

MONTHLY DIGEST ON THE AUPSC

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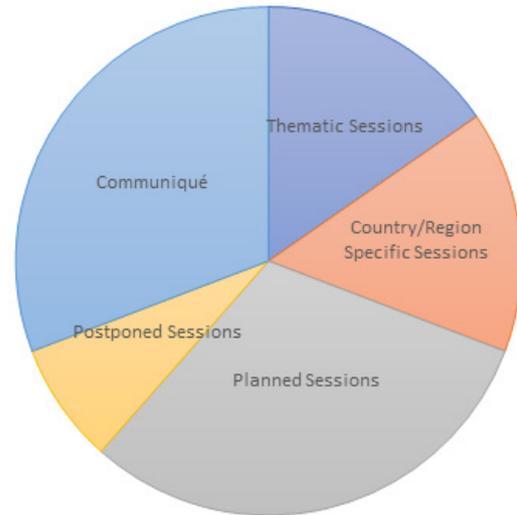
THE MONTH AT A GLANCE

Senegal was the chair of the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) in January. A total of four substantive sessions were convened during the month. While two of these sessions were country/region specific, the remaining two were thematic. Although Council's initial programme of work anticipated a session on South Sudan to take place within the month, the session was postponed to later months.¹ In terms of regional coverage, west and central Africa were the two regions that featured in PSC's agenda during January.

The outcomes of all sessions convened during the month were adopted as Communiqués – none of the session adopted as Press Statements. Overview of previous years demonstrates that the release of PSC outcome documents takes from one day to up to a month depending on the nature of negotiations among Council members and speed of monthly Chairperson's clearing of outcome documents for publication. In January 2021, it took about 4 days in average for the Communiqués to be published after the convening of each session.

¹ Accordingly, South Sudan was part of the agenda item addressed at PSC's 990th session convened on 13 April.

² The MNJTF was deployed in line with PSC's 484th Communiqué.



January 2021 PSC Substantive Sessions

MNJTF ACTIVITIES AND MANDATE RENEWAL²

At its 973rd meeting held on 18th January, the PSC considered the Report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTF) against Boko Haram and AU support to the force. The outcome of the session was adopted as a Communiqué.

The key outcome of the session was the extension of MNJTF's mandate for 12 months period starting from 31 January 2021. It is to be recalled that the taskforce's mandate was last renewed at Council's 898th session convened on 28 November 2019, for a one-year period starting from January 2020.

The PSC noted that 'Boko Haram still remains a threat for the countries of the region.' The threat it poses continues to evolve. Of significance in this regard that received particular attention during PSC's session was Boko Haram's growing use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). As some studies have warned, Boko Haram fighters seem to be gaining more sophisticated drones than militaries in the region. In part, possession of UAVs by terrorist groups operating in Africa is related to the influx of affiliated foreign terrorist fighters who bring with them the tactics and operational capacities for sourcing & using UAVs.

Council also took note of the needs assessment exercise of the MNJTF conducted in July 2020 and the identified gaps in the force's capacity. As noted during the session, the main gaps affecting the mission include Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED) equipment, Amphibious Equipment, counter drone equipment, force protection vehicles, surveillance equipment, and Intelligence, Surveillance Reconnaissance (ISR) services. The other challenges facing the MNJTF include funding and procurement delays, structural limitations.³ Perhaps most significant is the weakness of the non-military approaches that focus on addressing the root-causes and major drivers of terrorist insurgency in the region, notably the governance, development and security gaps prevalent in the Boko Haram affected territories. It was thus fitting that the PSC stressed the need for full implementation of the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko Haram affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region.

³ MNJTF TCCs reluctance to cede command to the taskforce has been cause for serious structural challenge, undermining the force's chain of command which is comprised of units of the national forces of contributing countries. This has in turn resulted in the weak coordination, lack of integration and poor performance of the MNJTF.

