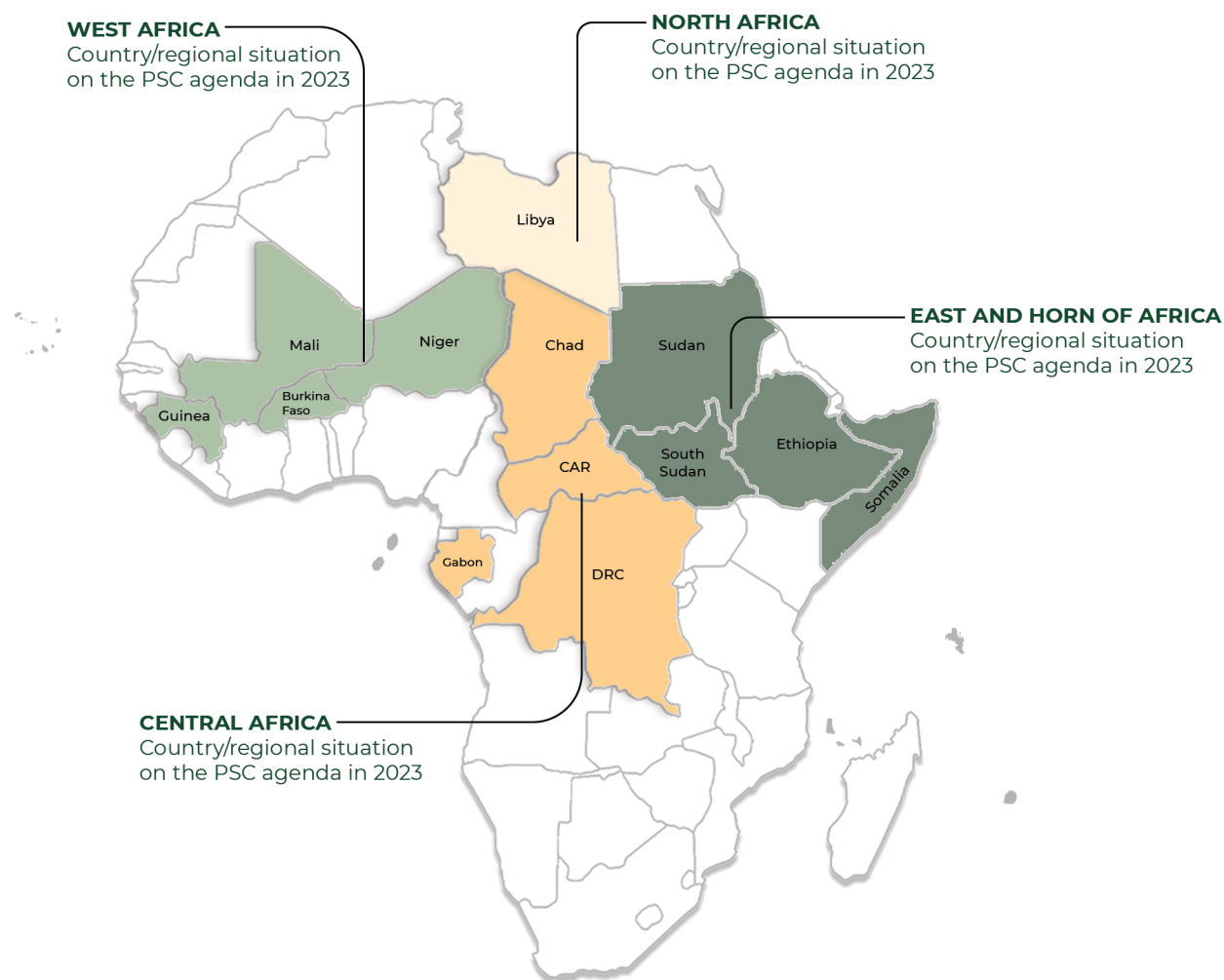


THE PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL IN 2023: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

AMANI AFRICA

Media and Research Services



FEBRUARY
2 0 2 4



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. WHAT THIS REVIEW IS ABOUT AND WHY	1
II. 2023: From the frying pan to the fire?.....	1
III. ACTIVITIES OF THE PSC IN 2023.....	7
3.1 Highlights from the activities of the PSC in 2023.....	7
3.2. Engagement of the PSC on country and region specific situations	11
3.2.1. PSC ON THE SITUATIONS IN THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA.....	11
Somalia and AMISOM/ATMIS:Between progress and continuity.....	12
Ethiopia: The monitoring and verification mechanism the only matter addressed in relation to Ethiopia.....	14
South Sudan: trying to keep the parties to the peace agreement on course for concluding the transition within the newly extended timeline.....	14
Sudan: Shaping AU's role after the country plunged into a new civil war.....	15
3.2.2. PSC ON SITUATIONS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICA REGION	16
Central African Republic (CAR): Still on the PSC radar, despite marginal attention	16
Chad: Supporting the transitional process while trying to avoid legitimization of retention of power by TMC	16
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): PSC struggling to carve out meaningful role towards the mitigation or resolution of the conflict in eastern DRC	17
Gabon: Slapping it with suspension as it joins the club of military rulers	17
3.2.3. PSC ON THE SITUATION IN WEST AFRICA	18
The Sahel: The fixation with coups overshadowing the burning fire of terrorism.....	19
Mali: Not even performative attention by the PSC as the country contends with complex transition and terrorism.....	20
Niger: PSC advancing a responsible non-military response as the last central Sahelian country jumping on the coup bandwagon.....	20
Burkina Faso: Demanding respect for transitional timeline without deploying support mechanism for the transition.....	21
Guinea: A coup induced transition struggling to get PSC's attention.....	22
Maritime in the Gulf of Guinea.....	23
3.2.4. PSC ON THE SITUATIONS IN THE NORTH AFRICA REGION.....	23
Libya: Too much talk but, inadequate progress both on the national reconciliation conference and the relocation of the AU Office back to Libya.....	23
3.2.5. IT WAS A NO SHOW FOR PSC ON THE SITUATIONS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION.....	5
3.3. PSC's WORK ON THEMATIC AND OTHER ISSUES.....	25
African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) Tools and Pillars	26
Elections and Governance	27
Humanitarian Crises and Action.....	28
Terrorism.....	29
Climate, Peace and Security.....	29

Sessions on specific category of protected groups.....	30
Cyber Security.....	30
Prevention of the Ideology of Hate, Genocide and Hate Crimes in Africa.....	31
Other thematic issues	31
New Thematic Agendas.....	31

3.4. CONSULTATIVE MEETINGS AND/OR OTHER ENGAGEMENTS.....32

PSC Meetings with AU Organs.....	32
PSC Meeting with RECs/RMs.....	32
PSC Meeting under Article 20 of the PSC Protocol.....	32

3.5. OTHER ACTIVITIES.....33

Retreats.....	33
15 th PSC Retreat.....	33
3 rd PSC Retreat with Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).....	33
Field missions.....	33
Burkina Faso.....	33
DRC.....	34
South Sudan.....	34

IV. THE PSC HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT AND CAN ONLY MEET THE DEMAND FOR MORE AND BETTER AU ROLE BY RESTORING THE PRIMACY OF DIPLOMACY.....34

I. WHAT THIS REVIEW IS ABOUT AND WHY

How did the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC), Africa's premier peace and security decision-making body, fare in delivering on its mandate in the face of the prevailing peace and security challenges on the continent during the just concluded year? What are the salient features of PSC's role in the maintenance of peace and security in Africa in 2023? These and related questions are the focus of our annual review of the PSC which presents analysis on the work of the PSC in 2023. As in the previous years, this year's review draws on the data and research work we carried out on the PSC in 2023.

Beyond the analysis of PSC's work, there are various developments of interest concerning the PSC that will receive attention in this review. These include changes and dynamics in its working methods and decision-making processes, developments in its relationship with actors engaged in peace and security diplomacy of interest for the continent and trends in the use (or lack thereof) of the peace and security tools of the African Peace and Security Architecture put in place for enabling the execution of its mandate.

While the review mainly focuses on the work of the PSC, it also contextualises the analysis within the framework of the peace and security challenges that Africa had to contend with during 2023. Thus, our review also discusses the major dynamics and trends that can be discerned from the various peace and security and political events of 2023.

It is against the background of the prevailing peace and security context on the continent discussed in depth in the succeeding section that the PSC carried out its activities in 2023. The issues that the PSC dealt with during the year largely reflect the conflict map of the continent, although, as examined below, there are peace and security situations and issues that warrant PSC's engagement but were not addressed. Perhaps more than the question of convergence between the agenda of the PSC and the peace and security dynamics of the continent in 2023, of particular significance are the issues of whether the PSC dedicated the level of attention commensurate with the gravity of each situation and whether it mobilized the kind of

conflict prevention, management, resolution and peacebuilding responses the circumstances warrant. The focus of this review is accordingly to use these questions for considering AU's peace and security work using the PSC as the main frame of reference.

In presenting data and probing analysis, this review first and foremost serves the purpose of systematically documenting the work of the PSC for the previous year. This review also helps not only to problematize the binary view that either the AU is performing well or it is completely useless. But it is also to present a more informed and nuanced picture about the indispensability of AU's peace and security work that the PSC is in charge of and leads through the instrumentality of its premier decision-making responsibility.¹ This review additionally contributes to identifying lessons from what transpired in 2023 that could be instructive for enhancing the effective functioning of the PSC in the execution of its mandate.

II. 2023: FROM THE FRYING PAN TO THE FIRE?

Last year, our review pointed out that 2022 was in so many ways a continuation of the deteriorating peace and security situations witnessed during 2020 and 2021 on the continent, despite pockets of relative improvements in some conditions. This trend has persisted during 2023, with conditions worsening in some situations.

According to statistics from conflict datasets,² there are close to 35 armed conflicts in Africa with hostilities involving state security institutions and non-state armed groups with some countries such as DRC having multiple conflicts at the same time. Countries with high conflict burden and protracted conflicts include Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, DRC, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. Not surprisingly, beyond the eruption of new conflicts in the Horn of Africa and the political instability in countries such as DRC, Guinea Bissau, Senegal and Sierra Leone, in 2023, as

¹ On the mandate and role of the PSC see *The Protocol to the Constitutive Act of the AU establishing the PSC and Amani Africa, The African Union Peace and Security Council Handbook: Guide on the Council's Procedure, Practice and Traditions* (2023).

² *Today's Armed Conflicts - Africa: More Than 35 Armed Conflicts*, Geneva Academy, <https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts#>

in the previous years, conflicts involving terrorism remain the most dominant source of threat to peace and security in Africa.³ The AU Commission reported to the PSC in October 2023 that from January to September 2023 the number of attacks and fatalities from terrorist attacks showed an increase of 95% and 55% respectively from the same period in 2022.⁴ This prompted the PSC to express its 'deep concern' over the 'expanding and worsening' scourge of terrorism and violent extremism in the continent.⁵

The emergence of parts of Africa, notably the Sahel, as the epicentre of terrorism in the world has continued to persist. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2023,⁶ 'four of the ten countries most affected by terrorism are in the Sahel and 'this region accounts for more terrorism deaths in 2022 than both South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa combined.' Other regions with heavy burden of violence involving terrorist attacks are East Africa (affecting in particular Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda) and Central Africa (Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)). In terms of regional distribution, West Africa stands out as the most affected, representing 48% and 52% of the total attacks and fatalities, respectively.⁷

Apart from the worsening attacks and fatalities in conflicts involving terrorism most notably in the Sahel and Horn of Africa, the trend of the threat of expansion of terrorism into the littoral states of West Africa that emerged in the previous year has also persisted during 2023. The Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) Commission Chairperson reported 4593

deaths due to terrorist attacks in West Africa in the first half of 2023. He cited as 'stark indication of the expansion of terrorism to littoral states, a situation that poses additional threat to the region,' the renewed terrorist attacks in Benin and Togo. The 2023 GTI report further documented 17 attacks and 44 deaths in Benin and Togo in 2022. Fatalities showed marked increase in 2023. According to the Minister of Communication of Togo, 31 people died, 29 were wounded and 3 are missing due to 'terrorist' incidents in 2023.⁸ The AU also reported that 'in Poni, a district in Burkina Faso that borders Cote d'Ivoire witnessed increased attacks while Koulpelogo province continued to witness increasing attacks closer to the frontier with Ghana.'⁹

In the Lake Chad Basin region, relative improvement has been registered in terms of frequency and fatality of attacks. Various reports including the 2023 Global Terrorism Index Report have indicated that Boko Haram attacks have shown a major decline not seen in over a decade. This does not suggest that the region has seen the end of conflicts involving terrorism nor that of Boko Haram. Despite the weakening of Boko Haram, it continues to orchestrate attacks in the region. Most importantly, other terrorist groups such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) are taking the upper hand and intensifying their insurgency.

Despite the persistence of the growing threat of terrorism on the continent, it is worth putting in perspective that conflicts involving terrorism are concentrated in pockets of limited number of countries in the affected regions. For example, the five most affected countries in terms of number of attacks and the fatalities recorded in 2023 (**Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Nigeria, and Somalia**) account for **62%** and **86%** of continental attacks and deaths respectively.

Despite the persistence of the growing threat of terrorism on the continent, it is worth putting in perspective that conflicts involving terrorism are concentrated in pockets of limited number of countries in the affected regions

3 Amani Africa, *Consideration of the Report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on terrorism and related issues in Africa, Insights on the PSC* (26 October 2023) available on <https://amani-africa-et.org/consideration-of-the-report-of-the-chairperson-of-the-au-commission-on-counter-terror-ism-in-africa-and-related-issues/>

4 AU, *Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Terrorism and related issues* (27 October 2023). <https://amani-africa-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/1182-Report-of-the-Chairperson-of-the-AU-Commission-EN.pdf>

5 PSC/PR/COMM.1182(2023). <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/1182-comm-en.pdf>

6 Institute for Economics & Peace. *Global Terrorism Index 2023: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, March 2023. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GTI-2023-web-170423.pdf>

7 Monthly Digest on the AU Peace and Security Council, Amani Africa (October 2023). Pg 10. <https://amani-africa-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/October-monthly-Digest-2023.pdf>

8 Togo: Over 30 Dead in Terrorist Attack in 2023, (November 2023). <https://www.africanews.com/2023/11/28/togo-over-30-dead-in-terrorist-attacks-in-2023/>

9 Iddi Yire. (December 2023). Chsmambas laments deteriorating terrorism threat level in west Africa. Ghana News Agency. <https://gna.org.gh/2023/12/chambas-laments-deteriorating-terrorism-threat-level-in-west-africa/>

2023 also witnessed the eruption of new conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, of which the latter engulfed nearly the entire country with serious regional ramifications. Despite the Pretoria Agreement's contribution to ending active hostilities in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, new conflict has been underway since the eruption of fighting in the Amhara region between a militia group, called Fano, and government forces in April 2023. New conflict also erupted in Somalia following the descent of territorial dispute between Somaliland and Puntland over Las Anod into a full-blown fighting.

The new conflict with the gravest consequences to the country and the region is the one that erupted in Sudan. After fighting erupted between the Sudan Armed Forces, headed by the head of the Sovereign Council General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, headed by general Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, aka Hemedti, on 15 April 2023, in subsequent months Sudan descended into a full-blown civil war.¹⁰ Conducted with complete disregard to the rules of war, this war continued to inflict enormous destruction to the Sudanese people and the Sudanese state. While Darfur and Khartoum bore the brunt of much of the indiscriminate violence from the war, RSF's campaign to deepen its grip on Darfur led to some of the most atrocious violence reminiscent of the genocidal violence that the region endured two decades ago.¹¹

In a development signalling the country's division into territories under the control of the two fighting forces, the Sudan army and government entities established their base in Port Sudan after losing Khartoum. In the offensive it undertook in October and November, the RSF expanded its territorial control in Darfur by capturing the region's major cities. In December, RSF gained territories in Sennar and White Nile states after capturing El Gezira and El Giteina.¹²

¹⁰ Solomon A Dersso & Zekarias Beshah Abebe, *Sudan's descent from a peace process to armed fighting and implications for the AU: The urgency for more and sustained action*, Ideas Indaba (20 March 2023), Amani Africa.

¹¹ Solomon A Dersso, Tsion Hagos & Zekarias Beshah Abebe, *On why Darfur deserves special attention*, Ideas Indaba, Amani Africa (22 June 2023). <https://amani africa-et.org/on-why-darfur-deserves-a-special-attention/>

¹² 'Sudan war: RSF enters White Nile state and Sennar'. Dabanga Sudan. (December 2023) <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-war-rsf-enters-white-nile-state-and-sennar>

Beyond the conflicts involving terrorism and those that erupted newly or further deteriorated, countries with protracted conflicts and/or post-conflict transitions such as CAR, DRC, Somalia and South Sudan. The conflict in Eastern DRC, particularly the fighting involving the M23 not only continues to fester but also to further deteriorate during 2023. Not surprisingly, this is stocking regional tension with Kinshasa persisting with its accusation of Kigali for supporting the M23 and even threatening military action. It has been in this context that DRC requested the withdrawal of the East African Force deployed to Eastern DRC to stabilize the situation only in June 2022. Highlighting contending regional interests, as the push for withdrawal of the East African Force gained steam towards the end of the year, DRC welcomed the decision of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) decision for deploying a force to the east of the country. Kinshasa's calculation is that SADC forces would direct their guns at the M23.

As in the previous year, civilians bear much of the brunt of the worsening of conflicts involving terrorism and the eruption of new conflicts such as those in Sudan. The data from the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) show that more than half of the terrorist attacks recorded from January to September 2023 were on civilians. These attacks led to 5683 civilian deaths out of the total of 12,092 deaths from terrorist attacks recorded for the reporting period.¹³ From new conflicts, an example that illustrates the heavy burden of conflicts on civilians is Sudan. During the past eight months, the conflict led to the killing of more than 13,000 civilians and the displacement of just under 8 million people inside and outside Sudan, with about 611,000 people displaced in the month of December alone.¹⁴ The situation in Sudan is now described as the worst displacement crisis and according to UNICEF, it is the worst child displacement crisis in the world with over 3 million displaced children.

