

Situation in Mali and the Sahel

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Tomorrow (25 July) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council is expected to hold a session on the situation in Mali and the Sahel. AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel, Pierre Buyoya, as well as the representatives of the G5 Sahel Secretariat and member states of the regional mechanism are expected to make statements.

Since the last PSC briefing on the situation in Mali and the Sahel in April, the security situation has remained highly volatile, with the insecurity in many parts of the Sahel notably Mali and Burkina Faso, further deteriorating. Violence by various non-State actors, including terrorist groups, criminal networks and community-based and tribal militias, perpetrated against civilians and security and defence forces show rise. There are also concerns about incidents of violations involving security forces of Sahel countries further exacerbating already fragile conditions.

In Mali, following the violent attack that claimed the lives of 160 Fulani civilians in March 2019, at least 95 people were killed in an attack that targeted an ethnic Dogon village in central Mali. The massacre is believed to be a retaliation given ethnic Dogon militia were suspected of committing the atrocities in the ethnic Fulani village in March. For members of the PSC, it is of major interest to hear about risks of expansion of the increase in inter-communal violence and the spike in insecurity in central Mali and the political, developmental and security measures required for containing cycle of inter-communal violence and stabilize central Mali. The UN documented that as at March 2019, 100,000 people were internally displaced, representing almost a threefold increase

in one year.

The briefing may also assess the political developments particularly in relation to the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement in Mali. The killing of ethnic Fulani villagers in March has resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga and his entire government. This has slowed down the progress and implementation of the Agreement. The continued violent incidents targeting civilians, killings of signatory and non-signatory armed groups to the peace agreement and attacks on Malian defence and security forces and UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) have also further complicated the implementation of the Agreement.

For the PSC, the deepening insecurity in Burkina Faso reflecting widening security in the Sahel is very worrisome. The UN reported that from January to March, 86 security incidents were registered in Burkina Faso, resulting in 376 deaths and injuries to 187 persons. In June last month, 19 people were killed following attacks by unidentified assailants. It is to be recalled that in December 2018 state of emergency has been declared in several northern provinces and has since been extended for additional six months.

According to the UN, the insecurity precipitated the displacement from their homes of more than 170,000 people, most of them since the start of 2019. Although much of the spike in insecurity affect Mali and Burkina Faso, a number of attacks leading to multiple deaths and kidnappings have also been reported in Niger.

Beyond the Sahel and West Africa region the PSC may also consider the impact of the deteriorating security situation in Libya and its effects on the Sahel region due to the proliferation of armed groups and the operation by terrorist groups. While the security responses tend to loom large, it is

of interest for the PSC to look into how to prioritize the political and development responses including improving the relationship between states institutions and communities and strengthening state institutions and the delivery of services. This would draw attention to the multifaceted root causes of the crisis in the region including the adverse effects of climate change. The G5 and AU representative to Mali and the Sahel briefings may also provide an update on the on going initiatives including the 1 May G5 Sahel extraordinary summit of Heads of State in Ouagadougou on the fight against terrorism and organized crime and the overall security challenges in the region. During the summit Germany has pledged \$51 million to support efforts by Burkina Faso in combating violent extremism.

The other issue expected to attract particular attention during tomorrow's session is the role of the G5 force. The latest Secretary General report on the G5 Sahel force noted that the force has resumed operations in January 2019, after a sixmonth interruption following the complex attack on its headquarters in Sévaré, Mali, in June 2018 and has conducted four operations. While the report noted that the force has attained 75 operational capacity, it continues to suffer from numerous challenges including training and equipment shortages, unclear sustainability of financing, the absence of fortified and secure operational bases, information sharing and coordination, and non-existent logistical supply chains to transport fuel and rations from the MINUSMA.

Apart from addressing these operational, logistics and resource issues facing the G5 Sahel force, also of interest for PSC members during tomorrow's session is clarifying the strategic direction of the force, including anchoring it on a political strategy to be implemented nationally. Related to this is the need to clarify and develop the force's strategic concept of operations, highlighted in the Secretarygeneral's report.

The resource challenges facing G5 Sahel is expected to draw the attention of PSC members. The European Union reportedly announced in early July to give €138 million (\$155 million) more to support the G5 Sahel Joint Force, including its police component. PSC members would in particular be keen to see provision of predictable support by the UN.

The report of the Secretary-General of the UN has underlined that the full operationalization of the G5 will depend on the predictable support it receives. Hence, he urged for a UN support office, funded through assessed contributions and independent of MINUSMA, to provide predictable and sustainable financing of support for the G5. Also proposed in the report is the extension of the support that MINUSMA provides to forces operating outside of Mali. PSC while renewing the mandate of the G5 Sahel Joint Force for a period of twelve (12) months, from 12 April 2019 to 12 April 2020, it also urged for 'the need for the UNSC to extend the support of MINUSMA beyond the limits of the Malian territory to all other components of the G5 Sahel Joint Task Force'. However, the UNSC has extended the mandate of MINUSMA until 30 June 2020 with the primary strategic priority of supporting the implementation of the political Agreement in Mali.

Given the level of insecurity in the region and the difficulties confronted by the forces, the PSC during tomorrow's session may recall its previous decision at its 838th session on the 'need for Council to also undertake a field mission to the G-5 Sahel region, as soon as possible, in order to have first-hand appreciation of the realities on the ground, as well as efforts being deployed by the G5 Sahel'. It may identify the next steps in undertaking the mission. Similarly, this week the UNSC is expected to hold its mid year briefing on the Sahel. Mohammad Ibn Chambas, Special Representative and head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), is expected to present the Secretary-General report on West Africa and the Sahel.

Key political and security developments in the region are expected to feature in the briefing. The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may express its deep concern over the deteriorating security situation in the region. It may reiterate the importance of the Nouakchott Process for the Enhancement of the Security Cooperation to collectively address the security challenges in the Sahel. It may follow up and provide concrete measures and timeline for the field mission to the region. It may call on the international community to continue and strengthen efforts and support to the G5 force and the countries in the region in order to mitigate the security challenges and reiterate its earlier call for the support from MINUSMA to be expanded to all G5 forces. It may urge member states in the region to maximize efforts particularly in terms of implementing political, socio-economic and environmental measures for addressing the underlying causes of insecurity in the region.