⁴ AU Commission's support to the MNJTF in line with the MoU and SIA has been financed through the European Union (EU)'s funds allocated under the African Peace Facility (APF) since 2016. Starting early 2021, the EU has come to re-evaluate the mechanisms through which it has financed peace and security efforts in Africa, a major take-away being its preference to fund ad-hoc coalitions like the MNJTF directly, in order to avoid procurement, bureaucracy and related challenges of funding such efforts through the AU Commission. Accordingly, EU's support to AU-authorized peace operations with military component, including the MNJTF, are to be financed through the European Peace Facility (EPF) going forward, bringing an end to the APF funding system. While the MNJTF has already secured residual funds from the APF until 1 January 2022, it will be funded through the EPF afterwards.

In terms of tasks assigned, the AU Commission was requested to renew the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Support Implementation Agreement (SIA) between AU, Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) of the MNJTF, and to regularly brief the PSC on activities of MNJTF. It is to be recalled that the MoU was signed between the AU Commission and the LCBC in late 2015, in line with the request made by the PSC at its 489th session. Once signed, the MoU was also endorsed by the MNJTF TCCs. The central purpose of the MoU is streamlining AU's additional support to the MNJTF so that the force is able to meet some of its key operational requirements. The SIA was signed later in 2016, as a supplementary agreement specifying the nature and modalities of the support provided to MNJTF by the AU Commission.⁴ The signing of both the MoU and SIA was welcomed at the 639th session of the PSC.

SITUATION IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

The situation in the Great Lakes region was considered by the PSC on 22 January, at its 974th meeting. The outcome of the session was adopted as a Communiqué with two major decisions. The first one was to convene a meeting on 27 February 2021, aimed at commemorating the 8th anniversary of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement (PSCF) for Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Region and to review the status of the framework's implementation. No PSC meeting was convened in that regard. On the other hand, a national level workshop was convened by the DRC Government on 26 and 27 February to commemorate the signing of the PSCF and to identify new priorities for the advancement of peace and stabilisation in eastern DRC.

The second key decision was Council's agreement to undertake a field mission to the Great Lakes region. While no specific timeline was set for the field mission, the PSC agreed to undertake it as soon as possible and reiterated subsequently its readiness to undertake the field visit at its 1005th meeting. However, as 2021 has come to an end with the planned visit not yet conducted, this may be carried forward to PSC's 2022 plans.

Other points addressed at the session include the progresses attained in the peace and security of the region, including Burundi's removal from the agenda of the United Nations (UN) Security Council (UNSC). According to the working methods of the UNSC, an agenda item can be removed from the Council's list in either one of two ways. The first one is through the review of the Council's seizure statement by UNSC members at the end of each year to determine whether any items should be deleted from the seizure statement, the basis for Burundi's removal. The other is where an item is automatically removed from the list for not being considered for three consecutive years unless a request is made by a member State to retain them.⁵

When it comes to the PSC, Art.7(3) of the Council's Rules of Procedure stipulates that an agenda item of which the PSC is seized and has not been considered for two years shall automatically be deleted unless a member State requests that it remains in the list. While PSC has not convened a session on Burundi since 2018, consideration of the situation in the country has remained part of its annual indicative agenda for all subsequent years, including 2021.

It was at its 993rd meeting where it considered the status of the AU Human Rights Observers and Military Experts (HRO&ME) Mission in Burundi that the PSC finally pronounced the removal of Burundi from its agenda as well as the end of the AU HRO&ME Mission's mandate.

The session also served to note and amplify initiatives that can facilitate stability and regional integration. The Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference was particularly mentioned in that regard. The confidence-building exercise among defence and security forces of the region was another initiative welcomed by Council. A meeting of security and intelligence experts of the region has been convened since 2019,⁶ with the recent one convened in July 2021 in Burundi where a two-year action plan of the Contact and Coordination Group (CCG)⁷ was adopted in the context of the fight against negative forces in eastern DRC. The action plan mainly revolves around four non-military pillars involving disarmament and repatriation of negative forces through engagement of local communities and civil society; disruption of arms supply and financial sources of negative forces; cross-border cooperation to create economic opportunities, particularly for youth; and reinforcement of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes.

Another important development emphasised by Council was the development of the UN Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework (UNGLRSF). Based on a conflict and socio-economic analysis of the region, the UNGLRSF advances a development approach to respond to the region's peace and security issues, mainly by complementing development efforts at the national level.

⁵ More details on this can be found in the UNSC Presidential Note adopted in December 2008 (UNSC S/2008/847).