The main factor for the fact that conflicts take a heavy toll on civilians relates to the deliberate

¹³ *Terrorism in Africa. (January -September 2023)* The African Center For the Study and Research on Terrorisms. African Union Commission. <https://www.caert.org/dz/2024/01/02/according-to-data-available-in-the-africa-terrorism-database/>

¹⁴ *Displacement Crisis in Sudan Deepens as Fighting Spreads*. UNHCR. (October 2023). <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/displacement-crisis-sudan-deepens-fighting-spreads>

targeting of civilians and the resort of conflict parties to indiscriminate use of force. In this regard, the PSC itself expressed concern 'over the escalation of violations of international humanitarian law, including deliberate attacks against civilians, attacks on public infrastructure, camps hosting IDPs and obstacles to humanitarian access.'¹⁵ Yet, AU has as yet to take any concrete action beyond PSC sessions and such expressions of concern to make good on PSC's own acknowledgement that the principle of non-indifference on which the AU is founded 'requires that the organization cannot be a bystander on humanitarian crises in the Continent.'¹⁶

Related to the dire crisis of civilian protection is the persistence and, in some cases, further deterioration of the grave humanitarian situation on the continent. The number of displaced people on the continent substantially increased from 2022, with new major displacements reported, among others, in the conflicts in Sahel, the DRC and Sudan. Apart from the additional nearly one million people forcibly displaced in the DRC during the first half of 2023, the war in Sudan alone added an unprecedented more than 7 million displaced from their homes. Highlighting the scale of the growing humanitarian crises due mostly to conflicts accentuated by climate disasters, the AU notes that Africa 'continues to carry a disproportionate burden of hosting the largest population of displaced persons and accounted for one in every five refugees globally, as well as one third of the total IDP population.'¹⁷ The PSC on its part in its sessions held on the humanitarian situation in September and October 2023, expressed deep concern 'over the worsening humanitarian situation in parts of the Continent, including the increasing number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) due to conflict, violence, and adverse effects of climate change.'¹⁸

Another feature of the political and security landscape of the continent during 2023 is the occurrence of further constitutional and election related crises in

addition to those registered in previous years. Two more countries jumped on the coup bandwagon. The first was Niger and the second was Gabon in July and August 2023 respectively. With these two coups, a coup belt that stretches from the Atlantic coast in West Africa across the Sahel to the Red Sea coast in the Horn of Africa emerged. These coups, the attempted coups in Burkina Faso (September 2023), Sierra Leone (November 2023) and the coup-like constitutional crisis that rocked Guinea Bissau (early December 2023) all highlight the continuation of the so-called new season of the resurgence of coups in Africa that started in 2020.

Additionally, beyond the disputes and crises that elections in many places trigger, there are increasing signs that citizens are losing confidence in elections as the avenue for democratic change and improving their socio-economic conditions. Despite the preference of many for competitive elections, increasingly fewer believe that elections result in accountable and democratic leaders.¹⁹ Many are increasingly disillusioned as elections increasingly become sites of violent contestations and sources of instability and/or rituals for legitimizing leaders with little democratic credentials.

Early in the year, the election in Nigeria, one of the most anticipated elections, was not free from troubles. According to the report of one of the local observer groups, various factors contributed to denting the credibility of and public confidence in the legitimacy of the elections. These include poor communication by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), incidents of violence used as a means to influence the electoral process, allegations of manipulation during collation of votes and the failure of the electoral technology, which was meant to enhance transparency.

Sierra Leone's 24 June multi-tier elections (presidential, parliamentary, and local elections) were marred by violence according to AU observers. As a crisis triggered by lack of transparency in the tabulation of the results, the AU, ECOWAS, Commonwealth

¹⁵ PSC/PR/COMM.1176(2023) <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/1176comm-en-mod2.pdf>

¹⁶ PSC/PR/COMM.1176(2023) <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/1176comm-en-mod2.pdf>

¹⁷ Report of the Commission on the Humanitarian Situation in Africa (January – December 2023) to be submitted to the 44th ordinary session of the Executive Council, 5.

¹⁸ PSC/PR/COMM.1176(2023) <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/1176comm-en-mod2.pdf>

¹⁹ Fredline M'Cormack-Hale & Mavis Supork Dome. Support for elections weakens among Africans: Many see them as ineffective in holding leaders accountable, Afrobarometer Dispatch 551 (September 2022). <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad551-support-for-elections-weakens-among-africans-many-see-them-as-ineffective-in-holding-leaders-accountable/>

observers and the West African Leaders Forum called on 'the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone to ensure maximum transparency in the processing and release of provisional and final results of the election'.²⁰ As a result, the post-election environment in the country has been characterized by tension and deepening polarization. In November 2023, the situation deteriorated further when armed confrontation, which the government characterized as an attempted coup, took place. This crisis, as an outgrowth of elections with questionable credibility, further illustrates a case of election that further eroded trust in and legitimacy of the prevailing system of governance.

In the elections in Zimbabwe held in August, a preliminary statement by AU-COMESA Election Observation Mission (EOM) concluded that the elections were conducted in a 'generally peaceful and transparent manner despite logistical challenges'.²¹ The SADC Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM), however, expressed reservations, stating that '[s]ome aspects of the Harmonized Elections fell short of the requirements of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act, and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021)'.²²

The 20 December elections in DRC, characterized by major logistical challenges and delays, were announced as delivering victory for the incumbent President Félix Tshisekedi— a result rejected by the opposition and challenged by local independent observers yet upheld by constitutional court. These elections, disputed as they are and taking place in flawed conditions, have not enhanced public trust and confidence in the government.

20 International Observers Call for Peace and Restraint in Sierra Leone. Press Statement. (June 2023). https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/42914-pr-press_Statement_AU_ECOWAS_Commonwealth.pdf

21 African Union and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa Election Observation Mission to the 23 August 2023 Harmonized Elections in Zimbabwe. Preliminary Statement. (August 2023). https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/43074-pr-Final_AU-COMESA_EOM_Preliminary_Statement_on_2023_Harmonised_Elections.pdf

22 Gibbs Dube. SADC: Zimbabwe's Harmonized Elections Fell Short of Nation's Constitution, Regional Body Guidelines. Voice of America. (August 2023). <https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/sadc-zimbabwe-s-harmonized-elections-fell-short-of-nation-s-constitution-regional-body-guidelines/7241009.html#:~:text=The%20Southern%20African%20Development%20Community,on%20free%20and%20fair%20polls>

The other elections including those in Gabon, Eswatini and Madagascar were not much less flawed or contested. Indeed, it is the contestations surrounding the results of the presidential election that the putschists used as an excuse for the coup that interrupted the potential resolution of the electoral dispute in favor of the opposition in Gabon.

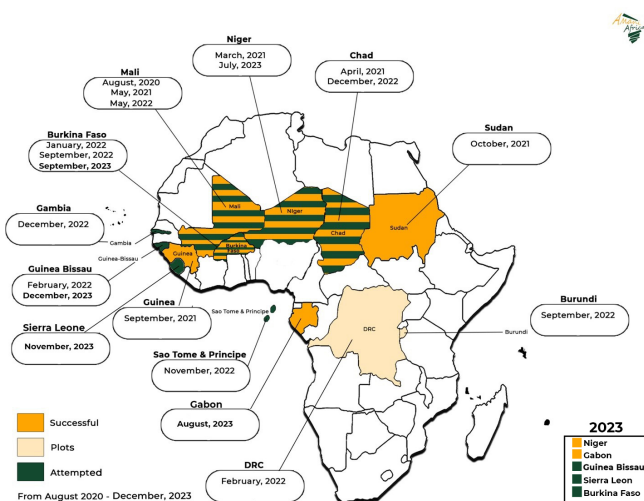
Another area of political instability and tension relates to the issues of both extension of term limits by incumbent presidents and transition from incumbents whose term of office ends. Examples that illustrate this include those of the CAR and Senegal. CAR became the latest country in the Central Africa region to remove constitutional term limits, paving the way for the incumbent to run for third term in the elections slated for 2025. Despite the opposition from political parties not in government to the removal of the constitutional clause limiting the terms of office of the president to two terms, the constitutional referendum in July (boycotted by some sectors of society) and the Constitutional Court in August 2023 endorsed the constitutional amendment including the removal of the clause on term limits. When it had the occasion to address the issue during its 1157th session, the PSC avoided to address the issue of extension of term limits in the operative part of the communiqué it adopted after the session, opting instead to indirectly talk about constitutionality in the preamble of the communiqué it adopted.

In Senegal, uncertainties around President Macky Sall's intentions for running for a third term have plunged Senegal into major political turmoil not seen in recent years. In one of the deadliest protests in opposition to President Sall's potential third term bid confrontation between security forces and protestors involving the use of force by security forces led to the death of at least 16 people and injury of 350 others according to data from OHCHR, UN's human rights agency.²³ Highlighting an emerging trend where objection of a member state blocks PSC engagement, a proposal for the PSC to discuss the situation in June 2023 did not materialize.

23 Ngouda Dione, Sofia Christensen and Diadie Ba. Fresh protests rock Senegal as death toll climbs. Reuters. (June 2023) <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/senegals-protest-hit-capital-left-with-looted-shops-debris-2023-06-03/>

Another and major source of crisis for democratic governance and constitutional rule in recent years and in 2023 is the return of military coups affecting particularly certain regions of the continent. As in the previous years, the season of military coups and the threat of such coups has thus persisted well into 2023. Indeed, two successful coups took place in 2023, which is more than the previous year. For the first time since it came into existence, the AU suspended two of its member states (Niger and Gabon) in one calendar month.²⁴ The occurrence of these coups led to the emergence of a coup belt stretching from the Atlantic Ocean coast in West Africa across central Sahel into the Red Sea coast in East Africa.

In addition to the two coups in Niger and Gabon, there were also three coup attempts. These were in Burkina Faso (September 2023), in Sierra Leone (November 2023) and Guinea Bissau (December 2023). With the exception of the coup in Gabon which is in the Central Africa region, all the other cases took place in the West Africa region. Indeed, West Africa continues to maintain its status as ground zero of the coup season that has been underway since 2020. Out of the nine successful military seizures of power since August 2020, six of them took place in West African countries. Out of the 14 member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), four of them, making up almost one-third of ECOWAS member states, are currently under military rule.



MAP-1: Plotted, Attempted and Successful coups,
Aug 2020-Dec 2023

²⁴ Briefing on the situations in Niger and Gabon. Insight on the Peace and Security Council. Amani Africa. October 2023. <https://amani-africa-et.org/briefing-on-the-situations-in-niger-and-gabon/>

One of the features of the conflict landscape is that most conflicts and crises such as coups, even when they are mostly intra- state, are regionalized and involve varying degrees of involvement of neighbouring countries. Yet, notwithstanding the fact that there are no outright inter-state conflicts, tension between DRC and Rwanda have spiked with the DRC accusing Rwanda of supporting the M23 and President Tshisekedi reportedly threatening to attack Rwanda. The Horn of Africa has also experienced mounting regional tensions in 2023, illustrated, among others, by the fallout between Addis Ababa and Asmara.

Of course, some of the features of the peace and security landscape of the continent in 2023 are continuities from the previous years. Apart from coups, this is the case with respect to the transnational and transregional character of conflicts and crisis on the continent. As such, the conflicts in the Horn of Africa, Lake Chad Basin, the Sahel and Great Lakes regions, are not only regional but also cross regional. For example, the new conflict that erupted in Sudan reverberates not only in the Horn of Africa region but also in North Africa and Central Africa regions as well.

Beyond the cross regional nature of conflicts in the Sahel and West Africa for example, one of the factors for the fact that more than one regional geopolitical and economic block is implicated in specific conflict situations is the membership of some countries in more than one REC/RM. One example that illustrates the complications that arise from such multiple memberships is the conflict in Eastern DRC. The membership of the DRC in SADC, International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the East African Community (EAC) means that all of them initiate response to the crisis, leading to fragmentation and competing policy action. It also allows the actors of the country with such multiple memberships to engage in forum shopping. This was exactly what transpired regarding the war involving the M23 in Eastern DRC. After welcoming the EAC force in 2022, DRC requested for the withdrawal of the force, blaming the force for not acting against the M23²⁵. As noted earlier, Kinshasa, hoping to get troops willing to direct their guns on the M23, welcomed

²⁵ East DRC: Commencement of East African Regional Force Withdrawal Amidst Criticisms. Africa News. (December 2023) <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/the-au-convenes-the-3rd-joint-committee-meeting-of-the-ethiopian-peace-process>

SADC decision to deploy a regional force, basically replacing the EAC force.²⁶

Another and perhaps more worrying feature of the peace and security trend on the continent in 2023 has been the deepening entanglement of conflict and crisis situations on the continent with the intensifying global geopolitical tensions pitting major powers and middle powers against each other. This has been most visible in the conflicts in the Sahel, Central African and Horn of Africa regions. In significant ways, a major feature of conflict dynamics in 2023 was the rise to prominence of the impact of the geopolitical tussle on conflicts and crises on the continent. In Sudan, the meddling of middle powers from the Gulf has become most impactful factor fuelling the war that broke out in April. In the Sahel and West Africa, internal political and security instabilities are more and more turned into a theatre of power rivalry involving a wide range of major and middle global powers.

Increasingly, this growing influence of intensifying geopolitical rivalry is making a mockery of the already deeply misunderstood and misused mantra of African solutions to African problems. This rising prominence of geopolitical rivalries as major factor shaping conflict and political dynamics is not only having deleterious impact on the behaviour of conflict parties and local political actors. But it is also stripping regional and continental policy makers off the limited agency that they have regarding the search for resolution of conflicts and political crises on the continent.

III. ACTIVITIES OF THE PSC IN 2023

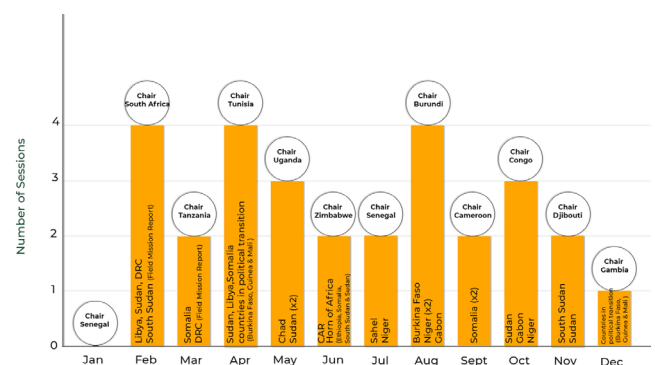
It is against the background of the prevailing peace and security context on the continent discussed in depth in the foregoing section that the PSC carried out its activities in 2023. The issues that the PSC dealt with during largely reflect the conflict map of the continent, although, as extensively examined below, there are peace and security situations and issues that warrant PSC's engagement but were not addressed. Perhaps more than the question of convergence

between the agenda of the PSC and the peace and security dynamics in 2023, of particular significance are the issues of whether the PSC dedicated the level of attention commensurate with the gravity of the situations and whether it mobilized the kind of conflict prevention, management, resolution and peacebuilding responses the circumstances warrant. This section is dedicated to delving into discussing these and related issues.

3.1 Highlights from the activities of the PSC in 2023

The proportion of time that the PSC dedicated to its regular activities involving the convening of meetings and adopting decisions on the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts has declined. By contrast, the proportion of time dedicated other secondary activities have shown increase. The number of sessions of the PSC in 2023 were less by about 14% from 2022. The decrease in the number of agenda items considered in 2023 from that of 2022 is 24%.

If one looks at this from the perspective of the number of sessions committed to country or region-specific conflict situations, the PSC dedicated in 2023 eight sessions less than it did in 2022 to country/region-specific situations. This accounts for the fact that no session was dedicated to any situation in Southern Africa, including Mozambique and some situations received less attention than they did last year. While the number of sessions dedicated to conflict situations on its own does not indicate impactful engagement on the part of the PSC, it signifies the level of political and diplomatic attention it is committing to conflict situations.



Country Specific Sessions considered in 2023

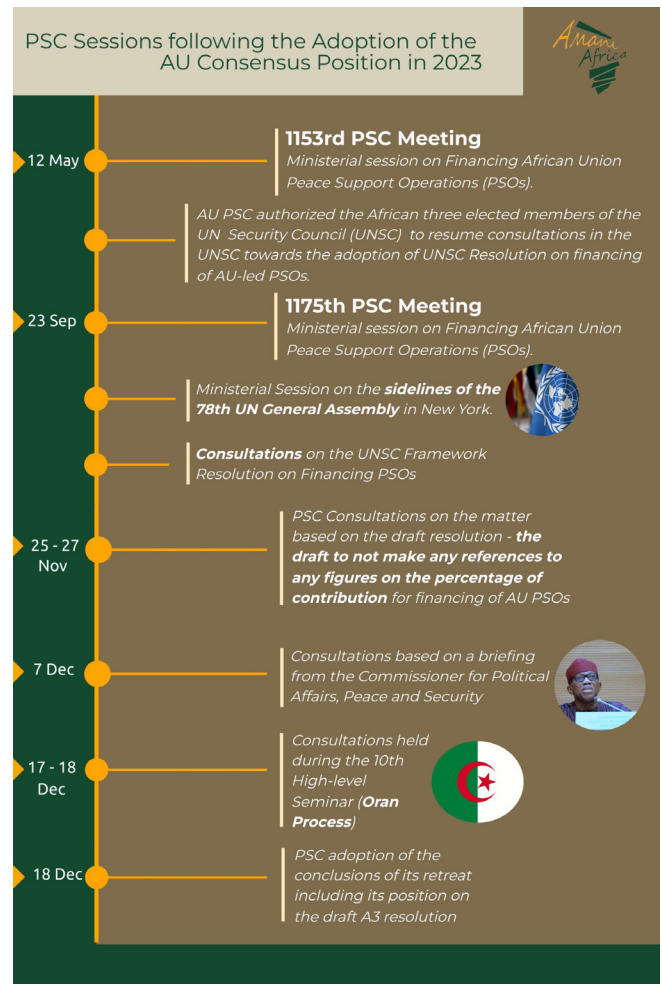
²⁶ Patrick Ilunga. DRC signs deal for SADC troops deployment. *The East African*. (November 2023). <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/drc-signs-an-agreement-for-the-deployment-of-sadc-troops--4437868>

The number and percentage of sessions dedicated to country/region specific conflict situations as compared to other sessions shows a further decline from the previous year. Out of the 68 agenda items in 2023, 43% were committed to various country and region-specific situations whereas 57% addressed various thematic and other issues. This is in part a result of increased proliferation of the Council's agenda items. Some of the new themes introduced in recent years could very easily be accommodated within the framework of pre-existing categories of thematic items that are already in the annual indicative agenda of the Council. The PSC itself recognized this and in the conclusion of its 15th retreat on its working methods, it proposed that the 2024 indicative program of work is rationalized by limited the number of thematic sessions and where possible by merging similar thematic issues.

