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**1ST MEETING OF CHIEFS OF DEFENCE STAFF
AND MINISTERS OF DEFENCE OF THE
COUNTRIES OF THE SAHELO-SAHARAN REGION**

**BAMAKO, MALI
4 SEPTEMBER 2015**

CONCLUSIONS

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1. The 1st meeting of the Ministers of Defense of the member countries of the Nouakchott Process on the Enhancement of Security Cooperation and the Operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) in the Sahelo-Saharan region was held in Bamako, Mali, on 4 September 2015. The meeting, which was preceded by preparatory meetings of experts and Chiefs of Defense Staff, on 2 and 3 September 2015, respectively, are part of the follow-up on the Conclusions of the 3rd ministerial meeting of the countries of the region, held in Niamey, Niger, on 19 February 2014, and the Declaration of the 1st Summit of the Nouakchott Process, organized in the Mauritanian capital on 18 December 2014.
2. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. The African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the North Africa Regional Capacity (NARC), the AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) and the Fusion and Liaison Unit (UFL) for the Sahel also participated in the meeting. Similarly, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations (UN) Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the Office of the UN Special Envoy for the Sahel (OSES), as well as the European Union (EU), attended the meeting.
3. The opening ceremony was marked by the statements made by the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, the Special Representative of ECOWAS in Mali, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Mali and Head of MINUSMA and the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the Sahel, as well as by the Minister of Defense and War Veterans of the Republic of Mali.
4. The meeting provided an opportunity to review the evolution of the security situation in the Sahelo-Saharan region and the efforts being deployed to address the challenges at hand. In this regard, the meeting considered modalities for the enhancement of operational cooperation among the countries of the region, especially through the systematization of joint border patrols, as well as through the establishment of mixed units involving military contingents. Similarly, the meeting considered the possibility of establishing an Intervention Force, which would operate in the northern part of Mali, and the issue of the strengthening of MINUSMA.
5. On the basis of the report submitted by the AU Commission on the follow-up on the relevant provisions of the Declaration of the Summit of 18 December 2014 of the member countries of the Nouakchott Process, the report of the preparatory meeting of experts and the recommendations of the Chiefs of Defense Staff, as well as the exchange of views on the different agenda items of the meeting, Participants agreed on the following:

On the evolution of the security situation in the Sahelo-Saharan region

6. Participants expressed concern about the evolution of the security situation in the region. They highlighted the attempt by the terrorist and criminal groups to regroup in the northern part of Mali and the increase in attacks against civilians, as well as against the Malian defense and security forces and the international forces present on the ground (MINUSMA and Barkhane). They further highlighted the spread of the terrorist threat to the central and

southern parts of Mali, as evidenced by the attack along the Côte d'Ivoire-Mali border, in the Sikasso region, at the end of June 2015, and the hostage taking in Sevaré, near Mopti, in early August 2015.

7. Participants also expressed concern over the prevailing situation in Libya, where the collapse of state structures and the existence of a number of armed groups have facilitated the establishment of safe havens in some parts of the Libyan territory by terrorist groups, including the "Islamic State" terrorist group, as well as the intensification of illegal migration with its attendant tragedies. They stressed the danger this situation continues to pose to security and stability in the region.

8. Participants reiterated the support of their respective countries and organizations to the ongoing stabilization efforts in the northern part of Mali, as well as to the implementation process of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers Process. They called upon all the signatory parties to honor their commitments, stressing that the scrupulous implementation of the Agreement will make it possible to further isolate the terrorist and criminal groups, thus facilitating their neutralization.

9. Participants welcomed the progress made by the member countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and Benin towards the operationalization of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) established to neutralize the Boko Haram terrorist group. They called for the intensification of the ongoing efforts and the mobilization of international assistance for the countries of the region, including financial resources, logistics and intelligence.

10. Participants noted with satisfaction the progress made in the implementation of the Nouakchott Process, particularly as regards its security cooperation aspects, with the regular convening of meetings of the Heads of Intelligence and Security Services (HISS) and other related activities. They called for the early implementation of the outstanding elements of the Operational Conclusions of the HISS meetings, as enumerated in the report of the Commission.

On the enhancement of operational security cooperation

11. Participants reiterated the commitment made by the countries of the region at the Niamey meeting and the Nouakchott Summit to enhance their operational cooperation, within the spirit of the relevant AU instruments, particularly the Common African Defense and Security Policy and the Non-aggression and Common Defense Pact, adopted in February 2003 and March 2005, respectively. Against this backdrop, they underscored the relevance of joint border patrols and the establishment of mixed units by countries willing to do so, both of which constitute flexible tools for the pooling of capacities and resources, in order to address the common challenges facing the countries of the region, while at the same time contributing to the deepening of regional integration. In this regard, they welcomed the steps taken within the region, both bilaterally and multilaterally, stressing their complementarity with the overall efforts aimed at fully operationalizing the APSA, including the African Standby Force (ASF) and its Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC).

