms of the peace deal, the joint meeting of the Sovereign Council and Cabinet approved the agreement as well as its harmonization with the Constitutional Declaration, the provisional constitution covering the transition period. Accordingly, changes have been made to the composition of the Sovereign Council by raising the number of seats to 14 so as to accommodate the 3 seats allocated for the rebel groups' signatories of the peace agreement. The return of SRF's leader, Al-Hadi Idriss, to Khartoum on November 15- a move hailed by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, head of Sudan's ruling sovereign council- is also a major advance that gives impetus for the implementation of the peace agreement.

The removal of Sudan from the State Sponsors of Terrorism (SST) is another positive development that would interest PSC members. It is to be recalled that the Council, in its previous session on Sudan, appealed to the US to the removal of Sudan from the SST list without any conditions. On 23 October, the US President Trump signed order to delist Sudan after USD 335 million wired in form of compensation for victims of the 1998 terrorist attack, opening the path for the recovery of Sudan's battered economy. This is a big step forward to start the long road to economic recovery, which the Council is expected to welcome. The removal is hoped to attract foreign investment and unblock Sudan from accessing possible debt relief under IMF and World Bank's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. It is to be recalled that the PSC appealed to the international community to support Sudan in overcoming its economic difficulties in cognizant of the critical role that the economic revival could play in keeping the transition on track.

Yet, securing participation of rebel groups that have not joined the Sudan peace agreement- the Sudan Liberation Movement-North led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu (Sudan's largest single rebel group) and the Sudan Liberation Movement-Army led

by Abdel-Wahid Nour- should be secured. The economy is still in shambles while inflation continues to surge due to soaring food prices. Protests are reported in Khartoum and other cities in October over the worsening economic situation. In the Eastern part, community clash erupted between ethnic Beja and Beni Amer following Prime Minister Hamdok's dismissal of ethnic Beni Amer governor of Kassala state on October 13.

The last time the PSC considered the situation in South Sudan was in its 945th session held on 15 September 2020 South in which the Council commends parties for the positive steps taken in the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) and further encouraged them to step up their efforts in the implementation of all outstanding Transitional tasks. However, little has moved since then except with some headways made on the issue of responsibility sharing at the state and local government levels. One of the outstanding issues that may be of interest to the Council is the deadlock over the governor of the oil-rich state of Upper Nile, which the Council urged both parties to resolve the issue to the earliest possible. President Salva Kiir and Riek Machar were able to work out on the appointment of nine out of the ten state governors, but failed to agree on the governor of the state of Upper Nile. A controversial opposition commander, General Johnson Olony Thabo was nominated by Dr. Rieck Machar in June, a nomination rejected by President Salva Kiir. There is a growing hope that the impasse will be resolved soon with reports emerging on Kiir's change of mind on the matter.

Also a step forward in the implementation of the revitalized peace agreement is parties reaching a deal on the allocation of positions including deputy state governors, state advisors, and County Commissioners- a move previously appealed by the PSC during its 945th session. Another development that might interest the Council is the recently concluded national dialogue conference, an initiative launched by President Kiir

in 2016 to foster national unity and reconciliation, held in Juba from November 3-17. The event was attended by more than 600 participants though the absence of SPLM- IO and National Democratic Movement (NDM) possibly dent its success. This is against the expectation of the PSC which previously called for the positive engagement of all actors including the holdouts in the dialogue.

A major development threatening the peace agreement and the transition in South Sudan is the perpetual culture of defection and change of allegiance, which, in the words of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), is 'contrary to the letter and spirit of the Agreement'. In October, Paul Malong's SSOMA faction South Sudan United Front/Army defected to Kiir's forces and reported launching attacks on Machar's force. In November, wave of defection hits SPLMO-IO, raising the stakes for the peace agreement. Secretary General, Tingo Peter; deputy chairperson for foreign relations committee, Pasquale Clement Batali; and General Lok Tang Reat who was at the epicenter of the December 2013 fighting in Juba, are cases in point.

While the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) in February is a big milestone for South Sudan, the continued delays over the restructuring of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly and the security arraignment trail the implementation process. It is to be recalled that the 36th Extraordinary Meeting of the IGAD Heads of State and Government held in July 2020 appealed to President Kiir to dissolve the current Transitional National Legislative Assembly (TNLA) before 26th July and the parties to reconstitute the TNLA within 7 days of its dissolution. This has not materialized yet. The creation of a unified national army and the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) not only move at snail's pace but also enmeshed by web of challenges including lack of resource.

The expected outcome is Communique. The Council is expected to

welcome the positive developments in the Horn of Africa and recognize the looming challenges with the potential to reverse the gains made thus far; and in this regard, it may call for more enhanced support by IGAD, UN, EU and the rest of the international community for the transition in these countries. The PSC may also renew the mandate of the AUHIP for a further period of 12 months as per the usual practice. The Council is expected to note with appreciation the progress made by the Federal Government of Somalia and the Federal member States on the modalities of the 2020/21 elections and urge the two parties to continue their constructive engagement to carry out credible election without sliding into election related violence. It may reiterate the importance of implementing the transitional plan that laid out the steps for Somalia to assume full responsibility over its own security matter and urge FGS and FMS to commit themselves for the implementation of the plan. The Council may appeal to international partners to provide backing for Somali political forces to achieve political settlement including over sharing of power and resources between federal government and federal member states and technical and financial support for ensuring inclusive, peaceful and free and transparent elections. It may further call upon the EU, UN and other partners to continue their financial support to AMISOM which is playing critical role in the peace and stability of Somalia. The PSC may also call on the UNSC to ensure that the views of the AU are fully taken into account in the UN's assessment, under UNSC Resolution 2520, of the security need of Somalia as the drawdown of AMISOM continues.

The Council is expected to welcome Sudan's removal from the SST list and may further call up on international partners to honor their pledges made during the High-level Sudan partnership conference in June 2020 in the effort to support Sudan's economic revival. The Council is also expected to welcome positive measures taken by parties to the October 3 peace deal between the Transitional Government of Sudan, the

Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) and Sudan Liberation Movement of Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) including raising the number of the Sovereign Council to 14 and the return of SRF leader, Al-Hadi Idriss to Khartoum. The Council may once again reiterate the call on the holdout groups, particularly Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) faction led by Abdelwahi Mohamed al-Nour and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu to renounce any form of violence and commit themselves to the peace process.

The Council may commend the positive steps taken by President Salva Kiir Mayardit and Dr. Riek Machar in the implementation of the revitalized peace agreement, particularly the progresses made in relation to the appointment of deputy state governors, state advisors and county commissioners. The Council may once again call upon President Kiir and Dr. Riek Machar to settle the deadlock over the appointment of governor to the Upper Nile State. It may also commend President Kiir for convening the national dialogue conference held in Juba from November 3 to 17. The Council may also wish to express its grave concern over the continued delay in restructuring the Transitional National Legislative Assembly, the slow pace in the creation of a unified force and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs; and urge parties to the peace agreement to expedite these processes as critical measures for sustaining gains made in the slow transitional process. The Council may also express the need for addressing risks resulting from the instabilities, divisions and defections affecting the parties to the peace agreement. The PSC may call for the creation of conditions for civil society organizations to contribute to efforts for consolidation of peace including through supporting the implementation of the outcome of the national dialogue process and the transitional justice mechanisms of the peace agreement.