2023 was a year for a major breakthrough concerning the longstanding issue of financing of AU led peace support operations (PSOs). Following the adoption of the AU Consensus Position by the 36th Assembly of the AU in February, the PSC held two sessions as part of its program of work and at least an additional three consultations. Its first session on the subject held on 12 May at ministerial level authorized the African three elected members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to resume consultations in the UNSC towards the adoption of UNSC resolution on financing of AU-led PSOs. It is to be recalled that the PSC in October 2019 decided to suspend the then negotiation by the A3 on such a resolution in the UNSC for referring key elements of the issues to be part of the resolution to the AU Assembly for adopting a common position. The PSC held another ministerial session in September on the sidelines of the 78th UN General Assembly in New York, with the participation of senior UN official.

During its retreat on its working methods held on 25-27 November in Tunis, Tunisia, the PSC held consultations on the matter based on the draft resolution initiated by the A3. On the problematic percentage of contribution for financing of AU PSOs, the PSC adopted the position that the 'draft should not make any references to any figures, particularly in terms of percentages.' On 7 December, the PSC held another consultation based on a briefing from the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security and tasked the AU Commission to engage the A3 to advance the Common Position. Following a proposal from the US to limit the reference of the percentage

only to the part that the UN would be responsible for, another consultation was held during the 10th High-level Seminar, also known as the Oran Process, held in Oran, Algeria on 17-18 December. On 18 December, the PSC adopted the conclusions of its retreat which included its position on the draft A3 resolution. Notwithstanding the fact that the PSC concluded to refer the matter to the AU Assembly and upheld its existing position on ²⁷reference to any percentage in the resolution, the consideration of the draft resolution as initially planned went ahead on 21 December and it was adopted as Resolution 2719 (2023) with amendment introduced by the US specifying the maximum percentage of UN assessed contribution that will be dedicated to UNSC authorized AU-led PSOs. In a post of 22 December on his X (previously tweeter) platform, the AU Commission Chairperson hailed the adoption of Resolution 2719 (2023) 'a historic development'.

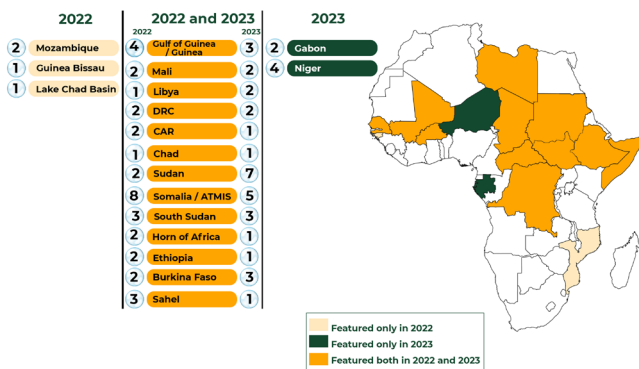


PSC Sessions and Consultations on Financing AU PSOs in 2023

²⁷ Moussa Faki Mahamat. African Union Commission Chair. https://twitter.com/AUC_MoussaFaki/status/1738153009857569196

In terms of trends, despite the difficulty that the PSC continues to face in being seized with new crises, one notable aspect of PSC's 2023 performance is that three 'new' situations emerged into its agenda. One of them relates to a country situation already on the agenda of the PSC and the other two concern the occurrence of military seizure of power in two countries. The first was the outbreak of a new war in Sudan, which promoted the emergency session of the PSC on 16 April. The two others concern the coups in Niger and Gabon. The remainder of the specific country and/or regional situations that the PSC dealt with in 2023 are carried over from earlier years.

Map in Regional Distribution that compares 2022 to 2023



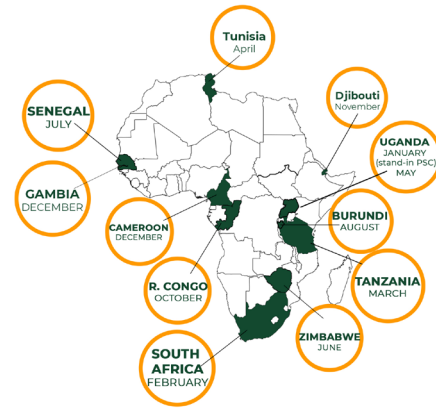
MAP-2: Regional Distribution of Country Specific Sessions, 2022 and 2023

With respect to the working methods of the PSC, a major highlight in 2023 is the introduction of the use of informal consultations. The PSC held two such informal consultations. While informal consultations are provided for in Article 8(11) of the PSC Protocol and Rule 16 of the PSC Rules of Procedure, the informal consultations that the PSC activated in 2023 are not exactly the same as those envisaged in Article 8(11) of the PSC protocol.²⁸ The PSC decided to use informal consultations in the Conclusions of the 14th Retreat of the PSC on its working methods for purposes of engaging representatives of countries suspended from participation in the AU due to unconstitutional changes of government. It was during Tunisia's chairship of the PSC in April that the PSC held the first such informal session. In December, the PSC held another informal consultation (session) with representatives of Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali.

The alphabetical order of the monthly rotation of the chairing of the PSC was followed except in one

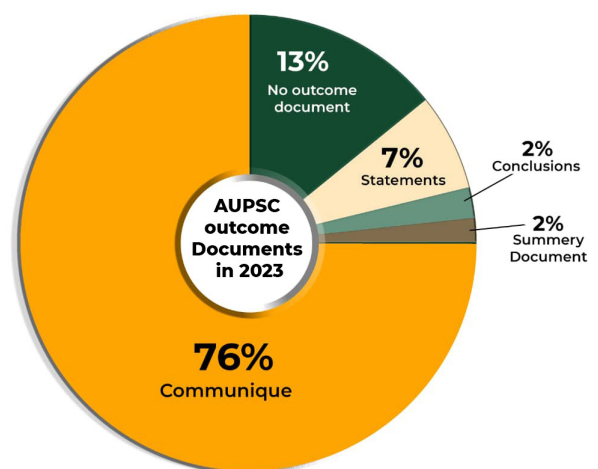
instance. In January 2023, while the turn for chairing the PSC was that of Senegal, Uganda stepped in as stand-in chair with Senegal opting to concentrate on chairing the PRC in the context of the preparatory meetings towards the 36th ordinary session of the AU Assembly. Senegal took up the role of chairing the PSC in July 2023 after the completion of the existing alphabetical order.

Chair of the PSC 2023



MAP-3: 2023 PSC Chairpersons

During the year the PSC held sessions at all the three levels that it is envisaged to meet in the PSC Protocol. As in the previous years, most of its sessions were held at Ambassadorial levels. The number of ministerial sessions in 2023 increased by two more sessions than in 2022 when the PSC held six ministerial sessions. The number of ministerial sessions in 2023 were the same as those in 2021. Unlike 2022 when the PSC did not hold a session at summit levels, in 2023 the PSC held two of its sessions at heads of state and government levels as in 2021.



Level of PSC Meetings, 2023

²⁸ Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. (July 2002). <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/1186comm-en.pdf>

After over a decade, the PSC held a session within the framework of Article 18 of the PSC Protocol on its relationship with the Pan African Parliament (PAP). This is the first time that the PSC met with PAP since its last meeting in 2012. After several years of hibernation of the Panel of the Wise (PoW), the PSC also convened a session on the briefing of the PoW with its 1142nd session. The last time the PoW briefed the PSC was in 2017.

In terms of engagement within the framework of Article 17 of the PSC Protocol, PSC's action concerning matters on the agenda of the UNSC, beyond financing of AU-led PSOs, largely focused on advocacy for lifting of sanctions. This is reflected in relation to the situations in the CAR, DRC, Somalia and South Sudan. A key aspect of the UNSC engagement on the situations on the continent that the PSC could contribute to (but is not) relates to UN missions. The PSC thus had no role in respect to the policy negotiations around the fate of UN missions in Mali and Sudan which ended abruptly and that of the DRC, which has started its exit, despite concern it expressed on the implications of the withdrawal of UN mission from Mali and attacks on the UN Mission in DRC. The PSC held the annual consultative meeting with the UNSC in October 2023.²⁹ One notable aspect of this year's consultative meeting between the PSC and the UNSC was the non-participation of any of the P5 members of the UNSC at the ambassadorial level.³⁰ A major development in the annual engagement between the PSC and the UN Peacebuilding Commission is their decision to elevate their engagement into a formal consultation.³¹

The PSC also held its annual consultative meeting with the European Peace and Security Committee (EUPSC). But as in 2022, the PSC and the EUPSC were unable to adopt a joint communique. This is owing to the lack of agreement on the proposal of the EUPSC for inclusion of formulation on the war in Ukraine in the joint communique. As with the EUPSC that persisted with its 2022 position on the inclusion of such formulation, the position of members of the PSC on precluding such language did not change when the two sides met for the 14th annual consultative meeting in Brussels in May 2023.³²

From conflict situations, the highest number of PSC sessions were dedicated to Sudan. Beyond the session dedicated to Sudan, this situation also received attention in a number of other sessions including those dealing with humanitarian situations, women, peace and security, Horn of Africa and the informal consultation (held on 21 December). From peace and security issues, unconstitutional changes of government received the most attention in various sessions of the PSC,^{33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38}, although there was no particular session dedicated to this issue. The most notable additions to PSC's thematic sessions include the one on African Day of Peace and Reconciliation marked for the first time on 31 January,³⁹ the session on community response to security challenges⁴⁰ and the

32 14th Annual Joint Consultative Meeting AU PSC and EU PSC. (J. N/A

33 PSC/PR/DA.1133(2023) <https://papsrepositoryafrica-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1804/1133%20Draft%20Agenda%20-%20EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

34 PSC/PR/COMM.1138 (2023) <https://papsrepositoryafrica-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1820/1138.comm-en.pdf?sequence=20&isAllowed=y>

35 PSC/PR/COMM.1164 (2023) <https://papsrepositoryafrica-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1909/1164.comm-en.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>

36 PSC/PR/COMM.1167 (2023). <https://papsrepositoryafrica-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1911/1167.comm-en.pdf?sequence=20&isAllowed=y>

37 PSC/PR/COMM.1170 (2023). <https://papsrepositoryafrica-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1923/1170.comm-en.pdf?sequence=22&isAllowed=y>

38 PSC/PR/COMM.1172 (2023). <https://papsrepositoryafrica-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1950/1172.comm-en.pdf?sequence=14&isAllowed=y>

39 PSC/PR/COMM.1135 (2023). <https://papsrepositoryafrica-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1810/1135.comm-en.pdf?sequence=31&isAllowed=y>

40 PSC/MIN/COMM.1163 (2023) <https://papsrepositoryafrica-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1810/1163.comm-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

29 Seventeenth (17th) Annual Joint Consultative Meeting Between the African Union Peace and Security Council and the United Nations Peace and Security Council. Joint Communique. (October 2023). <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/eng-final-joint-communique-17th-qjcm-on-6-october-2023.pdf>

30 Seventeenth (17th) Annual Joint Consultative Meeting Between the African Union Peace and Security Council and the United Nations Peace and Security Council. Joint Communique. (October 2023). <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/eng-final-joint-communique-17th-qjcm-on-6-october-2023.pdf>

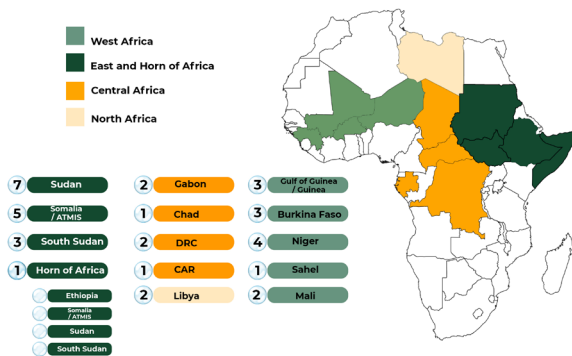
31 6th Informal Annual Joint Consultative Meeting between The Peace and Security Council of The African Union and The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. Joint Statement. (November 2023) <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/1156.comm-en.pdf>

session on private security and defence companies.⁴¹

During the year, the PSC held 61 sessions with the first session of the year held as the 1130th meeting of the PSC and the last being the 1191st meeting. Some of the sessions had more than one agenda item. As such the total number of agenda items that featured in the 61 sessions were 68. Compared to 2022, the number of sessions decreased by ten and the number of agenda items decreased by 24 in absolute terms.

3.2. Engagement of the PSC on country and region specific situations

Regional Distribution of PSC Session in 2023



MAP-4: Regional Distribution of Sessions, 2023

Of regional and country-specific sessions that took place during the year in review, 45% were committed to the situation in the east and horn of Africa, maintaining the region's dominance of PSC sessions allocated to regional and country-focused concerns. West Africa took up 27% of the regional/country-specific sessions while 21% was dedicated to central Africa. North Africa had one of the lowest shares of sessions at 7% while no session was dedicated to the southern Africa region. During the past couple of years, the situation in the Cabo Delgado region of Mozambique and operations of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) was regularly considered by the PSC. Despite continued violence and resulting dire humanitarian consequences in Cabo Delgado in 2023, the PSC did not commit a session during the year to follow up on efforts deployed to restore peace and stability in the region.

3.2.1. PSC ON THE SITUATIONS IN THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA

PSC sessions on East and Horn of Africa



In 2023, the lion's share of PSC's attention and time was dedicated to situations in the East and Horn of Africa compared to other regions. It is the only region where the number of PSC sessions was double digit, with a total of 13 sessions. Unlike in 2022 when the largest number of PSC sessions for this region were on Somalia and ATMIS, it is worth noting that the high percentage of PSC sessions to this region is attributable largely to the outbreak of a new war in Sudan in April 2023. PSC held a total of seven sessions on Sudan, six of which were solely dedicated to Sudan and an additional discussion on Sudan concerning other regional matters (i.e., a session of the Situation in the Horn of Africa).

The number of sessions in which Sudan featured as main agenda does not however capture the level of attention that PSC gave to the situation. As we pointed out earlier, specific aspects of the situation in Sudan also received attention in various thematic sessions of the PSC such as those dealing with humanitarian action and women, peace and security. Even the session on the Horn of Africa was initially put on the agenda to consider the regional ramification of the war in Sudan and expanded to cover the other situations in the region ahead of the convening of the session.⁴²

Another country-specific situation the PSC focused on in this region during the year was Somalia. While the number of sessions the PSC held on Somalia/ATMIS in 2023 is less by 4 sessions from 2022, the issues that

africa-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1903/1163.commen.pdf?sequence=23&isAllowed=y

41 PSC/MIN/COMM.1189 (2023) N/A

42 Monthly Digest on the AU Peace and Security Council, Amani Africa (June 2023). Pg4. <https://amani-africa-et.org/monthly-digest-on-the-african-union-peace-and-security-council-june-2023/>

animate PSC sessions on Somalia/AMIS remain similar to those the PSC faced in 2022. The PSC held three specific sessions dedicated to Somalia covering both the situation in Somalia and ATIMS. The PSC also dealt with the situation in Somalia as part of the session on the situation in the Horn of Africa. The issue of ATIMS also featured during the ministerial session held on the margins of the 78th UN General Assembly in New York in September 2023.⁴³

Another situation in the East and Horn of Africa region that the PSC sessions addressed was South Sudan. Compared to 2022, the PSC decreased its engagement reverting back to one session to this situation similar to 2021. The session on South Sudan, related to the field mission of the PSC, was dedicated to the implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreements in light of the upcoming 2024 election. Additionally, the PSC also reviewed the situation in South Sudan during the session that focused on the situation in the Horn of Africa.

In relation to the situation in Ethiopia, the only instance in which the PSC had engagement in its formal session was in the context of its session on the situation in the Horn of Africa. Even in the particular instance, it was limited to the work of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism established under the November 2022 Pretoria Peace Agreement.

Somalia and AMISOM/ATMIS: Between progress and continuity

The first of the 3+ meetings of the PSC focusing on the Somalia and activities of ATMIS, the 1143rd PSC meeting, was convened on 7 March 2023, at the ambassadorial level.⁴⁴ The issue of major pressing concern, which also received particular attention in the AU Commission Chairperson's Report as illustrated by the number and content of paragraphs in the recommendation section addressing the issue, was the dire funding shortfall facing ATMIS.⁴⁵ Expressing its 'deep concern' over the lack of predictable, adequate, and sustainable funding

for the mission, the PSC reiterated the different options that it previously considered to narrow down the funding deficit that ATMIS has continued to face.

Taking account of the success that the military campaign of the SSFs and local militia forces registered in liberating some territories under the control of Al Shabaab, the PSC communique stressed the imperative of accompanying the successful offensives with stabilization strategy to extend governance and state authority in newly liberated areas. In addition to this was the request by the Council to ATMIS and FGS to complete all outstanding tasks to ensure the completion of Phase 1 of the transition plan, following the extension of the timelines for the drawdown of 2,000 ATMIS troops from end of 2022 to 30 June 2023. Furthermore, Council highlighted the need for the commencement of preparations for the phase 2 drawdown involving 3000 ATMIS troops to be completed by 30 September 2023. One additional element of the meeting was the appeal of the PSC to the UNSC to positively consider the [repeated] request from the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) to lift the arms embargo imposed on the country, particularly in light of the progress made in delivering on the benchmarks outlined in UNSC Resolution 2662 (2022).

Moreover, at the [1151st meeting](#) on 28 April 2023,⁴⁶ the PSC discussed the progress of ATMIS over the past year and the joint operations conducted by the SSF and ATMIS. Among the contributions of ATMIS commended during the session included its support towards the successful implementation and realization of the Somali Transition Plan (STP) and the Somali National Stabilisation Strategy, notably through the provision of security and creation of enabling environment to newly liberated areas, as well as the enhancement of institutional capacity of the SSF and supervision of the May 2022 election.⁴⁷ Apart from the continuing concern about the financial challenges facing ATMIS and measures being taken in that respect, the meeting emphasized the importance of reforming and restructuring the Somali Police Force and welcomed progress in the reconfiguration of ATMIS. It also requested completion of outstanding

⁴³ Information received during Amani Africa consultation with Ambassador of the PSC, 16 October 2023.

⁴⁴ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1143rd meeting of the PSC (7 March 2023).

⁴⁵ On the specifics of the financial challenges facing ATMIS see *Cash strapped African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) starts its second year facing uncertain financial future*, Amani Africa Ideas Indaba (4 April 2023).

⁴⁶ AU Peace and Security Council, Communiqué of the 1151st meeting of the PSC (28 April 2023).

⁴⁷ Monthly Digest on the AU Peace and Security Council (April 2023). Pg8. <https://amani africa-et.org/monthly-digest-on-the-african-union-peace-and-security-council-april-2023/>

tasks to ensure the drawdown of ATMIS troops according to the transition plan.