⁶ The first meeting was convened in November 2019 in Tanzania whereas the second (in December 2019) and third (in February 2020) were both held in Kenya. In addition to contributing as confidence-building exercises, the meetings serve as platforms for exchanging information on the latest developments in the region's security and to brainstorm ways of neutralising negative forces, particularly in eastern DRC.

⁷ The CCG is mandated to oversee the implementation of non-military measures in order to eradicate negative forces in the region. It is an initiative which emerged from the agreement of Chiefs of Intelligence and Security Services in the GLR that consolidating peace and stability would require more than just military pressure. Following wide consultation among Chiefs of Military and Civilian Intelligence of countries in the region, operationalising the CCG was recommended at the meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the Defence of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), on 14th October 2020. Accordingly, the CCG was launched in May 2021.

Council also welcomed the exit strategy of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Having closed nine of its field offices since the 2018 peaceful transfer of power in the DRC, MONUSCO is currently present at its headquarter in Kinshasa and in six other provinces of the country. The exit strategy, which was elaborated in the UN Secretary General's report of 30 November 2020 (S/2020/1150), is a joint roadmap of the Government of DRC and MONUSCO. The exit strategy elaborates benchmarks and minimum conditions which shall be met prior to the complete withdrawal of the mission, with the mission's withdrawal being rolled out in such a way that it is tailored to each province's specific needs and progressively, starting with non-essential troops. Considering the volatility of the security situation in Eastern DRC, the strategy envisaged for no fixed timeline for the final and complete withdraw of the mission.

The proliferation of armed groups was also a noteworthy concern highlighted by the PSC. A 1999 glossary by 'The New Humanitarian' compiling main armed groups operating in the Great Lakes Region included about 12 armed groups in its list, out of which four were from the eastern DRC. A couple decades later, the figures have changed dramatically with over 100 armed groups operating within DRC alone. The table below tries to capture some of the main known armed groups currently operating in the region.

Council concluded the session with a request for the AU Commission to provide quarterly briefings on the situation in the Great Lakes region.⁸

While a briefing was presented at the 1005th PSC meeting convened in June in line with this request, no other briefings were received by the PSC on Great Lakes within the year. It is worth recalling that at its 488th session, Council made a similar request for quarterly report on the situation in region to be submitted by the AU Commission.

PEACE AND SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Council's session under the theme 'peace and security and development' was convened on 27th January, at its 975th meeting. The outcome of the meeting was adopted as a Communiqué.

This was the second time Council convened a session on this theme. The first session on the same theme took place in 2019, at the 883rd meeting of the PSC. Whereas the previous session focused on emphasising the general nexus between peace and security and development, the recent session had a more specific focus on how security challenges in the continent should be taken into consideration in financing development efforts. The international conference held in Dakar on 2 December 2019 under the auspices of the Government of Senegal on the theme: "Sustainable development and sustainable debt, finding the right balance" also served as a background to the session.

Armed Group	Origin	Main area of Operation	Period of Operation
The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)	Rwanda	Eastern DRC	2000 to present
The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)	Uganda	Eastern DRC	1998 to present
The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)	Uganda	DRC-CAR-South Sudan border areas	1987 to present
Mai-Mai Kabidon FPP/AP	DRC	North Kivu province of DRC	2018 to present
Nduma Defense of Congo-Renovated (NDC-R)	DRC	Eastern DRC	2015 to present
Islamic State - Central Africa Province (ISCAP)	ISIS	Kivu and Ituri provinces of DRC	2019 to present
National Coalition of the People for the Sovereignty of Congo	DRC	Eastern DRC	2017 to present

⁸ It may also be worth noting that Council's request for quarterly briefings can be used as a way to guide periodic PSC-A3 consultations on the situation in the Great Lakes, ahead of UNSC meetings on the same issue.

The importance of capacitating national armies through security sector reform and introduction of new technologies and approaches that can address emerging security threats including terrorism was a key point emphasised at the session. As a new development in that area, Council welcomed the adoption of an Action Plan on fighting terrorism by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for 2020-2024.⁹ One of the main areas of the Action Plan, for which a substantial percent of its budget is committed, is the provision of training and equipment for defence and security forces of ECOWAS member States. In light of the growing access and usage of UAVs by Boko Haram as noted at Council's 973rd session, ECOWAS's Action Plan could also play an instrumental role by better equipping State militaries to respond to such emerging threats.

