

# Status report on the full operationalization of ASF and CLB

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Tomorrow (08 July) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene a session to consider report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the full operationalisation of the Africa Standby Force (ASF) and the AU Continental Logistics Base (CLB). The convening of this session under Nigeria's chairship of the PSC is indicative of the importance that Nigeria attaches to and draws on its earlier engagements for achieving the utilization of the ASF in deploying PSOs.

Following the opening remarks of the Chairperson of the PSC for July, Victor Adekunle Adeleke, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs and Peace and Security, Bankole Adeoye, is expected to make a statement. The PSOD and the Chief of Staff of the ASF may also provide update to the Council. Council may also receive briefing from representatives of Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) on the status of their respective Regional Standby Forces.

It is to be recalled that the ASF was declared to be fully operational by the AU Assembly at its 14th Extra Ordinary Session convened in December 2020. The Assembly in this decision directed the PSC to utilise the framework in mandating and authorizing AU peace support operations (PSOs). At the strategic and political levels, an issue worth addressing for the deployment of PSOs using the ASF is agreement between Member States, the REC/RMs and the AU on the processes from mandating deployment to the identification and preparation of the capabilities by RECs/RMs and the release by

Member States of the capabilities they pledged as part of the regional standby force and the actual deployment of the forces to the theatre of operation.

At the institutional levels, there is also the issue of clarity on the role of strategic level ASF planning element at the level of the AU and staffing capacity of the AU ASF planning element. In this regard, the PSC may wish to discuss how its decision authorizing or mandating the deployment of a PSO is followed up by the AU ASF planning element for implementation in coordination with RECs/RMs.

One of the challenges in the utilisation of the ASF framework for mandating and authorising AU PSOs is the lack of clarity between the AU and RECs/RMs regarding the command and control of regional forces. Since the first ASF exercise in 2010, one of the outstanding questions is the respective roles of the AU and the RECs/RMs in the decision-making process for the deployment of the ASF. At Council's first joint- consultative meeting with RECs/RMs which was convened on 24 May 2019, it was agreed that RECs/RMs shall forward to the PSC, proposals for a practical way forward in relation with the deployment of ASF.

Although the drafting of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the AU and RECs/RMs on the ASF replacing the 2008 MoU has been finalized, the MoU has as yet to be signed by the AU Commission and RECs/RMs. This MoU is expected to clarify the respective roles of the AU and RECs/RMs in mandating and deploying ASF. In tomorrow's session, this is one of the issues in respect of which Member States of the PSC may seek clarity on what needs to be done for the signing of the MoU by the AU and the RECs/RMs.

The session also presents the opportunity for Council to be updated on the status of readiness of Regional Standby Forces. As noted by Council at its 767th session, the different RECs/RMs have shown progress in operationalising their

respective standby forces. While the East African Standby Force (EASF), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) seem to continue taking advances, the North Africa Regional Capability (NARC) still lags behind.

Accordingly, one of the issues necessary to address is the standardization of the state of readiness of the various Standby Forces which is also critical for interoperability. While efforts have been made in developing standard for verifying the pledged capabilities of the various regional standby forces, the verification of pledged capabilities has as yet to get the buy in of the RECs/RMs.

It may also interest Council to reflect on the importance of updating the ASF to effectively respond to new and emerging threats in the continent. This principally includes the increasing proliferation of terrorism and extremist violence, outbreak and spread of health pandemics including Ebola and Covid-19, as well as natural disasters and humanitarian crises, such as climate change induced insecurity and the growing rate of forced displacement. With respect to responding to the threat of terrorism and violent extremism within the framework of ASF, it is to be recalled that Council convened a session on the establishment of a special unit on counter- terrorism within the framework of ASF at its 960th meeting. At the session, the AU Commission was requested to provide technical guidance and submit concrete proposals on the technical aspects regarding establishment of this special unit and to seek inputs from the Specialized Technical Committee on Defence, Safety and Security (STCDSS) in this regard.

Tomorrow's session will also discuss the status of the CLB. The CLB which is based in Douala, Cameroon and forms part of the setup of the ASF serves the main purpose of ensuring the presence of policies and procedures for procuring, delivering

and accounting for necessary support to all military, police and civilian components of AU PSOs. It is to be recalled that the CLB was inaugurated on 05 January 2018, by the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security and the Prime Minister of Cameroon. The update on the CLB is expected to cover staffing, use of the resources stored at the CLB, relationship of the CLB with regional logistic bases and infrastructure development including addressing the challenge of safe storage materials that partners donated and currently housed at the CLB.

As highlighted in the report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission submitted at the 13th Ordinary Meeting of African Chiefs of Defence Staff and Heads of Safety and Security and the 12th Ordinary Meeting of the STCDSS, there is need to ensure storage and security of the CLB. Moreover, the need for Member States to support the CLB through the secondment of personnel at their own cost was emphasised at the 13th Ordinary Meeting of the STCDSS. During tomorrow's session, it is expected that the PSC will receive update on the measures taken for the safe keeping and storage of equipment that partners including Turkey and China donated. With respect to staffing, the Chairperson's report for the session highlights that as of 9 April 2021 nine (9) military officers are deployed at the CLB seconded at own cost by AU Member States namely; Cameroon (7), Niger (1) and Morocco (1) and Nigeria (1). It also indicates that one (1) training officer from Zambia is expected to deploy soon.

The other issue expected to be discussed in relation to the CLB is the distribution from the current stock of supplies to the regional logistics bases and the use of the supplies for purposes of supporting ongoing missions. As highlighted in the Chairperson's report, the 13th meeting of the STCDSS meeting held in November 2020 urged RECs/RMs and /or identified Member States to commit to receive and preposition ASF equipment in their Regional Logistics Depots (RLD) to facilitate future

rapid deployment. It is indicated that the various RECs/RMs are at various stages in the identification and establishment of RLD with NARC, ECOWAS and EASF having RLD at various stages of operationalization and ECCAS and SADC being at stage of identification of sites for establishing respective RLD.

The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué. The PSC is expected to outline concrete steps in the process of fully operationalising and deploying the ASF and properly utilising the framework for planning and rapid deployment of PSOs to conflicts and crises in Africa. It may follow up on the proposals it requested to be submitted by RECs/RMs for a practical way forward in relation with the deployment of ASF, at its first annual joint consultative meeting with RECs/RMs. It may also call for enhancing the capacity of the ASF Planning Element at the AU. With respect to the status of signature of the 2018 MoU between AU and RECs/RMs on ASF, the PSC may call for immediate steps being taken for finalization of the signing of the MoU. In terms of the CLB, the PSC may call on RECs/RMs to work closely with the AU to speed up the establishment and operationalization of respective RLD and start receiving equipment from the CLB as part of the effort to prevent equipment from deterioration due to storage issues and lack of use. Council may commend Member States' efforts made towards supporting the capacity of the CLB by seconding staff at their own cost and call for permanent solution for the staffing of the CLB through approved structure and budget.