Cognizant of the plan for the phase II drawdown of ATMIS troops by end of September, on 14 September, the PSC convened its [1173rd meeting](#) on the Situation in Somalia and the Operations of ATMIS.⁴⁸ Council decided, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2628 (2022) and UN Security Council Resolution 2687 (2023), to withdraw 3,000 ATMIS troops by 30 September 2023. It decided to undertake this drawdown in an equitable manner to prevent any security gap. Additionally, it further decided to withdraw 851 ATMIS police personnel as per the directives of the FGS.⁴⁹

Indicating the existence of disconnect between Addis Ababa and Mogadishu, Somalia sent a letter not long after the convening of this session by the PSC and its decision to implement the withdrawal of the 3000 troops 'without conditions'. In the letter addressed to the UNSC, Somalia requested for a technical pause of the drawn down for 90 days. Signifying the failure of the FGS to follow procedure by raising the matter with the AU directly before communicating with the UNSC, the UNSC referred the matter back to the AU.

When on 23 September, the [1175th meeting](#) of the PSC was convened to discuss the financing AU Peace Support Operations (PSOs),⁵⁰ some members of the PSC, including ATMIS troop contributing countries, raised the need for the PSC to support Somalia's request for a technical pause of the drawdown of the 3000 ATMIS troops, thereby reversing its 14 September decision. But the ministerial level meeting confined itself to noting the request and committing to the convening of a PSC session on the matter.

As there was a need for addressing the uncertainty that the request for technical pause created before the end of the due date of 30 September and in pursuit of the communique of the 1175th session,⁵¹ the PSC convened a session, not initially in its program of work for the

month, on the very last day of the month, despite it being a Saturday. When the PSC held its [1177th session](#) of on 30 September, given the danger of reversal of the hard-won security gains and the strong backing from the TCCs for the suspension of troop withdrawal, it was left with no option but to reverse its earlier decision to withdraw the 3000 troops and endorse the request for the technical pause by three months.⁵² This is not the first time that PSC extended ATMIS drawdown. In November 2022, upon the request of the FGS, PSC revised the operational timeline of phase I drawdown of 2000 troops from 31 December 2022 to 30 June 2023.

The second important issue addressed by the 1177th session was funding. Cognizant of the serious financial implication of the technical pause, PSC in this session directed the AU Commission to consider various options to mobilize the required finding for the three months extension. As critical step to process the exit of ATMIS within the timeline, the PSC urged 'the FGS to prioritize force generation, regeneration and capacity building, in order to take over and adequately occupy all FOBs handed over by ATMIS.'

The offensive against Al Shabaab and the successes registered in that regard are indicative of positive developments both in terms of the increasing capacity of SSFs and the possibilities of close working relationship between local security initiatives and national forces. Yet, despite some of these key gains registered during 2023, much of the fundamentals of the conflict situation in Somalia have not completely changed. During the year, the terror group continued to orchestrate major attacks, including in areas that are regarded as being out of the reach of Al Shabaab.⁵³ Similarly, the dance between proceeding with the drawdown of ATMIS troops as well as the taking over of responsibilities by SSFs and the repeated extension of the timelines for the drawdown highlight the persistence of AU's engagement between progress and continuity. Thus, while there is a policy position to finalize the exit of ATMIS by the end of 2024, it is also widely recognized that Somalia would require the presence of some form of military mission that will

⁴⁸ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1173rd meeting of the PSC* (14 September 2023).

⁴⁹ The drawdown of the 851 ATMIS police was not part of the original plan but included on the request of Somalia.

⁵⁰ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1175th meeting of the PSC* (25 September 2023).

⁵¹ PSC/MIN/COMM.1175(2023). <https://papsrepositoryafrica-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1958/1175%20Communique%20-%20EN.pdf?sequence=21&isAllowed=y>

⁵² AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1177th meeting of the PSC* (30 September 2023).

⁵³ ACLED Situation Update. *Al-Shabaab Strikes Back at Local Administrators*. (October 2023). <https://acleddata.com/2023/10/20/somalia-situation-update-october-2023-al-shabaab-strikes-back-at-local-administrators/>

replace ATMIS.

Ethiopia: The monitoring and verification mechanism the only matter addressed in relation to Ethiopia

In February 2023, the PSC's Provisional Program of Work for the month envisaged a plan for a field mission by the PSC. The PSC was made unable to undertake the field mission as planned. The opportunity that the field mission would have afforded the PSC to see for itself the situation on the ground and facilitate further policy support for consolidating peace and rehabilitation of affected people, including IDPs was squandered. The PSC's limited its engagement on Ethiopia in 2023 dedicating only one session as part of the PSC's briefing on the Situation in the Horn of Africa. During the [1158th session](#), the PSC commended the efforts by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) for actively seeking a peaceful resolution to the conflict and encouraged the support provided by the High-Level Panel in this regard. Given challenges faced particularly by people affected by the war including displaced people and some areas that remain insecure, the Communiqué indicated the PSC's emphasis on the need for the full implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) signed in November 2022 and welcomed the deployment and extension of the AU Monitoring Verification Mechanism (MVM).

The key outcome from the session included a request by the PSC to the AU Commission to undertake a needs assessment for the extension and deployment of the AU MVM. Although the AU MVM was anticipated to come to an end by December 2023, at a meeting of the [Joint Committee on the Monitoring Verification Mechanism of the Ethiopian Peace Process](#),⁵⁴ it was announced that the AU MVM mandate would be extended for another year, ending in December of 2024. The outcome of the convening also saw the approval by the AUC Chairperson to use approximately one million USD from the Crisis Reserve Facility of the AU Peace Fund to support the DDR process under the COHA.

The end of active hostilities in the Tigray region of

⁵⁴ The AU Convenes the 3rd Joint Committee Meeting of the Ethiopian Peace Process. African Union Commission, (December 2023). <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/press-release-the-au-convenes-the-3rd-jcm-1-dec-2023.pdf.pdf>

Ethiopia brought much needed respite for civilians caught in the crossfire of the war and has been welcomed by various stakeholders in the region and beyond. Yet, in 2023, Ethiopia has seen the persistence of conflict in Oromia region and the eruption of new one in the Amhara region in April. Unless shifts happen in the PSC and the situation changes significantly, the engagement of the PSC in the coming year will most likely remain the same.

South Sudan: trying to keep the parties to the peace agreement on course for concluding the transition within the newly extended timeline

On 28 February 2023, the Council convened its [1141st session](#), which adopted the Report of the Field Mission to South Sudan and its recommendations.⁵⁵ The Council acknowledged the roadmap and the 24-month extension of the transition period set to culminate in the elections in December 2024. It urged the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) and other concerned parties to complete outstanding transitional tasks within the extended period, emphasizing that there would be no further extension.

On 16 November, the Council at its [1186th session](#), considered the situation in South Sudan focusing on the state of the transitional process.⁵⁶ The PSC welcomed the progress made notably the appointment of the leadership of the three institutions, namely: the National Elections Commission (NEC); the National Constitutional Review Commission (NCRC) and the Political Parties Council (PPC). Signifying the inadequacy of the assignment of leaders of these institutions, the PSC rightly underscored the importance of expeditiously operationalizing these bodies, including availing them with the required resources to ensure that they effectively discharge their respective mandates. In addition, the PSC encouraged R-TGoNU to redouble efforts and commitment to implement the outstanding transitional tasks within the remaining timelines of the Transitional Roadmap and to expedite the establishment of the Board for Special Reconstruction Fund (BSRF), so that the AU Chairperson, the UN Secretary-General and IGAD

⁵⁵ AU Peace and Security Council, Communiqué of the 1141st meeting of the PSC (28 February 2023).

⁵⁶ AU Peace and Security Council, Communiqué of the 1186th meeting of the PSC (16 November 2023).

Chair, working in coordination with the RTGoNU, can successfully organize the South Sudan Pledging Conference as provided for in Chapter 3.2.8. of the Peace Agreement.

Sudan: Shaping AU's role after the country plunged into a new civil war

Over the course of 2023, the PSC's engagement on Sudan increased significantly. Of the seven total sessions the PSC convened on Sudan, there was only one session held before the outbreak of fighting between the SAF and RSF. This signifies that the surge in PSC engagement is driven principally by the new war. Of the six sessions of the PSC on the new war in Sudan, the sessions with substantial outcome were two. The first of this was [1156th](#) and only summit level session on Sudan where the PSC adopted the AU Roadmap for the resolution of the Conflict in Sudan.⁵⁷ The other was the PSC 1185th session, which was also held at ministerial level, adopted a decision for the establishment of a High-Level Ad hoc Panel on Sudan and the expedition of the political dialogue process. During the informal consultation the PSC held on 21 October to which the humanitarian situation in Sudan was added as additional agenda item on the request of the PSC Chairperson for the month not only reiterated the need for the establishment of the high-level panel but also for it to be at the level of former head of state/government.⁵⁸

Prior to the conflict, the PSC during its first quarter of the year discussed the situation in Sudan with its primary session on Sudan being held on 6 February 2023. During this [1137th](#) session, the PSC made key decisions regarding the ongoing political developments and the sanctions imposed on Sudan. The session took place in the context of significant political developments in Sudan. Notably, the signing of a Political Framework Agreement (PFA) on 5 December of the previous year marked the culmination of the first phase of the political process aimed at restoring constitutional order. The session resulted in three key outcomes: the request for the AU Commission to undertake a technical needs assessment mission to Sudan, specifically focusing on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development

⁵⁷ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1156th meeting of the PSC* (27 May 2023).

⁵⁸ AU PAPS, *The Fourth Quarter Report of the Peace and Security Council of the AU for the year 2023 (October-December)* 14. Also see Amani Africa, *Monthly Digest on the AU PSC* (December 2023).

(PCRD); secondly, urged the Commission to provide the AU Liaison Office in Khartoum with the necessary human, material, and financial resources to enhance its effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate; and lastly, the PSC's decisions to maintain the sanctions against Sudan highlighting the importance of meeting key demands related to constitutional order, political detainees, and peace agreements before any potential reconsideration. Unfortunately, the progress made for the return to constitutional order around the Political Framework Agreement was short-lived as the PSC convened on 16 April to urgently address the armed confrontation that erupted between the SAF and RSF. Marking the second convening of the PSC on Sudan, at this [1149th](#) session, the PSC strongly condemned the conflict and called for an immediate ceasefire to prevent further violence and protect civilians.⁵⁹ The PSC also tasked the AU Commission Chairperson with facilitating dialogue and resolution while seeking coordination with the UN and IGAD through the Trilateral Mechanism, which resulted in the formation of an Expanded Mechanism launched a few days prior by the AUC Chair calling for a meeting on 20th of April.

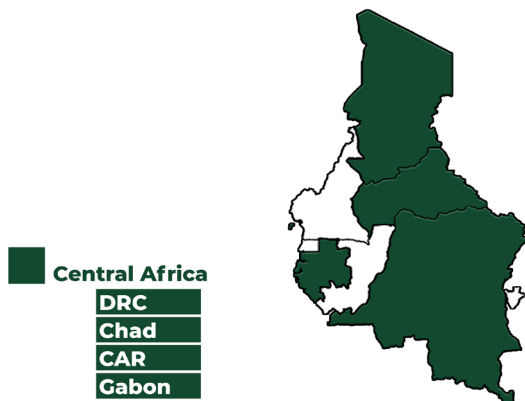
Since the PSC's first convening concerning the war in Sudan on April 16, the PSC has had four subsequent deliberations on the situation. These include the [1154th](#) and [1156th](#) PSC sessions where the AU PSC adopted the *African Union Roadmap for the Resolution of the Conflict in Sudan*. The AU Roadmap highlights five key pillars that need to be addressed to resolve the protracted conflict in Sudan including: the need for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, addressing the humanitarian conditions, protection of civilians, engagement of neighboring countries and an inclusive political process for the resolution of the conflict. Of the five pillars, only two have been addressed by the PSC in the following session, namely the engagement of neighboring countries via the Expanded Mechanism, and secondly the need for an inclusive political process which was discussed on November 15 during the PSC's last session of the year. During its [last convening on Sudan](#), the PSC made two requests to the Commission. The first was to expedite the two-stage political dialogue process with the support of IGAD and in alignment with the AU and IGAD Roadmap. The other was the request for the Commission to set up a High-Level Ad hoc Panel

⁵⁹ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1149th meeting of the PSC* (16 April 2023).

on Sudan.⁶⁰

3.2.2. PSC ON SITUATIONS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICA REGION

PSC sessions on Central Africa



In 2023, PSC's coverage of Central Africa remained more or less similar to its previous years of engagement on the region. While the Council's consideration of the situations in the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was a continuation of its discussions on the files in 2022, a new situation introduced to the PSC's agenda in 2023 was the situation in Gabon. Notably, the PSC did not convene a session to assess the overall situation in the Great Lakes Region (GLR) in line with its annual indicative programme of work and its established practice. Further to convening sessions dedicated to these countries, the PSC also undertook a field mission to DRC from 20 to 23 March 2023.

Central African Republic (CAR): Still on the PSC radar, despite marginal attention

One session was convened during the year on the situation in the CAR. This was the [1157th meeting](#) held on 13 June 2023.⁶¹ Further to assessing the status of implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR (PAPR-CAR), the session was convened on the backdrop of the deteriorating security situation in CAR due to the spillover effects of the war in Sudan. The spike noted in illicit proliferation of arms in CAR in connection with the war in Sudan has in particular been noted as

⁶⁰ On why this decision matters and gives the AU the opportunity to regain its lost credibility in handling the Sudan file, see Solomon Ayele Dersso, *Establishment of a high-level panel an opportunity for reinvigorating AU's role on Sudan*, Ideas Indaba (5 December 2023).

⁶¹ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1157th meeting of the PSC* (13 June 2023).

emerging challenge to maintaining the limited gains made in the implementation of the PAPR-CAR.

The disagreement faced among CAR's political stakeholders in organising a constitutional referendum was also among the central issues of focus of PSC's meeting. Despite fierce opposition from various segments of society, the change to the constitution enabling President Faustin Archange Touadera to seek a third term in office was validated by the Constitutional Court as the outcome of the referendum held on 30 July 2023. An important aspect missing from the Communiqué of the 1157th meeting on CAR was an update on the status of the transfer of the responsibilities of AU Military Observer Mission to CAR (MOUACA) to the AU office in the CAR.

This is perhaps one of those situations on the agenda of the PSC in respect of which PSC's engagement was no more than performative. The one session the PSC held on the situation does not signify other than the fact that it remains on the PSC radar.

Chad: Supporting the transitional process while trying to avoid legitimization of retention of power by TMC

The political transition in Chad was discussed within the context of PSC's [1152nd meeting](#), when it received briefing by the Panel of the Wise on its mission to Chad.⁶² Other than considering the Panel of the Wise briefing on its mission to Chad, the PSC did not dedicate a specific session to assess the status of the transition in Chad. Among the points the 1152nd meeting addressed, the PSC noted the 24-month extension of the transition period and rejected any further delays. Other than manifesting diplomatic censure, the material import of this rejection remains doubtful. The PSC also underscored the need for a clear roadmap with specific timelines for implementation of transition activities and for more inclusivity in Chad's political and peace processes including in the drafting of a new constitution.

In terms of the engagement of the Panel of the Wise with Chadian stakeholders, it is to be recalled that the PSC requested deployment of the Panel to Chad following lack of consensus in the PSC on the

⁶² AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1152nd meeting of the PSC* (11 May 2023).

policy action to be adopted regarding the conclusion of the national dialogue of October 2022 granting the members of the TMC the option of running for elections, which, together with the extension of the transitional period, also generated massive opposition citizen protests. Of particular policy significance from the decision of the PSC on the report of the Panel is its reaffirmation of its decision on the non-eligibility of members of the Transitional Military Council (TMC), including its head and president of the transition, Mahamat Debi. This signifies the intention of the PSC to maintain on the table suspension of Chad in the event of the failure of the TMC to respect its clear normative prohibition of those who seized power outside of constitutionally stipulated procedure from running for elections.

It remains to be seen whether the PSC will follow through on this policy posture for applying suspension if Debi, under the authority of the outcome of the October 2022 national dialogue, stands for election at the end of the transition period.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): PSC struggling to carve out meaningful role towards the mitigation or resolution of the conflict in eastern DRC

On the DRC, two sessions were convened during the year in review. Not any less significant was the field mission that the PSC undertook to the DRC. It is to be recalled that the PSC, despite its initial plan to undertake field mission in the Great Lakes region covering the DRC in June 2022, its visit ended up being limited to Burundi.

The first one of the two sessions was the [1140th meeting](#) held at the Heads of State and Government level, on 17 February 2023.⁶³ Two main issues were the central focus of this meeting – escalating tension between DRC and Rwanda and intensified fighting between the DRC army and the March 23 Movement (M23). Convened in parallel to the mini-summit of leaders of the East African Community (EAC) which also took place on 17 February 2023, the PSC session was markedly an enhancement of its engagement on the situation in eastern DRC. With respect to the tensions between the DRC and Rwanda, the Communiqué of the 1140th meeting underscored the importance of

confidence and trust building in the region. Since the re-emergence of the M23 in 2022 tensions between the DRC and Rwanda spiked to very concerning levels as they traded accusations over the situation in eastern DRC with incidents of military confrontations and heightened risk of the two plunging into full-blown war. It is thus fitting that the PSC called on the DRC and Rwanda to sustain efforts aimed at reconciliation through dialogue. The PSC also reiterated its continued support to the Luanda and Nairobi Processes and underscored the importance of harmonisation and coordination between these two approaches.

In terms of deploying conflict management instruments, the PSC continued to follow the lead of the regional actors. In this respect, the PSC at the 1140th session decided on the use of the AU Peace Fund for supporting the EAC force which was deployed in June 2022, within the framework of the military track of Nairobi peace process, whose mandate included neutralising negative forces in eastern DRC.

The second session was convened after the PSC field mission [1145th PSC session](#) was convened to consider the report of the Council's field mission to the DRC.⁶⁴ The mission which was conducted from 20 to 23 March took the PSC not only to Kinshasa where it engaged with key members of the DRC government including President Felix-Antoine Tshisekedi, but also to key areas in eastern DRC, including North Kivu which continues to be most affected by ongoing conflict in the region. Having considered the report of the field mission – which took quite a while finalising owing to the absence of consensus on some points raised by DRC stakeholders – the PSC at its 1145th meeting, signifying its inability to carve out meaningful role, end up making a call on the amorphous entity called 'international community' to impose sanctions against armed groups in the region and to fight against the illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources and minerals mined in eastern DRC.