The importance of preventive measures including preventive diplomacy and other political solutions was also highlighted. It is however interesting that under paragraph 11 of the Communiqué, Council points out such preventive approaches as supplementary to military measures.

Although Council did not follow up on its request at its 883rd session for the Chairperson of the AU Commission to submit annual reports on the coordination between AU Specialised Agencies and the AU Commission to support Council in the nexus of peace, security and development, it did emphasise the importance of strengthening coordination among existing instruments including the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL), the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) and the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT).

AU GUIDELINES ON ELECTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 AND OTHER PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES

The 976th session of the PSC which took place on 29th January was dedicated to the theme 'elections in Africa', and the outcome of the session was adopted as a Communiqué.

In commencing the session, Council congratulated member States that were able to successfully conduct elections despite challenging circumstances imposed due to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. Burkina Faso, Central African Republic (CAR), Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Tanzania and Uganda are member States that were able to organize elections during the period from July to December 2020.

The session had a specific focus on the "AU Guidelines on Elections in Africa in the Context of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic and Other Public Health Emergencies". Having welcomed the Guideline, Council decided that member States shall provide their inputs on the AU Elections Guideline, after which it will be submitted to the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC). As indicated in its the Executive Summary, the development of the Guideline was initiated at the request of both the PSC and PRC.

⁹ While ECOWAS's Action Plan which was developed in 2019 is a welcome commitment from the countries of the region, it is important to note that this is not the first regional commitment made for addressing terrorism. A former (2013) regional counter-terrorism strategy and implementation plan developed by ECOWAS was never implemented due to multiple challenges including the lack of serious commitment among member States to address terrorism through a regional strategy. It is hence important to ensure that the new Action Plan takes into account and provides mechanisms for addressing the challenges which rendered the implementation of its previous strategy difficult, while also anticipating other challenges that can hinder effective implementation including inadequacy of funding and existence of parallel counter-terrorism mechanisms in the region such as the MNJTF and the GS Sahel Joint Force.

It is worth recalling that the PSC first requested the AU Commission to develop guideline for elections at its 935th session convened in July 2020. At that session, the request made was for the development of “guidelines for the organization of credible elections, in the context of public health emergencies and humanitarian disasters”. The Guideline considered at the 976th session was more specific to Covid-19 and does not extend to ‘humanitarian disasters’.

Finally, Council requested the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) to provide it with regular updates on trends, progresses and challenges in the fight against Covid-19. However, Council has not received any other briefings by the Africa CDC at subsequent sessions convened in 2021.

OTHER PSC ACTIVITIES DURING THE MONTH

In addition to its substantive sessions, the PSC also dedicated in its provisional programme of work for January, two meetings to consider a report on its activities and the state of peace and security in Africa. The consideration of such report is guided by the requirement under Art.7(1)(q) of the PSC Protocol. Following consideration by the PSC, the report is submitted to the AU Assembly at its ordinary sessions, normally convened in January or February of each calendar year.

Provided that this year’s ordinary session of the AU Assembly – the 34th Ordinary Session which was initially scheduled to take place during the first week of February – focused on a limited number of agenda items, Council did not undertake consideration of the report on its activities and the state of peace and security in Africa during January. On 18 February, Council commenced considering the draft report and agreed to refer it to experts for further evaluation. The report, covering the activities of the PSC as well as the state of peace and security on the continent in the period from February 2020 to January 2021, was finalised and presented at the 34th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly which took place on 23 February 2021.

Another activity which formed part of January’s programme of work of the PSC was preparation for the PSC retreat. Although PSC retreats are usually convened during May, there was a plan to conduct this year’s retreat from 25 to 26 February, which explains the inclusion of preparations in January’s programme of work. As the planned retreat coincided with the 34th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly, it could not be conducted in February and was rather held in May, as foreseen in Council’s 2021 annual indicative agenda.



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Amani Africa is an independent African based policy research; training and consulting think tank with a specialization and primary focus on African multilateral policy processes, particularly those relating to the African union.

We support the pan-African dream of peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa through research, training, strategic communications, technical advisory services, and convening and facilitation.

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