12. Participants, having noted the key features of the generic concepts of operation for joint patrols and mixed units, as described in the report of the Commission, agreed on the following measures to enhance operational cooperation in the region:

- to ensure a shared assessment of the threats and risks in the Sahel region, as a prerequisite for more effective security cooperation, bearing in mind that these threats and risks could be categorized as follows: terrorism, organized crime (drug, arms and human trafficking), illegal immigration and irredentism;
- to initiate a continued process of lessons learnt from existing initiatives, in order to enhance the effectiveness of joint patrols and facilitate the establishment of mixed units by countries willing to do so. In this regard, it was agreed to organize a mission to assess the existing arrangements in the region, which will culminate in the organization of a lessons learnt workshop by the end of 2015;
- to organize a planning meeting before the end of 2015 to fine tune the generic concepts of operation for joint patrols and mixed units, as articulated in the report of the AU Commission, as well as to prepare a generic AU support concept for regional efforts towards operational cooperation;
- to encourage the countries of the region to establish, as necessary, modalities for enhanced operational cooperation on the basis of existing best practices. In this regard, Participants requested the AU, particularly through its High Representative for Mali and the Sahel, as well as the relevant Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, to sensitize the States about the importance of enhancing operational border cooperation;
- to request the countries that establish operational cooperation arrangements, in the form of joint patrols and mixed units, to notify the AU and the relevant Regional Mechanisms, in order to facilitate follow-up of ongoing initiatives and the mobilization of the necessary political support and resources;
- to promote civil-military actions in the fight against terrorism and transnational organized crime; and
- to involve representatives of Defense Staff Headquarters of the countries of the Sahelo-Saharan region in the meetings of the HISS, as from the next meeting of the HISS, scheduled to take place in Abuja, Nigeria, to further enhance coordination between intelligence collection and operational action.

On the establishment of an intervention force in the northern part of Mali and the enhancement of MINUSMA

13. Participants recalled that the Nouakchott Summit had expressed the full readiness of the countries of the region, in consultation with the UN, to contribute to the enhancement of MINUSMA, in particular through the establishment, on the model of the Intervention Brigade of the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), of an intervention force to be deployed in the northern part of Mali, to assist in the fight against the terrorist and criminal groups and facilitate the successful completion of the ongoing stabilization efforts.

14. Participants acknowledged the seriousness of the security threat posed by the terrorist and criminal groups both for Mali, including the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and

Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers Process, and for the entire region. In this context, Participants stressed the need for a more sustained action to deal with this threat, especially given that the situation in Libya, with the rise of the “Islamic State”, constitutes an aggravating factor. Participants noted the recommendations made by the AU Commission with regard to the mandate and tasks of the proposed intervention force, as well as with regard to possible options for its establishment and coordination mechanisms with other forces present on the ground. They expressed preference for the option of an African Mission benefiting from a logistical support package funded by UN assessed contributions, along the lines of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

15. Recalling the Declaration of the Nouakchott Summit and noting that MINUSMA is not mandated to conduct counter-terrorism operations, as well as the need for the region, with the support of the international community, to play a more important role in the fight against terrorism and organized crime, Participants agreed on the following with regard to the possible establishment of an intervention force in the northern part of Mali:

- the need for a proper understanding of the current threat and its possible evolution, as well as for adequate intelligence, in order to design the proposed force on the basis of the tasks expected of it. In this regard, Participants requested the AU Commission, in coordination with ECOWAS, the UN and the countries of the region, to facilitate a mission to assess the situation on the ground, before the end of the month of September 2015; and
- the organization by the AU, by mid-October 2015 at the latest, of a meeting of experts from the countries of the region, to which the UN and other relevant international partners would be invited, to develop a concept of operation and other operational-level documents, with a view to enabling the relevant AU organs to pronounce themselves on the issue of the force and take appropriate decisions.

16. Participants agreed on the need, in parallel to the efforts on the possible establishment of an intervention force in the northern part of Mali, to strengthen the operational capacity of MINUSMA. They agreed on the following measures:

- support to the Troop Contributing Countries to mobilize the equipment they need to meet the required standards;
- strengthening of the participation of MINUSMA in the meetings of the HISS, as well as of operational coordination, including the reciprocal secondment of Liaison Officers; and
- facilitation of the opening of alternative land supply routes for MINUSMA, considering the increase in asymmetric attacks against the convoys of the Mission in Mali.

17. Participants also stressed the importance of strengthening the capacity of the Malian defense and security forces, particularly as regards equipment and training, to enable them to play a leading role in the fight against the scourge of terrorism and organized crime. In this respect, they commended the work of the EU Training Mission (EUTM) and urged the EU to enhance its support through the programme “Train and Equip”. They called upon the AU

Member States to contribute actively to this process, as well as to the reform of the defense and security sector provided for in the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.

18. Participants welcomed the Algerian proposal on the establishment, in Tessalit, in the northern part of Mali, of a Regional Training and Familiarization Center for Combat in the Desert, in support of the Member States of the Nouakchott Process. They called for the early operationalization of this center.

On the operationalization of the African Standby Force, ongoing AU Missions and other related activities

19. The Commission provided an update on the operationalization process of the ASF, with the organization, in October/November 2015, in South Africa, of the AMANI AFRICA II Field Training Exercise (FTX), to validate the attainment of full operational capability for the ASF and its RDC. The Commission also provided an update on the ongoing AU Missions (notably AMISOM and the Regional Task Force against the Lord's Resistance Army), as well as on the Project on Enhanced Small Arms and Light Weapons Control and Physical Protection and Stockpile Management in the Sahel region, launched in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 15 May 2015, in collaboration with the relevant Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and with the support of international partners.

Follow-up and next meeting

20. Participants requested the AU Commission, working with the concerned stakeholders, to ensure the necessary follow-up and to submit these conclusions to the Peace and Security Council (PSC), for information and support. They agreed to hold their next meeting, jointly with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, ahead of the 2nd Summit of the Nouakchott Process, scheduled to take place in Ndjamen, Chad, at a date to be determined by mutual agreement between the Chadian Government and the AU Commission.

Acknowledgment

21. Participants expressed their deep appreciation to the Malian authorities for their warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements made for the successful conduct of their deliberations. They expressed appreciation to President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita for his continued commitment to peace, security and stability in Mali and in the region as a whole.

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