Gabon: Slapping it with suspension as it joins the club of military rulers

Gabon came back to PSC's agenda in the context of the coup that took place on 30 August 2023. Gabon was on the Council's agenda previously in 2016 in

⁶³ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1140th meeting of the PSC (17 February 2023)*.

⁶⁴ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1145th meeting of the PSC (31 March 2023)*.

connection with election-related violence and in 2019 related to the attempted coup d'état of 7 January 2019. Seeing only from the country's record of being on PSC's agenda, it is easy to understand that Gabon has long been dealing with deep governance challenges. The recent coup is also one to be appreciated within this context.

The 1172nd emergency session, convened on 31 August 2023 a day after the coup in Gabon, decided to suspend the member state from all AU activities until the restoration of constitutional order.⁶⁵ Aside from the usual remarks of the PSC accompanying all of its sessions addressing UCGs including the condemnation of military takeover of power; demand for military to return to the barracks; and reaffirmation of all AU instruments and rules underpinning democratic norms and principles, a key [outcome of the 1172nd](#) meeting was the PSC's request for the Chairperson of the AU Commission to work in collaboration with ECCAS for the deployment of a high-level mission to Gabon to engage Gabonese stakeholders towards laying the necessary foundation for the transfer of power to a civilian-led and democratically elected government.

On 23 October 2023, the PSC held another session to assess the status of transition in Gabon and implementation of the decisions of its previous meeting.⁶⁶ Notably and as highlighted in the [Communiqué](#) of that session, key components of a transition process, mainly the adoption of a clear transition timetable for organising a national dialogue and conducting elections were yet to be determined two months after the coup. However, some progress was also noted, particularly the adoption of a transitional charter, appointment of a civilian Prime Minister and appointment of members of the Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions (CTRI). In terms of regional efforts to support Gabon with its transition process, the 4th Extraordinary Summit of ECCAS was welcomed for the appointment of a facilitator for political process in Gabon – CAR President Faustin-Archange Touadera – and a Special Envoy – CAR's Foreign Affairs Minister, Sylvie Baïpo-Témon. On AU's part, the deployment of a high-level mission by the AU Commission as requested

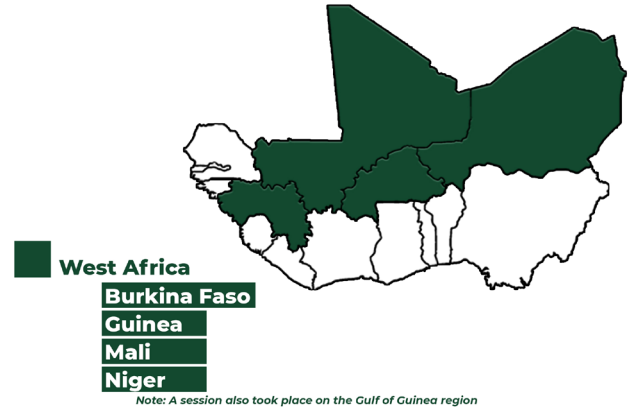
⁶⁵ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1172nd meeting of the PSC (31 August 2023)*.

⁶⁶ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1180th meeting of the PSC (23 October 2023)*.

by PSC's 1172nd meeting was still pending by the time it convened a second session two months later.

3.2.3. PSC ON THE SITUATION IN WEST AFRICA

PSC sessions on West Africa



In the period under review, the PSC allocated seven sessions and conducted two informal consultations to address the situation in the West Africa region. This marks a decline in PSC's focus to situations in this region compared to the previous year, during which there were 14 sessions dedicated to the region.⁶⁷ The six sessions included discussions on the Sahel region, Burkina Faso and the coup in Niger, with two informal consultations specifically addressing countries undergoing political transitions. Additionally, the PSC addressed in a separate session the issue of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Despite the reduced attention from the PSC, the security situation in the region has persistently worsened, terrorism has escalated and its geographical reach has expanded.⁶⁸

In its programme of work, the PSC dedicated individual sessions to Burkina Faso and Niger, while also addressing Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea collectively during the [1162nd session](#) focused on the Sahel region. The 1166th session of the PSC reviewed the report of the field mission to Burkina Faso that took place from 22 - 27 July 2023, whereas the situations in Niger were discussed in sessions [1164th](#), [1168th](#), and [1180th](#).

Informal consultations were also held covering Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, marking a departure as the PSC implemented this format for the first time

⁶⁷ See Amani Africa, *The Peace and Security Council in 2022: The year in review* (18 February 2023).

⁶⁸ During its 1182nd session, the PSC also expressed concern over the growing menace of terrorism and violent extremism on the continent, particularly in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin regions.

in this year to overcome limitations in engaging with member states suspended from AU activities. The objective behind these informal consultations was to enable direct engagement between the PSC and Member States suspended from AU activities due to unconstitutional changes of government (UCG). The primary focus was to facilitate discussions concerning the transition process and the necessary steps toward the restoration of constitutional order and civilian rule. The first consultation of this kind occurred on 26 April 2023, during which the PSC engaged with representatives from Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Sudan. A second informal consultation was convened on 20 December 2023 that considered Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea.

With regards to field missions, the first released provisional programme of work of the PSC for July indicated that the field mission that took place in Burkina Faso was initially scheduled to take place in the Sahel region as a whole, but later the PSC undertook the mission only in Burkina Faso. The effective implementation of field missions, combined with informal consultations and country-specific dedicated sessions, could enable the PSC to adopt a comprehensive approach, ensuring a more nuanced and context-specific assessment. This approach would foster a more effective and tailored response to the diverse political situations across the region.

In the West Africa Region this year, two noteworthy events unfolded. First, the withdrawal of MINUSMA from Mali, which marks a significant development. The second event involved the Niger coup, leading to Niger's return to the PSC's agenda after nearly six years as a situation of concern other than in terms of terrorism.

Dealing with the situation in Niger, was PSC's hornets' nest for 2023. In response, the PSC strategically emphasized the significance of diplomatic solutions and collaboration among continental bodies. Acknowledging the complexity of the crisis, the PSC sought to prioritize diplomatic channels and collaboration between the AU and ECOWAS for the resolution of the crisis in Niger.

The Sahel: The fixation with coups overshadowing the burning fire of terrorism

During the course of 2023, the PSC dedicated a session specifically to the Sahel region only once (1162nd). However, discussions on countries within the Sahel region occurred in two separate informal consultative meetings. Another activity that took the PSC to the Sahel was the 17th Consultative meeting between the Members of the UNSC and the PSC.

During the 1162nd session addressing the situation in the Sahel,⁶⁹ the PSC primarily focused on the transitions induced by the coups and this lessened the level of attention that the PSC should have given to the enduring insecurity in the region, caused mainly as a result of terrorism, violent extremism and fragile political transitions in multiple member states. The ongoing humanitarian crisis was also a prominent concern during this session.

With regards to the political transitions in the region, the PSC expressed deep concern about delays in the transition processes in Sahel countries, specifically Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali. The PSC strongly urged the transitional authorities of these nations to reengage in constructive dialogues with ECOWAS, emphasizing the need for renewed cooperation. This encouragement encompassed facilitating visits by ECOWAS mediators to each country.

Moreover, the Council emphasized the imperative of adhering to agreed transition timelines and urged the prompt operationalization of Joint Transition Monitoring Committees. This call for operationalization was reiterated during the 17th Consultative. Activating these Committees is vital to ensuring adherence to agreed timelines, providing oversight and accountability mechanisms, and promoting inclusivity by involving representatives from diverse stakeholders. Most importantly, these Committees serve as a crucial mechanism for oversight and accountability in the transitional processes of the concerned nations.

The most significant development in the Sahel that was in the making in the past year was the collapse of the G5 Sahel. This breakdown of a new regional block in the making came about as one of the causalities of Niger's coup.

⁶⁹ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1162nd meeting of the PSC (20 July 2023).

Mali: Not even performative attention by the PSC as the country contends with complex transition and terrorism

Unlike the previous years, a stand-alone session was not dedicated to Mali in 2023. The result is that not even performative attention was given to the intersecting challenges of complex political transition, fighting terrorism and geopolitical and regional wrangling. To ameliorate this situation, the PSC discussed the situation in Mali in the context of the informal consultation that it introduced in April 2023 to deal with all countries affected by coups. It is interesting to note that during the second informal consultation in December covering Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, the PSC, in a move that acknowledged the inadequacy of the diplomatic efforts for supporting the countries in transition, ‘underscored the need to demonstrate a clear determination in accompanying the countries, and in this regard, recommended (rightly) that the Chairperson of the AU Commission consider the expeditious appointment of a retired Head of State/Government to engage the countries concerned and to brief the Heads of State and Government to galvanize the required political support.’⁷⁰

Despite the lack of a dedicated session, there was an occasion for the PSC. Although the framing of the session was not as usual “Mali and the Sahel”, Mali was discussed during the [1162nd session](#) of the PSC. Concerning the situation in the country, the session highlighted a significant development in 2023, including the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) following Mali’s request for the withdrawal of MINUSMA’s troops during a UNSC meeting in June 2023.

To address the potential negative impacts of MINUSMA’s withdrawal the PSC called on the AU Commission to promptly initiate consultations. It is intended that these consultations would involve key stakeholders such as the International Mediation’s chef de file, members of the Mediation (including ECOWAS and the UN), and the Malian parties. The objective was to explore ways in which the AU could further contribute to maintaining and facilitating critical arrangements related to the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. Additionally, expressing

deep concern over the persisting deadlock in the peace process in Mali, the PSC urged the Transitional Authorities and signatory movements to resume dialogue as outlined in the agreement. During the 17th consultative meeting between the PSC and the UNSC, the joint communiqué highlighted the need for a safe and orderly drawdown, liquidation, and the provision of safe passage for peacekeeping personnel. As a result of the withdrawal request, the decade-old MINUSMA completed its withdrawal in December 2023.

Together with the disintegration of the G5 Sahel, the withdrawal of MINUSMA represents another manifestation of the failure of the regional and international security engagement in Mali. Additionally, following the resignation of the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission and Head of the AU Mission in Mali and the Sahel, AU’s already precarious role and presence have further been weakened. Subsequent to the coup in Niger and the enormous pressure ECOWAS sought to deploy for reinstating the deposed president, the Burkina, Mali and Niger declared the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States, signaling the emergence of a process involving major rearrangement of the regional order.

Niger: PSC advancing a responsible non-military response as the last central Sahelian country jumping on the coup bandwagon

Niger was tabled on the PSC’s agenda four times ([1164th](#), [1168th](#), and [1180th](#) sessions) highlighting the level of policy attention the country’s situation following the coup d’état that unfolded from 26 – 28 July 2023 necessitated. The 1164th session convened just two days after the junta, which declared itself the National Council for the Safeguarding of the Homeland (CNSP) overthrew the government of Mohamed Bazoum and seized power.⁷¹ During the session, the PSC expressed its concern regarding the increasing occurrence of military coups in Africa unequivocally condemning the coup and urgently calling for the immediate release of President Bazoum.

In contrast to ECOWAS, which framed the event as an ‘attempted coup,’ the PSC characterized it as a coup and employed a distinct approach in its response. Notably, the PSC opted not to invoke Article 7(g) of the PSC

⁷⁰ Amani Africa, *Monthly Digest on the AU Peace and Security Council (December 2023)* 7

⁷¹ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1164th meeting of the PSC (28 July 2023)*.

Protocol immediately. Instead, and following earlier precedents in respect to Burkina Faso in November 2014 and Sudan in April 2019, the PSC granted the junta a fifteen-day period to reinstate constitutional order. The session's communiqué specified that if its demand for restoration of constitutional order remained unaddressed beyond the stipulated timeframe, the PSC would activate Article 7(1)(g) and implement Article 30 of the Constitutive Act, leading to Niger's suspension.

The PSC's 15-day deadline lapsed on 11 August 2023. As a result, the PSC held its 1168th session on 14 August 2023⁷² which came four days after the Second Extraordinary Summit of the ECOWAS Heads of States and Governments on the political situation in Niger held on 10 August 2023. Since the ECOWAS urged the AU to support all its decisions, the four-member states of ECOWAS within the PSC, constrained by institutional protocol, lobbied for the endorsement of ECOWAS decisions. In the course of the session, it became apparent that over one-third of PSC members raised doubts regarding the wisdom of employing military force to restore the deposed president, citing concerns about peace and security risks. The PSC was not also in a position to avoid suspending Niger after the 15-day deadline without contradicting its earlier determination that the situation in Niger constituted a coup.

Rather than following the customary practice of putting a draft communiqué on silence procedure, the PSC Chairperson chose continued consultations to secure a compromise. After a week of negotiations, the draft outcome document, presented at the 1169th meeting on 21 August 2023, did not fully endorse ECOWAS decisions but accommodated the ECOWAS member states' position to the maximum extent possible.⁷³ Through the communiqué released after the session, the PSC unequivocally condemned the coup in Niger and suspended Niger from all AU activities until the restoration of constitutional order. While it expressed support for the role of ECOWAS and endorsed the sanctions it imposed, albeit with qualification, on the issue of use of force the PSC took a diplomatically sensitive stance by requesting an assessment of the economic, social, and security

⁷² AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1168th meeting of the PSC (14 August 2023)*.

⁷³ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1169th meeting of the PSC (21 August 2023)*.

implications of deploying the standby force into Niger.

This case highlighted the principle of subsidiarity, emphasizing the importance of PSC's role in independently deciding on situations in accordance with AU norms, rather than merely rubber-stamping decisions made by sub-regional bodies like ECOWAS. The PSC's proactive stance in addressing the Niger situation without waiting for ECOWAS showcased how such an approach provides it with the space to autonomously navigate complex diplomatic challenges.

The [1180th session](#) expressed concern regarding the dire humanitarian situation resulting from the severe economic sanctions imposed by ECOWAS.⁷⁴ The PSC called on ECOWAS to minimize the disproportionate effects of these sanctions on the ordinary people of Niger. The PSC also decided to conduct a Field Mission to Niger, although the timeline was not specified. Furthermore, the PSC requested the transitional authority of Niger to adopt a practical and time-bound timetable for the implementation of the transitional period. The AU Commission was also urged to promptly appoint a High-Level Representative for Niger and deploy a high-level mission to assess the needs of the Transitional Government for the restoration of constitutional order and facilitate national dialogue. By the end of the year, this request has remained not acted on by the AU Commission.

From a regional perspective, the consequences of the Niger coup go beyond deepening the constitutional crisis and the accompanying political uncertainty in the Sahel. It became the last nail on the coffin of the new regional security arrangement, the G5 Sahel, which was already on its deathbed following the withdrawal of Mali from the group. The major shift in the political situation of Niger could not also be without its adverse impacts for other regional arrangements, notably the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram.

Burkina Faso: Demanding respect for transitional timeline without deploying support mechanism for the transition

Besides the two informal consultations on countries that are in political transition, Burkina Faso was discussed as a stand-alone agenda item during

⁷⁴ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1180th meeting of the PSC (23 October 2023)*.

the [1166th session](#) of the PSC on 3 August 2023. The session was convened to consider the report of the PSC field mission to Burkina Faso, conducted from 22 - 27 July 2023.⁷⁵ The primary objective of the field mission was to gather first-hand information on the country's political, security, socio-economic, and humanitarian conditions, with a crucial focus on assessing the progress in implementing Burkina Faso's Transition Roadmap. The field mission involved multiple stakeholders, including internally displaced individuals, transition authorities, political organizations, and regional/international collaborators in Burkina Faso.

Following the September 2022 coup, a 24-month transition timeline was established, culminating in scheduled elections in July 2024. While positive developments such as the Transition Roadmap and electoral calendar were acknowledged, the PSC noted uncertainties about holding elections in its report of the July field mission. In this regard, the PSC, in its 1166th session, emphasized the imperative for the transitional authority to practically demonstrate commitment to successfully organizing elections within the agreed-upon timelines.

However, the current security challenges cannot be without major consequences on the organization of elections. Despite government assertions of territorial control, Burkina Faso experienced a notable surge in terrorist attacks from January to September 2023, ranking second globally in terms of terrorism impact after Afghanistan. The ban on public demonstrations and political activities, in effect since September 30, 2022, persists, raising further concerns about the conduciveness of the political environment for holding free and credible elections.

The PSC, in its adopted communiqué, underscored the imperative of an inclusive transition process, urging the Transitional Authorities to lift restrictions on political parties and stakeholders. Furthermore, the PSC emphasized the necessity for increased collaboration and coordination between the AU, ECOWAS, and the Government of Burkina Faso for an effective political transition. This was particularly highlighted during interactions with the African Diplomatic Group, emphasizing the importance of robust collaboration between the AU and ECOWAS, aligned with the

principles of subsidiarity and comparative advantage.

The PSC's attention focusing mostly on the political transition with marginal account to the security and institutional challenges facing Burkina Faso and insisting on the convening of elections within the transitional timelines has not been accompanied by the deployment of robust support mechanism. Under the circumstances, PSC's policy position rings hollow

Guinea: A coup induced transition struggling to get PSC's attention

In 2023 there was no session dedicated to assessing the situation in Guinea. Nevertheless, Guinea was discussed during the informal consultations in April and December. During the informal consultation in April, the PSC had planned to undertake a field mission to Guinea in August and receive an updated briefing on the political transitions in Guinea and Mali in September, as outlined in its program of work. However, neither the field mission nor the updated briefing session occurred as originally planned.

The December informal consultation meeting provided the opportunity for the PSC to follow up on the implementation of the transition plan. The two-year transition period agreed by ECOWAS and the transition authorities of Guinea in October 2022, which was also endorsed by the PSC, scheduled elections for the end of 2024. The transition plan encompassed key elements such as developing a new constitution, holding a referendum, establishing an election management body, and organizing various elections. However, challenges emerged, particularly in drafting the constitution, with the major opposition boycotting consultations. The missed June deadline for constitution adoption and the likely delay in the December referendum highlight obstacles. Internally, Guinea's transitional authorities face strained relations with opposition parties and ECOWAS and the recent prison break in Conakry underscored security concerns. Internal discord, exemplified by dismissals and conflicts among military factions adds complexity to the transition process, posing significant challenges.

⁷⁵ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1166th meeting of the PSC (3 August 2023)*.

Maritime in the Gulf of Guinea

The [1174th session](#) held on 18 September 2023 was the only session dedicated to Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea.⁷⁶ The Council expressed deep concern about the prevalent insecurity caused by pirates and organized criminal networks in the Gulf of Guinea region. Condemning illicit maritime activities, the PSC emphasized the need for concerted efforts to address this issue. The establishment of the Combined Maritime Taskforce was welcomed, as it marked a collaborative effort among 11 Gulf of Guinea countries to combat maritime threats. The PSC also acknowledged the ten-year implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCoC), designed to enhance cooperation in combating transnational organized crime in the maritime domain. While recognizing achievements, the PSC recommended expanding the YCoC to cover the entire Atlantic coast and encouraged member states to fully adhere to and implement it.

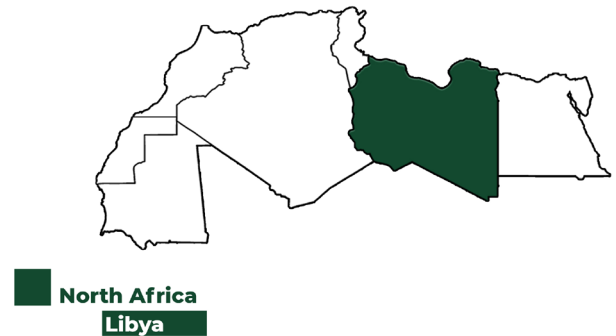
Despite these positive developments, the PSC's focus on security and law enforcement measures in addressing Gulf of Guinea insecurity overlooked socio-economic, governance, and cross-border human security issues. The complexity of maritime security necessitates a comprehensive strategy that engages with these broader factors. The session also directed the AU Commission to establish a coordination mechanism or Unit on Maritime Security without financial implications, assigning responsibilities that inherently require resources. Additionally, the PSC missed the opportunity to follow up on the development of annexes to the African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (Lomé Charter).

The PSC's emphasis on security measures, while important, may limit its ability to comprehensively address the multifaceted challenges and root causes of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea region, calling for a more holistic approach. Another factor of PSC's decision that raises concern is its choice for the establishment of a coordination mechanism or Unit on Maritime Security without any financial implications. The lack of attention to the financial, logistical, and institutional aspects of proposed actions raises questions about the practical implementation of recommended measures.

⁷⁶ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1174th meeting of the PSC (18 September 2023)*.

3.2.4. PSC ON THE SITUATIONS IN THE NORTH AFRICA REGION

PSC sessions on North Africa



Similar to previous years, the North Africa region was given limited attention by the PSC in 2023, focusing on the only country-specific issue in the region, Libya. In comparison to the year prior, the PSC aimed to increase its engagement on Libya in 2023 by dedicating one additional session to the political crisis in the country compared to last year. The PSC was steadfast in holding the two sessions on Libya in the first two quarters of the year. During its first convening, the PSC requested a field mission to Libya, which would have demonstrated a more tangible engagement by the PSC on Libya, however, the PSC did not proceed with the field mission.

Beyond the two sessions on the situation in Libya, other engagements of the PSC in the North Africa region include a workshop dedicated to the review of the Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy that took place in Cairo Egypt, and the 10th Annual High-Level Seminar on Peace and Security in Africa which was held in Oran, Algeria for the third consecutive year and the 15th Annual PSC Retreat on Working Methods which was held in Tunis, Tunisia.

Libya: Too much talk but, inadequate progress both on the national reconciliation conference and the relocation of the AU Office back to Libya

In 2023, the situation in Libya was first discussed at the PSC's [1136th session](#) convened on 1 February.⁷⁷ Key attendees included the newly appointed Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Libya, Abdoulaye Bathily, and various representatives from Libya, neighboring countries, and the High-Level

⁷⁷ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1136th meeting of the PSC (01 February 2023)*.

Committee on Libya. The session highlighted two major concerns regarding Libya. First, the ongoing political crisis regarding the formation of two executive bodies due to division and lack of agreement among political actors in the country. This political impasse has indefinitely postponed the general elections planned for December 2021. However, there was a glimmer of hope as a consultation held in Cairo in early January 2023 resulted in an agreement between the Tobruk-based House of Representatives and the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity for drawing up a roadmap for the elections. The critical challenge remains the reaching of consensus on the constitutional basis and electoral laws for the election process to proceed.

During its first session on Libya, the PSC emphasized the importance of the inter-Libyan Reconciliation Conference, even if it doesn't directly address the impasse. In addition, the AU High-Level Committee for Libya was urged to build on the momentum towards the national reconciliation conference. A committee meeting was held in February, and it was announced that the AU would facilitate the conference, scheduled for May 2023. SRSG Bathily also proposed a high-level steering panel to facilitate the legal framework and timelines for the 2023 elections, emphasizing the need for coherence and avoiding duplication of efforts. Concerning the reconciliation efforts of the AU Commission and the High-Level Committee for Libya, chaired by President Denis Sassou Nguesso, a preparatory meeting on the inter-Libyan Reconciliation Conference took place in Brazzaville, Congo, in July 2023 and adopted a roadmap of activities for the preparatory commission in charge of convening the inter-Libyan National Reconciliation Conference and the second meeting took place in Benghazi on 14-15 November 2023.

The second major concern highlighted in the session was the persisting insecurity in Libya, despite the 2020 Ceasefire Agreement. Military tension and the threat of confrontations continue to loom. Armed clashes between supporters of rival governments escalated in the previous year, posing a risk to the relative stability achieved in the country. The presence of foreign fighters, including mercenaries, further complicates security issues in Libya and extends risks to the wider Sahel region, which already faces significant security threats. Efforts to withdraw foreign fighters from Libya have been ongoing, with a coordination mechanism

approved in early February 2023 involving the 5+5 Joint Military Commission and liaison committees from Libya, Sudan, and Niger. This mechanism aims to ensure the safe withdrawal of mercenaries and foreign fighters, contributing to a more favorable environment for political processes and elections.

Key actionable decisions from the session included the PSC's request for the AU Commission to relocate the AU Liaison Office (AULO) in Libya to Tripoli and the decision to undertake a field mission to Libya, along with dedicating a Heads of State and Government session to the situation. Regarding the relocation of the AULO for Libya, based on previous decisions by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in February 2020, 2021 and 2022 and the High-Level Committee for Libya in 2022, an AU Task Force related to the relocation of the Tunis-based AULO to Libya, undertook an assessment mission to Tunis and Tripoli from 29 July to 4 August 2023. The team was tasked with conducting a technical assessment of matters related to the relocation of the AULO: financial, facility, assets and support services, to ensure the effective implementation of the relocation of the office by the end of 2023 and allow the AU to engage fully with the Libyan stakeholders and partners directly on the ground, including the finalization of the Host Nation Agreement. A roadmap was subsequently adopted by the working team to expedite the relocation of the AULO from Tunis to Tripoli.

In its [1150th session](#) on 18 April, the PSC held its second meeting on Libya in the year, focusing on the national reconciliation process.⁷⁸ The PSC called for inclusivity and transitional justice in the reconciliation process but expressed doubts about the conference's timing due to ongoing political divisions and international interference. It reiterated its call for external actors to refrain from fueling Libya's crisis. Additionally, the PSC discussed plans for Libya's general elections and welcomed the formation of the 6+6 Joint Committee to address electoral framework issues. The PSC also received briefings on efforts to withdraw foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libya and emphasized the need for their safe return to prevent security threats. The PSC reiterated its intention to conduct a field visit to Libya and urged the AU Commission to expedite the relocation of the AU Mission in Libya to Tripoli, however, neither one of the requests came to

⁷⁸ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1150th meeting of the PSC (18 April 2023)*.

fruition in 2023.

The political situation in Libya has not witnessed any notable improvements this year. The two conflicting Governments of the West and the East continue to compete for legitimacy and authority over the country. Constitutional and Presidential elections have not taken place, although progress has been made by the High National Elections Commission (HNEC) and the 6+6 Commission in charge of reviewing electoral laws. However, critical contentious points over these laws mainly, the criteria of presidential candidates, are impeding the process.

3.2.5. IT WAS A NO SHOW FOR PSC ON THE SITUATIONS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION

For Southern Africa, the PSC annual indicative program of the PSC in 2023 envisaged the possibility of a session on the situation in Mozambique with regards to the Southern Africa Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), the peace support operation previously endorsed by the PSC and deployed by the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Contrary to previous years, however, the PSC neglected to hold any session on the situation. Although the PSC was unable to cover the peace support operations in their session directly, there has been some engagement by the commission concerning SAMIM. Following previous [PSC decisions](#), the AU PAPS department Director for Conflict Management undertook a mission to Pemba, Mozambique towards the end of 2023. The mission is in alignment with the request of the PSC for the AU to deliver the donated equipment to the SAMIM support operation. Further, the regional body, [SADC also convened in 2023 on the matters of the mandate extension of the SAMIM](#), as such, the regional body has agreed to extend the mandate for another year, ending in July 2023.

While no field missions of the PSC were conducted to southern Africa, other PSC's activities that took place in southern Africa include the 3rd Annual Joint Retreat between the PSC and the APRM which convened in Johannesburg, South Africa.

3.3. PSC'S WORK ON THEMATIC AND OTHER ISSUES

Much like the previous couple of years, 2023 saw the continuation of PSC's increased engagement on thematic agenda items. In addition to some of the thematic issues which have become regularized within the PSC's yearly program of work,⁷⁹ the PSC also considered new thematic issues such as community response to security challenges as discussed further below. Part of the reason for the increase in thematic and other issues in 2023 has been the convening of meetings which are not necessarily of direct and strategic relevance for the mandate of the PSC. One example is PSC's engagement with entities that have neither statutory basis nor functional role on peace and security, exemplified by the meeting with the African First Ladies' Peace Mission (AFLPM).⁸⁰ At the same time, despite the increase in thematic sessions, some thematic issues that have become regular in the PSC's agenda did not feature during the year.⁸¹

As can be understood from the absence of any major or substantial outcomes from the PSC's engagement on various thematic and other issues, there is increasing concern that the dedication of increasing portion of PSC time and diplomatic resources on such thematic items particularly with little tangible impact in those thematic domains is detracting from effective utilization of limited resources to priority areas of PSC's mandate. Given the compounded nature of peace and security threats in country specific situations, the PSC could perhaps consider allocating more time to such situations that are already on its agenda as well as emerging crises in specific member states.

⁷⁹ Examples include women, peace and security (WPS), children affected by armed conflicts (CAAC), youth, peace and security and prevention of genocide and hate crimes

⁸⁰ This was an engagement held as one of the agenda items of PSC's 1154th meeting on 16 May 2024.

⁸¹ Some of these agenda items include health pandemics, development and peace and security nexus, and illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons.

African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) Tools and Pillars

Seven sessions were convened during the year committed to the various APSA tools and pillars.

The PSC's first session associated with APSA structure was focused on continental early warning and security (CEWS). Two sessions were convened around this theme – the 1138th and 1170th meetings. The [1138th meeting](#) held on 8 February presented a briefing by the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) on continental early warning and security outlook for the year 2023.⁸² Some of the major security threats the PSC emphasized in the communiqué of the 1138th meeting include among others, intra-state tensions, terrorism and violent extremism and democratic governance deficits. As predicted, 2023 had been a year that demonstrated unfolding crises across the continent connected to the identified areas of threat.

The [1170th session](#) held on 22 August mainly served to question the efficiency of traditional AU responses to current security threats such as the scourge of UCG and to underscore the importance of collective approaches to effectively respond to security threats.⁸³ Having regard to the continuing surge in terrorism, particularly in the Sahel region, one of the key outcomes of the 1170th session was the PSC's request for the AU Commission to ensure that all future CEWS updates include in- puts related to the persistence of terrorism, specifically in the Sahel region, 'despite the presence of numerous military bases'.

Another session of the PSC related to APSA tools and pillars was the briefing presented by the AU Panel of the Wise on its activities after the lapse of 5 years, the last time the Panel briefed the PSC having been in March 2017. The 1142nd meeting⁸⁴ of the PSC which took place on 3 March restored the formal engagement between the PSC and the Panel of the Wise and revived the Panel's supportive role to the PSC in dealing with issues ranging from electoral disputes to complex transitions. The session also served to reflect on some of the factors that constrain

the effective functioning of the Panel of the Wise, the main ones being shortage of resource and absence of cooperation from member states – usually involving the invocation of sovereignty to restrict and limit engagement of regional mechanisms such as the Panel of the Wise.

Within the framework of PSC's engagement on the operationalization of the AU Peace Fund, the issue of financing AU Peace Support Operations (PSOs) also featured among the sessions convened during the year. In addition to being discussed in the context of deployment of PSOs in specific country situations – such as funding challenges faced by ATMIS – the PSC committed two Ministerial level sessions to discuss the issue of financing AU-led PSOs. The first one of these was the [1153rd meeting](#) convened on 12 May which served to set in motion the negotiation process for the adoption of UNSC resolution on financing of AU-led PSOs including through UN assessed contributions, by requesting the A3 to 'resume consultations with the relevant stakeholders towards the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution on financing AU-led PSOs'.⁸⁵ Another key outcome of the 1153rd meeting was the Council's decision to increase the ceiling of the Crisis Reserve Facility (CRF) from \$5 million to \$10 million for 2023 and 2024. This was decided with the central purpose of ensuring timely and effective response to emergency peace and security concerns in the continent.

The other ministerial session committed to the issue of financing AU-led PSOs was the [1175th meeting](#) held on 23 September.⁸⁶ At the meeting, further to emphasizing the importance of strengthened partnership between the UN and the AU to ensure effective response to global peace and security challenges, the PSC requested the A3, with the support of the AU Commission, to commence negotiations towards generating consensus on a framework resolution, for consideration by the UNSC before the end of December 2023.

Despite challenges faced, particularly with respect to the processes involved in the negotiation of a draft resolution, the PSC's engagement on this file, as canvased in an earlier section, has indeed contributed

⁸² AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1138th meeting of the PSC (08 February 2023)*.

⁸³ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1170th meeting of the PSC (22 August 2023)*.

⁸⁴ This was one of PSC's sessions convened during the year which had no publicly available outcome document.

⁸⁵ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1153rd meeting of the PSC (12 May 2023)*.

⁸⁶ AU Peace and Security Council, *Communique of the 1175th meeting of the PSC (23 September 2023)*.

to efforts led by the A3 for restarting negotiations on a resolution for financing AU-led PSOs through UN assessed contributions, which eventually led to the adoption of [UNSCR 2719/2023](#).

Operationalization of the African Standby Force (ASF) was also discussed during the year within the framework of PSC's [1159th session](#) committed to assessment of the status of implementation of the Common African Defense and Security Policy (CADSP), held on 22 June.⁸⁷ With respect to the ASF in particular, one of the important points underscored during this meeting was the importance of harmonizing decision-making and enhancing collaboration between the AU and RECs/RMs for the successful deployment of the ASF – particularly having regard to the existence of little to no engagement in the deployment of regional forces. The PSC also emphasized the need for undertaking strategic review of the ASF, including along the lines of the outcomes of the 2022 Inaugural Lessons Learned Forum on AU PSOs which stressed the need for 'reconceptualization and alignment of the ASF with the current PSO practice and realities'.

Lastly, on 30 November, the PSC convened its annual engagement on PCRD, at its [1188th meeting](#).⁸⁸ The session mainly served the PSC to receive updates on the revision process of the AU PCRD Policy Framework. Having deliberated on the revised policy, the PSC decided for it to be submitted to the Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly scheduled for February 2024. One area of progress achieved towards strengthening AU's peacebuilding architecture has been the establishment of a Working Group on PCRD. The Working Group which is co-chaired by the PAPS Commissioner and the Chief Executive Officer of the AUDA-NEPAD was launched in May 2023. Noting and welcoming this progress, the PSC also used the 1188th session as an occasion to endorse the Working Group on PCRD.

⁸⁷ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1159th meeting of the PSC (22 June 2023).

⁸⁸ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1188th meeting of the PSC (30 November 2023).

Elections and Governance

In 2023, the PSC convened four sessions addressing issues related to elections and governance.

Two of the sessions dedicated to this thematic area were the biannual meetings committed to the PSC's consideration of the AU Commission Chairperson's report on elections in Africa. The first one of these was the [1132nd meeting](#) convened on 20 January which reviewed elections in eight countries, conducted in the second half of 2022 (these were Republic of Congo, Senegal, Kenya, Angola, Sao Tome and Principe, Equatorial Guinea, Tunisia, and Lesotho).⁸⁹ The session was also critical in highlighting some practices and methodologies of the AU Elections Observation Mission (AUEOM) such as the deployment of joint election observations of the AU and RECs/RMs taking the model of the joint AU- COMESA Election Observation Mission to Kenya.

The second meeting committed to consideration of the AU Commission Chairperson's report on elections was the [1165th session](#) held on 31 July.⁹⁰ Further to reflecting on elections convened in six member states during the reporting period – Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Benin, Djibouti, Mauritania, and Guinea Bissau – the PSC also took the session as an opportunity to call on 'candidates in elections in member states to accept election results as officially pronounced by their respective competent authorities'. The Council however failed to highlight the impact of flawed elections on political stability and democratic consolidation and refrained from underscoring the responsibility of the 'competent authorities' to ensure the full compliance of elections with the basic standards and their conduct in a free, fair and credible manner.

The [1167th meeting](#) convened on 11 August was another PSC session held during the year, failing within the theme of election and governance issues.⁹¹ This meeting was convened as an experience sharing session between the PSC, the African Governance Architecture (AGA) Platform Members and the PRC

⁸⁹ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1132nd meeting of the PSC (20 January 2023).

⁹⁰ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1165th meeting of the PSC (31 July 2023).

⁹¹ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1167th meeting of the PSC (11 August 2023).

Sub-Committee on Human Rights, Democracy Governance (HRDG). Aimed mainly at improving and enhancing collaboration between these organs particularly in light of the resurgence in UCG in the continent, the session drew attention to critical issues such as the importance of joint AGA-APSA initiatives.

In addition to these, one meeting was dedicated specifically to discussions on AU sanctions regime.⁹² This was the [1181st session](#) held on 24 October which focused on assessing the effectiveness of the AU normative framework in dealing with unconstitutional changes of government (UCG), taking into account recent coups in various African countries. Aside from highlighting the importance of strengthening sanctions measures, the PSC took note of the need for evaluating the effectiveness of existing frameworks and modifying them to be better aligned to the current security environment. A critical point emerging from the deliberations of the 1181st session was also the emphasis made on the importance of quiet diplomacy when there are clear and undisputable early warning signs of an impending crisis in a Member State. This is particularly essential in relation to situations that lead to the occurrence of UCG as has been observed in many cases over the past couple of years. Reactivation of the PSC Sanctions Committee including the process for developing the relevant terms of reference and identifying the technical capabilities to ensure its effectiveness also formed part of the points discussed during the session.

Humanitarian Crises and Action

Three sessions were held in 2023 – the 1155th, 1176th and 1178th meetings – to deliberate on preexisting and emerging humanitarian concerns in the continent. The first one of these was the [1155th meeting](#) held on 18 May.⁹³ One important aspect of this session was that it linked the discussion with specific country and regional situations within the continent. In that framework, deteriorating humanitarian situations in parts of Africa, particularly in countries such as Sudan, DRC, Burkina Faso, Mali and Somalia took center stage of the discussion. More generally, the Horn of Africa, the Sahel region, the Lake Chad Basin and

parts of Southern Africa which continue to face grave humanitarian challenges as a result of a combination of factors including violent conflicts, terrorism, inter-communal violence, UCG, famine and the growing impact of climate change were also addressed. Another critical aspect of the 1155th meeting was its intended focus on boosting Africa's food production. Although the outcome of the session did not draw the required level of attention to the issue, Africa's self-sufficiency in food production is something that requires being treated as a priority, having regard to the food insecurity crisis that majority of the continent's population currently faces.

The [1176th meeting](#) held on 27 September was specifically committed to a follow-up on the implementation of pledges made at the May 2022 Malabo Extraordinary Summit on Humanitarian Situation.⁹⁴ Aside from taking note of the progress made in this respect, the session also served to emphasize the importance of partnerships with development oriented organisations for effectively undertaking humanitarian operations. Noting that conflicts in Africa, beyond causing major humanitarian crises, are also increasingly becoming sites for flagrant violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and basic principles and standards of human rights, the PSC also emphasized the link between AU's initiatives for Silencing the Guns (STG) and resolving humanitarian challenges in the continent. Further to urging all actors that pledged support during the Malabo Summit to expeditiously redeem their pledges, the PSC also underscored the importance of accelerating finalization of the governing structures of the Emergency Fund for humanitarian crises to enable its utilization. Other pending tasks relevant for effective humanitarian interventions in the continent such as the establishment of a Humanitarian Support Index and operationalization of the African Humanitarian Agency (AfHA) were also highlighted in the outcome document of the 1176th session.

At its [1178th meeting](#) held on 10 October, the PSC received a briefing from the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in various regions of Africa, including the Horn of Africa, Sahel, Lake Chad Basin and parts of northern and southern Africa.⁹⁵ One of the issues that

⁹² AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1181st meeting of the PSC (24 October 2023).

⁹³ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1155th meeting of the PSC (18 May 2023).

⁹⁴ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1176th meeting of the PSC (27 September 2023).

⁹⁵ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1178th

was central to the discussions of this meeting was the concern of humanitarian access. While underscoring the importance of establishing humanitarian corridors, allowing unhindered access to populations in need and guaranteeing protection of humanitarian actors across the continent, the PSC singled out the conflicts in Sudan and eastern DRC as situations requiring urgent cessation of hostilities to help facilitate unhindered humanitarian access.

Terrorism

In contrast to the widespread prevalence and geographic expansion of terrorism, along with the significance accorded to the topic in previous years, the focus notably diminished in 2023. The PSC convened only one meeting on terrorism, specifically during the [1182nd session](#) held on 27 October, solely dedicated to the consideration of the AU Commission Chairperson's report concerning counterterrorism and related matters.⁹⁶ In comparison, the PSC convened three sessions in 2022 out of which two were held at ministerial level, reflecting on issues such as the link between transnational organized crime and terrorism as well as the utilization of development and deradicalisation as levers for countering terrorism and violent extremism.

Aside from highlighting the trends in terrorism in the continent, the 1182nd session importantly underscored the imperative of prioritizing political solutions alongside military and security interventions in response to the threat of terrorism. The communiqué of the session further emphasized the need for 'context-specific interventions' tailored to address specific security, governance, development and humanitarian needs of the affected countries and regions. A very critical outcome of this session was also the PSC's endorsement of the use of 'dialogue and negotiations to facilitate voluntary surrender and rehabilitation of terrorists and extremists'.

One gap in the policy response to the threat of terrorism is that the AU has yet to outline a strategy for deploying non-security tools and allocating resources to support local governance structures and essential services. Echoing Amani Africa's landmark special

research report,⁹⁷ this gap is also identified as the next frontier in the AU's policy intervention, aligning with the decision of the PSC to establish an annual roundtable for exploring alternative approaches to counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism.

Climate, Peace and Security

In 2023, one session was committed to a discussion on climate change. In addition to a dedicated session on the theme, climate change was mentioned as a factor contributing to security threats on multiple occasions. The [1170th session](#) on CEWS not only affirmed the PSC's recognition of the complex relationship between climate change and peace and security, it also emphasized the importance of integrating climate-sensitive programming into national development plans, specifically in agriculture and infrastructure.

The [1184th session](#) of the PSC convened prior to COP 28 underscored the importance of risk prevention and resilience building and urged the AU to assist Member States and the RECs/RMs in fortifying efforts against climate-related security threats.⁹⁸ The meeting also served to highlight several relevant themes relating to the climate-security nexus including financing, risk prevention and resilience building, adaptation, and building of capacities and institutions. With respect to financing, the issues that the PSC addressed include the necessity to boost funding for climate change adaptation and resilience building, establishing an African Climate Fund, and enhancing access to finance. The involvement of entities like the African Development Bank and the UN Economic Commission for Africa was deemed essential for the establishment of such an African fund.

In addition to these issues canvassed in earlier PSC sessions, the PSC also enunciated two new elements in its 1184th session. The first of these is on the issue of green transition. In this respect, the PSC underscored the need to 'ensure sufficient investment in the green transition' and 'develop local value chains for green technologies to better position Africa in the global transition both in terms of innovation and value chains.' The other relates to the emphasis the

meeting of the PSC (10 October 2023).

⁹⁶ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1182nd meeting of the PSC (27 October 2023).

⁹⁷ Amani Africa 'The growing threat of terrorism in Africa: A product of misdiagnosis and faulty policy response?' Special Research Report No.13, May 2022.

⁹⁸ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1184th meeting of the PSC (07 November 2023).

communiqué puts on inclusivity. Accordingly, it called for the involvement of 'the most marginalized the in decision-making process from policies to projects' and the engagement of 'the private sector and civil society'.

Sessions on specific category of protected groups

As part of its annual engagement in sessions addressing concerns relating to specific groups/categories of people, the PSC convened meetings on youth peace and security (YPS), women peace and security (WPS) and children affected by armed conflicts (CAAC) during the year in review.

On WPS, the PSC held two sessions in 2023. The first one of these was the [1144th](#) session convened on 14 March as an open session.⁹⁹ Leveraging on the AU's theme for the year 2023, this session brought to attention the importance of integrating WPS agenda in the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), with a specific focus on women in cross-border trade in conflict and post-conflict situations. On 17 November, the PSC had another session committed to the Commemoration of the UNSCR 1325 (2000) WPS. This was the [1187th](#) session which rather than focusing on general and abstract discussions on UNSCR 1325 as usual, brought in the perspectives of women representatives from the DRC and Sudan.¹⁰⁰

One session was committed to CAAC in 2023. This was the ministerial and high-level open session held from 4 - 5 December, in Banjul, The Gambia.¹⁰¹ Key areas of discussion that featured during this ministerial open session include prevention of violations against children in conflict situations; implementation of AU Legal Frameworks on child protection, prevention of the use and recruitment of children by armed forces and armed groups; and rehabilitation and reintegration of children in post-conflict settings. Following the deliberations in these key areas, the [Banjul Conclusion](#) was adopted encapsulating some practical recommendations including development

of a Continental Child Justice Framework addressing both punitive measures as well as the recourse and restitution elements for child survivors and the establishment of a robust continental reporting, monitoring and evaluation framework with clearly defined indicators aimed at providing accurate, reliable and up-to-date data on the plight of children in situations of violent conflict and crisis.

Same as CAAC, one session was dedicated to YPS in 2023. This was the [1183rd](#) [meeting](#) held on 3 November to commemorate the African Youth Month under the theme of "1 million Next Level is Knocking: Youth-led Movement that Transcends Borders".¹⁰² The 1183rd session was an opportunity to take due note of the increased legitimate demand for a more significant role in decision-making by African youth as well as inclusion in the political sphere and socio-economic opportunities. In light of that, one of the key outcomes emerging from the session was the PSC's emphasis that youth are intentionally and systematically engaged in mediation, dialogue, reconciliation and other peace processes on the continent, including through co-deployment with seasoned mediators.

Cyber Security

Two sessions were convened in 2023 to address concerns of cyber security in Africa. The first one of these was the [1148th](#) [meeting](#) held on 13 April, following the major cyber-attack on the AU Commission cyber space that resulted in the loss of data and disruption of regular activities.¹⁰³ Taking this experience as well as the growing global cyber threats and attacks into account, the PSC called on the AU Commission to create mechanisms and platforms, such as regional forums, specifically designed to address cybersecurity issues. The second session dedicated to this theme was the [1171st](#) [meeting](#) held on 24 August, when the PSC engaged with the AU Commission on International Law (AUCIL) for the second time, following the inaugural engagement held during the 1120th meeting on 9 November 2022.¹⁰⁴ The meeting between the two organs mainly aimed to follow on the discussions regarding the applicability of international law to cyber

⁹⁹ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1144th meeting of the PSC (14 March 2023).

¹⁰⁰ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1187th meeting of the PSC (30 November 2023).

¹⁰¹ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1190th meeting of the PSC (04 December 2023).

¹⁰² AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1183rd meeting of the PSC (03 November 2023).

¹⁰³ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1148th meeting of the PSC (13 April 2023).

¹⁰⁴ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1171st meeting of the PSC (14 August 2023).

security and the development of a common African position on cyber security in the continent. One of the key outcomes of this meeting was the establishment of an expert-level working group for the review of the Draft African Statement adopted and endorsed by the AUCIL, for adoption by the PSC as a Common African Position on the Application of International Law in the Cyber Space. The PSC also requested the Working Group, once established, to submit the Draft Common African Position on Cyber Security in Africa for its consideration, ahead of the 37th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly in February 2024.

Prevention of the Ideology of Hate, Genocide and Hate Crimes in Africa

One of PSC's regularized agenda items, the prevention of ideology of hate, genocide and hate crimes featured once during the year. This was the [1147th open session](#) held on 6 April 2023.¹⁰⁵ Further to re-emphasizing the decisions adopted in its previous meetings on the theme, the PSC highlighted various specific measures that Member States should consider to address the challenge of the ideologies of hate, genocide, and hate crimes. Although relevant, the challenge with these measures remains the absence of mechanisms for actualizing them in practice. In terms of follow-up, some of the critical decisions reiterated from the Council's previous sessions were: the need to reinvigorate the early warning mechanism as a preventative tool to enable an early response before hate speech and crimes degenerate into violent conflicts and genocide and the decision for the PSC to include an analysis on indicators of hate crime and risk factors for them to escalate to genocide, in the Report of the PSC on its Activities and the State of Peace and Security in Africa.

Other thematic issues

Further to the various thematic issues discussed above, the PSC also addressed its regular thematic agendas including the commemoration of amnesty month, living together in peace and mine action in Africa. This year's commemoration of African Amnesty Month (AAM) took place in Maputo, Mozambique, under the theme "Disarmament as a key opportunity for silencing the Guns," recognizing Mozambique's efforts to silence the guns in Africa through the 2019 peace

¹⁰⁵ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1147th meeting of the PSC (06 April 2023).

and reconciliation agreement and the successful completion of the DDR process in June 2023. On 'Living Together in Peace', while no session was convened, the PSC issued a [Press Release](#) on 16 May, joining the rest of the world in the call for the promotion of the culture of tolerance and appreciating the value of unity in diversity. The PSC also committed its [1146th session](#) held on 3 April to the commemoration of international day for mine awareness and assistance in mine action.¹⁰⁶ The session served to bring attention to the key factors that continue to impede mine clearance goals in Africa including proliferation and use of new landmines in various conflict situations as member states continue to face financial constraints to complete clearance of existing landmines and explosive devices.

New Thematic Agendas

In a notable development, the PSC dedicated a [session](#) to the issue of community responses to security challenges.¹⁰⁷ This marked the first time that this concept became a stand-alone agenda item. While previous discussions in PSC sessions touched upon this issue under various themes, the specific focus on community responses reflected a growing recognition of its policy significance in addressing security challenges in Africa. The session aimed to enhance community resilience in the face of security threats across the continent. A central theme of the discussion involved exploring strategies to engage youth, women, and African civil societies in preventive diplomacy initiatives. Additionally, the session sought to foster civil-military cooperation in peace support operations, emphasizing the importance of member states participating in self-assessment processes to capture and analyze lessons learned from local communities. Furthermore, the session highlighted the need to recognize the role of communities and the role of religious and community leaders. As a result, the session requested the AU Commission to review the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to adapt it to contemporary security challenges facing the continent.

The other thematic topic new to the agenda of the PSC is the issue of Mercenaries and Private Military and Defence Companies (PMDCs). While the PSC

¹⁰⁶ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1146th meeting of the PSC (03 April 2023).

¹⁰⁷ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1163rd meeting of the PSC (21 July 2023).

has discussed the issue of PMDCs and mercenaries in different sessions before, this was the first time it was addressed as a stand-alone agenda item. During the session, the PSC strongly condemned the actions of PMDCs, emphasizing their detrimental effects on human security and the violation of individuals' rights in the regions of their operation. As indicated in the Fourth Quarter Report for 2023,¹⁰⁸ during the session, the PSC prioritized expediting the operationalization of the ASF to tackle security challenges across the continent. However, acknowledging that the ASF alone may not completely eliminate the use of PMDCs due to their diverse capacities and bilateral arrangements with host nations, the PSC called for enhanced collaboration with the UN Working Group to investigate and assess PMDCs and mercenaries-related activities in Africa. Furthermore, concerning the revision of the Convention on mercenaries, the PSC requested the establishment of a working group to review the OAU/AU Convention on Mercenaries and assess PMDCs and related activities.

3.4. CONSULTATIVE MEETINGS AND/OR OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

In 2023, PSC conducted its regular consultative meetings with various AU, UN and other partner organisations.

PSC Meetings with AU Organs

In 2023, the PSC institutionalized new consultative meetings and engagements with different entities. One of such engagement was the consultative meeting between the PSC and the Pan African Parliament (PAP) which took place on 30 June, during the PSC's [1160th meeting](https://papsrepository.africa-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/2025/AUPSC%20Q4%202023%20-%20EN.pdf?sequence=7&isAllowed=y).¹⁰⁹ The primary objective of the meeting was to enhance the cooperation and collaboration between the PSC and the PAP in promoting peace, security, and stability in Africa. Despite its previous engagements with the PAP, the PSC institutionalized the session during its 1160th session.

¹⁰⁸ AU Peace and Security Council, Fourth Quarter Report for 2023, PSC/RPT/Q4 (2023), <https://papsrepository.africa-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/2025/AUPSC%20Q4%202023%20-%20EN.pdf?sequence=7&isAllowed=y>

¹⁰⁹ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1160th meeting of the PSC (30 June 2023).

Another significant engagement with an AU organ was the PSC's engagement with the Sub-Committee on Human Rights, Democracy, and Governance (HRDG).¹¹⁰ In 2022, the PSC decided to institutionalize its engagement with the HRDG as an annual event, scheduled to take place in August. Consequently, this year's consultation held on 11 August, was convened in accordance with this decision. Unlike the previous year, when the PSC held separate sessions for its engagement with the HRDG and the African Governance Architecture (AGA) Platform, this year's consultation brought both the sub-committee and the AGA platform together. The purpose was to facilitate experience sharing between the PSC, the HRDG, and the AGA Platform members. The session was held under the theme "Experience Sharing Session between the PSC and the AGA Platform Members."

PSC Meeting with RECs/RMs

The 3rd Annual Consultative meeting between the PSC and RECs/RMs was held from 28 to 30 August 2023 in Bujumbura, Burundi. The meeting aimed at enhancing cooperation and collaboration between the PSC and policy organs of RECs/RMs in addressing the governance, peace and security challenges on the Continent. Discussions focused on the upsurge in terrorism and UCG in Africa and the application of the principle of Subsidiarity and complementarity – challenges, lessons and prospects for the future.

PSC Meeting under Article 20 of the PSC Protocol

To institutionalize the inaugural informal consultative meeting between the PSC and members of civil society organisations (CSOs) that took place the year prior, in 2023, the PSC committed its [1161st session](#) held on 6 July, to the second annual consultative meeting with representatives of CSOs.¹¹¹ The session, following the inaugural meeting saw the participation of various CSOs working on governance, peace and security, around AU and provided the platform for various institutions across each region to give insight to the PSC on key areas of concern regarding peace and security in their respective regions. The meeting also served to follow-up on the status of finalizing

¹¹⁰ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1167th meeting of the PSC (11 August 2023).

¹¹¹ AU Peace and Security Council, Communique of the 1161st meeting of the PSC (06 July 2023).

the CSOs database being developed by ECOSOCC for mapping CSOs working on governance, peace and security matters, to facilitate engagement with the PSC. With respect to ensuring the inclusivity of CSOs to support the work of the PSC, efforts such as the launch of the African Network of Think Tanks for Peace (NeTT4Peace) by the PAPS Department as well as the establishment of Pan-African Civil Society Network on Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PANPAPS) as a CSO-led initiative were noted during the session as positive advancements. To boost further engagement and more solid involvement of CSOs in supporting the PSC realize its mandates, the 1161st meeting identified the Inter-Regional Knowledge Exchange Platform (I-RECKE) and the Africa Facility to Support Inclusive Transitions (AFSIT) as relevant initiatives to have active CSO participation.

3.5. OTHER ACTIVITIES

The 10th High-level Seminar on Peace and Security in Africa, dubbed 'the Oran Process,' was held at the Ministerial Level to guide African Members of the UNSC - commonly referred to as the A3 - in tackling peace and security issues on the continent. This year's theme was 'Celebrating 10 years of progress and cooperation: A decade of transformation and innovation, reaching new heights together'. The seminar's discussions centered on the A3's approach to setting and prioritizing African issues on the UNSC agenda. It also explored strategies for enhancing support for and coordination with the A3 by the PSC and the AU at large. Furthermore, the meeting focused on addressing the challenges and developing strategies to support incoming A3 states.

Retreats

15th PSC Retreat

The PSC held its 15th retreat on its working methods in November 2023, in Tunis, Tunisia. The retreat was organized as part of steps by the PSC to continuously strengthen its working methods, to enable the Council to more effectively discharge its mandate within the framework of the APSA and AGA, as embodied in the PSC Protocol. The Retreat focused on three key issues, namely: the outcome of the Retreat of the PSC Committee of Experts held from 21 to 23 November 2023 which considered various working

and policy documents to facilitate the deliberations of the Council. Another area of focus was on the working methods of the Council, including an assessment of the Annual Indicative Programme of Work for 2023 and budget considerations; and finally on Unconstitutional Changes of Government (UCGs) on the Continent, with emphasis on best ways and means of addressing UCGs using the existing normative frameworks of the Union.

3rd PSC Retreat with Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)

The PSC held its 3rd engagement with the APRM in a joint retreat held from 11 - 12 December 2023 in Johannesburg, South Africa. Discussions during the retreat centered on the APRM impact study over the last 20 years; Implementation of the 2023; Africa Governance Reports (AGR); Foreign Interference and Military Coups in Africa; and the launch of the Africa Governance. The focus was also on evaluating the cooperation between the PSC and APRM in the areas of early warning and conflict prevention. Additionally, the synergy between the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the African Governance Architecture (AGA) was discussed.

Field missions

In 2023, the PSC conducted field missions to three countries: Burkina Faso, DRC and South Sudan. The number of visits conducted in 2023 less by one than the previous year when the Council undertook mission to four countries. However, this reduced number of field missions was not for lack of planning further missions. Indeed, the PSC indicated that it would undertake mission to Libya and Guinea but these plans did not come to pass.

Burkina Faso

The mission to Burkina Faso took place as part of the PSC's involvement in the Sahel Region. The purpose of the visit was to engage with member states in the region regarding security developments and political transitions. However, the intended objective of visiting multiple member states could not be fulfilled, and as a result, the PSC only visited Burkina Faso

DRC

The PSC field mission to the DRC conducted from 20 to 23 March took the Council to Kinshasa as well as key areas in Goma, particularly North Kivu which continues to be majorly affected by the ongoing conflict in eastern DRC. This allowed the PSC to have a first-hand account on the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in displacement camps in the region as well as the increasing insecurity faced among IDPs due to attacks perpetrated against these camps. Other key national actors including the Governor of North Kivu Province as well as stakeholders from the Minister of Social and Humanitarian Affairs; the Armed Forces of DRC (FARDC); the UN Stabilization Mission in DRC (MONUSCO); the East African Community (EAC) Regional Force; the Joint Verification Mechanism and civil society organisations were also consulted by the PSC during this field mission.

South Sudan

The PSC conducted its 7th field mission to South Sudan from 22 to 25 February 2023. This mission followed up on the decisions of the AU Assembly regarding the situation in South Sudan, specifically the transition process. The field mission took place at the end of the initial 36-month transition period provided by the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) and marked the beginning of a 24-month extension of the transition period.

IV. THE PSC HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT AND CAN ONLY MEET THE DEMAND FOR MORE AND BETTER AU ROLE BY RESTORING THE PRIMACY OF DIPLOMACY

The conflict dynamics in 2023 suggest that the situation on the continent has generally deteriorated further from the already dire state of 2022. This grim picture of the security situation of the continent makes the PSC and the wider AU as important, if not more important today than earlier years. The fraying multilateral system and the growing geopolitical tensions in the world have made the PSC and

its effective functioning a fundamental strategic imperative for Africa today more than at any other time before. In the circumstances, the PSC and the AU in general do not have the luxury to operate in a business-as-usual fashion. Alas, the AU seems to be performing even less than its records of yesteryears and the PSC barely sustaining its bare minimum functions and declining credibility. The reality is that the PSC and Africa ill afford for the PSC to continue its current path of being satisfied with sustaining the bare minimum of its functions and its challenged credibility. It has to rediscover the golden era of ambitious, robust and sustained peace and security diplomacy to make diplomacy the first and primary peace and security instrument.

In 2023, there were instances that illustrated the increasing importance of the PSC as a leading site for collective peace and security action in Africa, albeit these instances were isolated. One such case was with respect to the new war that broke out in Sudan. First, the PSC, despite being taken by surprise like many others, was quick in convening an emergency session within 24 hours of the outbreak of the war. Second, the emergency session, despite being held in person, a day earlier than initially proposed and on a holiday weekend, saw the participation of all PSC members, with ten of them represented at ambassadorial levels.¹¹² The Chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, was present and briefed the PSC in person, one of the few occasions that he briefed the PSC during the year. In substantive policy terms, the PSC, apart from condemning the outbreak of new fighting and demanding the parties to commit to immediate ceasefire, tasked 'the Chairperson of the AU Commission to use his good offices to facilitate dialogue and peaceful resolution of the conflict.'



PSC emergency session on the situation in Sudan, 16 April 2023

¹¹² Monthly Digest on the AU Peace and Security Council (April 2023). Pg5. <https://amani-africa-et.org/monthly-digest-on-the-african-union-peace-and-security-council-april-2023/>

Commendably, at the initial phase, the Chairperson seized the momentum and convened an international ministerial meeting on the Sudan. From the extended mechanism that emerged from this convening, the AU established a core group. Instead of the Department for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, the Chairperson of the Commission also designated his Chief of Staff, who in 2019 served as a special envoy, to double as the point person and a spokesperson on the Sudan file. The nature of this arrangement and the lack of support, if not opposition to it, on the part of Sudanese actors evolved to produce institutional weakness undermining AU's lead role. When the PSC met at Heads of State Level on 27 May 2023, one of the two instance the PSC convened at this highest level in 2023, the Chairperson of the PSC, Uganda's President, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, proposed the establishment of a high-level facilitator or panel of facilitators in an effort to reinvigorate and salvage AU's peacemaking role. However, lacking support from AU Commission and some in the PSC, this proposal did not find its way into the communiqué of the session. It took another five months of the failed status quo for the PSC to firmly put the issue of a high-level mechanism dedicated on a fulltime basis to the Sudan file. Accordingly, it adopted the decision on the establishment of a high-level panel during its ministerial session held on 15 November 2023. This decision on the establishment of the Panel gave the AU the opportunity to redeem its lost credibility on the Sudan file.¹¹³

The other instance in which the PSC's leadership role was on the spotlight was in the context of the military coup that took place in Niger. Following a decision of ECOWAS imposing a litany of sweeping sanctions and a threat of use of force for reinstating the deposed government of Niger back to power, divisions emerged in the PSC on whether the PSC endorses ECOWAS decisions or adopts its own course of action. There were various factors that made this situation more challenging for the PSC. First, the ECOWAS decision was made at heads of state level and specifically requested for endorsement of its decisions by the AU.¹¹⁴ Additionally, the AU Commission Chairperson, instead of helping the PSC with upholding AU

norms standards, expressed full support for ECOWAS decisions.¹¹⁵ The PSC's eventual arrival at the right position was largely a result of the approach taken by the Chairperson of the month and the willingness shown by member states to engage in a different way than the usual process. Instead of following the usual practice of proceeding with putting the draft communique on silence procedure which could have led to deadlock, the Chairperson opted for an extended consultation with various members of the PSC including most notably members of the PSC from the ECOWAS region. It is worth noting that the fact that the Chairperson of the month was not from ECOWAS region must have played a role as well.

All the foregoing together with diplomatic and technical tactfulness in crafting the outcome document in a way that shows sensitivity to the position of PSC members from ECOWAS countries proved critical in achieving an outcome that is consistent with AU norms and practice. This approach, while indicating support for the effort of ECOWAS in send strong signal against the coup, declined support to the ECOWAS decision to use force for reinstating the deposed government in Niger.¹¹⁶ PSC's position of focusing on diplomacy and application of suspension of Niger pursuant to applicable AU norms and established practice and its aversion to using force in respect to military coup was subsequently vindicated when eventually the ECOWAS summit decided in December 2023 to recognize the situation in Niger as a coup, thereby abandoning the idea of reinstating the deposed government back to power through the threat of use of force. This also proved to be an excellent example that illustrates why subsidiarity cannot be used as necessitating the PSC rubber stamping the lead and decision of RECs/RMs.

In terms of tools, the PSC adopted very few new conflict prevention, conflict management or conflict resolution mechanism in 2023. First, PSC decided to adopt sanction by suspending Niger from participation in AU activities. Additionally, the PSC

¹¹³ Solomon A Dersso, *Establishment of a high-level panel an opportunity for reinvigorating AU's role on Sudan*, Ideas Indaba (05 December 2023), Amani Africa.

¹¹⁴ Communiqué of ECOWAS Extraordinary Session of Heads of State and Government, 30 July 2023, https://ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Final-Communique_Extra-Summit-on-Niger.pdf

¹¹⁵ Communiqué of AU Commission Chairperson, 10 August 2023, https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/43045-pr-en-Communique_of_the_Chairperson_of_the_AU_Commission_in_support_of_the_10_August_2023_ECOWAS_decisions_regarding_Niger.pdf

¹¹⁶ Monthly Digest on the AU Peace and Security Council (August 2023) .Pg4-6. <https://amaniAfrica-et.org/monthly-digest-on-the-african-union-peace-and-security-council-august-2023/>

decided on the appointment and deployment of 'high representative(s)' to foster the mediation efforts by ECOWAS. Second, the PSC also suspended Gabon from participation in AU activities following the coup that took place on 30 August. Going further, it also tasked the AU Commission to deploy a high-level mission to Gabon to engage key stakeholders to facilitate conditions for restoration of constitutional order. Third, on Sudan, the PSC decided on the establishment of a high-level panel to operate as a dedicated mechanism for peacemaking in Sudan. Fourth, with respect to the situation in DRC, the PSC, welcoming the deployment of the EAC force to Eastern DRC, decided to support its operations through the AU Peace Fund. Subsequently, the AU contributed \$ 2 million towards supporting the EAC operation.

Outside of these few cases, over all PSC's engagement in conflict prevention, management and resolution efforts have principally involved the following:

- convening of sessions and the adoption of communique or statement expressing its policy positions,
- undertaking of field missions; and
- sanction taking the form of suspension for unconstitutional change of government.

In those limited instances in which it adopted a decision on the establishment of new conflict/crisis management or resolution tools, the decision has either been totally ignored or followed up either after a long delay or poorly, thus detracting from the impact of PSC action. For example, as at the end of 2023, the appointment and deployment of a high representative to Niger has as yet to be acted on. Similarly, the decision for establishment of the high-level panel for Sudan had not been acted on when 2023 ended, despite the urgency of the situation in Sudan and much needed sustained active AU engagement.

While the foregoing cases illustrate the continuing critical role of the PSC, overall, the performance of the PSC in 2023 show the unsustainability of failing to bridge the growing gulf between what the PSC did and the demand of the security situation for PSC action and leadership in mobilizing effective conflict prevention, management and resolution actions. This growing gulf is aggravating the crisis of credibility

of this premier continental peace and security decision-making body, while the nature of the peace and security challenges continue to demand more and not less of the PSC, highlighting its increasing indispensability.

Despite the major deterioration in the security situation of the continent, the approach from the PSC not only remained in a business-as-usual mode but also seldom went beyond performative sessions and pronouncements of concern. Continuing the trend that has been underway for some years now, effectiveness of the PSC thus remains under strain. The increasing tendency of reducing PSC's work to a performative (or going through the motion) engagement and the decline in mobilizing effective PSC action are attributable to several factors including:

- the disappearance of effective political and technical leadership both at the level of member states and the AU Commission that was critical in mobilizing collective action for much of the first decade of PSC's existence;
- member states lack of concerted effort or resistance for action;
- deleterious effect of the rise of geopolitical rivalry as a major factor shaping the dynamics of conflicts and political crises;
- persisting and new working methods issues;
- problems of policy coherence with RECs/RMs; and
- capacity/resource limitations.

Another factor getting on the way of PSC's effectiveness in executing its conflict prevention, management and resolution mandate is the continuing increase in the percentage of thematic and other agenda items than those focusing on specific conflict situations. Accordingly, in 2023, the thematic and related items other than country and region-specific conflict situations accounted for nearly 60% of the agenda of the PSC. Within the PSC itself this has become a source of disquiet. Accordingly, in the conclusion of the 14th retreat of the PSC on its working methods, the PSC highlighted the need to rationalize 'the 2024

Annual Indicative Programme of Work of the Council, among others by limiting the frequency of meetings on thematic issues and where possible, by merging meetings on seemingly similar thematic issues.’ Additionally, the PSC underscored the ‘need for the PAPS Department to continue to advise all incoming PSC Chairpersons to prioritize meetings on country-specific situations.’

Additionally, there is also a need for adopting a framework that facilitates the pulling of efforts and resources of both the AU and RECs/RMs rather than the tension inducing principle of subsidiarity. As with the partnership with the UN, the peace and security challenges on the continent are of such a nature that no one entity at regional or continental levels can deal with on its own. This necessitates that the AU and RECs/RMs disabuse themselves of the view that the delivery of the collective public good of peace and security is best facilitated through guiding their relationship on the basis of subsidiarity. Apart from Niger that highlighted the serious flaws of the principle of subsidiarity, other cases that highlighted the issue of policy coherence between the PSC and RECs/RMs was the case of Sudan. At the 1137th session dedicated to the transitional process in Sudan (prior to it being completely derailed by the outbreak of the war in April), the regional body Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) advocated for the lifting of Sudan's suspension from the AU despite the fact that conditions warranting such lifting were missing. The PSC, in declining this call, demonstrated the importance of maintaining its autonomous leadership role in policy making while nurturing close working relationship and consultative decision-making anchored on the primacy of AU norms.

The decision-to-implementation gap continues to plague the effectiveness of PSC actions. Instead of improving, the serious challenge of implementation and follow through has further aggravated during 2023. Examples in this respect include the decision of the PSC for the relocation of the AU Office to Libya from Tunis to Tripoli and its decision for the appointment and deployment of a high-representative for Niger to foster mediation efforts. Accordingly, in the conclusions of the 14th retreat of the PSC held in November 2023 in Tunis, Tunisia, the very first issue that the PSC addressed itself to was this issue of non-implementation of decisions. Thus, it underscored ‘the need to ensure follow-up on the

implementation of the PSC decisions, with emphasis on effective tracking, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of PSC Decisions.’ Additionally, it also stipulated ‘the need to dedicate two sessions annually to the assessment/evaluation of the status of implementation of PSC and Assembly decisions on peace and security in the Continent.’

One of the factors for the lack of follow up relates to the lack of support to the various AU country political offices. Apart from the fact that many of AU's country offices suffer from severe shortage of human and material resources, some operate for extended period without leader. For example, the PSC at the 1157th meeting also requested the Chairperson of the Commission to expedite the appointment of a new SRCC for CAR, which remained vacant for a long period extending beyond a year, leaving the mission rudderless. Similarly, the AU office in Mali remains without head of mission since the departure of the AU High-Representative and Head of MISAH in August 2023.

The creeping practice of allowing resistance by a member state to the PSC being seized with a matter is rendering useless the rule of the PSC Protocol that no member state can object the inclusion of an issue into the agenda of the PSC.¹¹⁷ Making matters worse, even on those country/regional conflict situations on the agenda of the PSC, PSC's engagement has been very few and far in between. In those instances, in which the PSC dealt with specific conflict situations, it is uncommon that it adopted measures commensurate with the demands of the situation at the particular material time. Rather than the demand of conflict situations, how country or regional situations appear on the monthly program of work in the majority of cases tends to follow the regional membership of the monthly chairperson of the PSC. Together with capacity gaps at the level of member states, these conditions have made PSC's engagements to be often performative. The lack of any new initiative or absence of actionable measures in the outcome of PSC sessions are not uncommon. For example, PSC's 1178th session, where the PSC received update on the humanitarian situation, it was noted that ‘despite the recognition of the worsening of the humanitarian crises on the continent, the communique is bereft of

¹¹⁷ Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. (July 2002). Art.8(7). <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/psc-protocol-en.pdf>

any actionable decision.¹¹⁸

As events in the Horn of Africa and those in the Sahel show, geopolitical rivalry involving old, resurgent and new powers has increasingly become a major factor shaping conflict dynamics. While the PSC indicates its recognition of this issues, for example, when it condemns foreign interference in respect to the war in Sudan, there is no indication that the impact of geopolitical rivalry both on the behaviour of conflict parties and peace and security diplomacy is adequately accounted for. This necessitates that AU's peace and security diplomacy is recalibrated having regard to the increasingly deleterious impact of the emergence of global geopolitical tensions as major factor affecting conflict dynamics on the planning and deployment of peace and security diplomacy.

Restoring the primacy of diplomacy as the main peace and security instrument

Considering the peace and security landscape of the continent and the worsening geopolitical tension globally and its manifestations on the continent, the PSC and the AU broadly ill afford not to restore and even further expand the successful and robust peace and security diplomacy of the previous decade. In this respect, one cannot emphasize enough the PSC's emphasis on the centrality of mobilizing robust diplomacy in relation to countries facing political transition underscoring 'the need to demonstrate a clear determination in accompanying the countries, and in this regard, recommended (rightly) that the Chairperson of the AU Commission consider the expeditious appointment of a retired Head of State/ Government to engage the countries concerned and to brief the Heads of State and Government to galvanize the required political support.'

This emphasis to 'demonstrate a clear determination' in mobilizing robust diplomacy as the primary peace and security instrument will be required in 2024 as many of these countries in transition have to contend with the end of their transitional period in a poor institutional and security environment. This determination for robust diplomacy is required from the PSC in relation to other issues it would need to deal with during 2024: the preparations that need

to be made for concluding the exit of ATMIS and the follow on mission that would take over from ATMIS to avoid vacuum, uphold its principled policy position in accordance with applicable AU norms that the members of the TMC including the transition leader in Chad do not run for elections, avert the deterioration of the constitutional crisis in Senegal that plunged the country into political instability, to avert the impending breakdown of regional orders in West Africa and the Sahel and threat of such breakdown in Horn of Africa and Great Lakes regions, and ensure that the impending end of the transitional period in South Sudan does not occasion tension and risk of relapse to conflict. The PSC may therefore take the reconfiguration of its membership following the election to be held during the 37th AU summit and the induction that it would convene in March 2024 for charting a strategy for mobilizing action that the prevailing situation requires having regard to its experience and lessons from 2023.

¹¹⁸ Monthly Digest on the AU Peace and Security Council (October 2023) pg5 <https://amani-africa-et.org/monthly-digest-on-the-african-union-peace-and-security-council-october-2023/>



MEDIA AND RESEARCH SERVICES

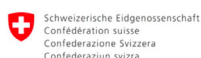
ABOUT AMANI AFRICA

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Amani Africa wishes to express its gratitude to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the support in the production of this review. We also thank the Government of Switzerland, the Embassy of Ireland, and Open Society Foundations for the additional support.



ADDRESS

On the Corner of Equatorial Guinea St. and ECA Road, Zequala Complex,
7th Floor, Addis Ababa
Tel: +251118678809
Mobile: +251944723204 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia