


Somalia Has Proof Of Eritrea's Meddling in Internal Affairs, Says Minister

By Peter Clotney
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Somali officials are considering reporting neighboring Eritrea to the UN Security Council for undermining the government despite Asmara's sharp denial. President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed's unity government has accused Eritrea of continually supplying arms hard-line insurgent groups, including al-Shabab, to destabilize the government. But Asmara flatly denies this, saying it is tired of accusations that it sends weapons to al-Qaeda-linked Islamist militants fighting the new Somali government. Described by Washington as a terrorist organization with strong ties to al-Qaeda, al-Shabab has refused to recognize the new Somali government, vowing eventually to take over the country.

Abdushakur Warsame is the Somali Minister for Planning and International Cooperation. He told VOA that Mogadishu has proof of Asmara's meddling.

"This is the first time we talked as a national unity government of Somalia about Eritrea interference in Somali issues. And this is not an accusation, but it is information, and we gave details and information about the Eritrean involvement of supplying weapons and ammunitions to the opposition groups like al-Shabab and Hisbul-Islam," Warsame said.

He said Mogadishu is not sure the rationale behind Asmara's interference in Somalia's internal political dynamics.

"We don't know why Asmara is supporting al-Shabab. There is no reason to support al-Shabab. Al-Shabab doesn't have any legitimacy to fight against the national unity government. There is no Ethiopian occupation in the country and they (al-Shabab) demanded the Sharia law, and the president accepted, and the parliament approved that application of the Sharia," he said.

Warsame described as unfortunate Asmara's support to hard-line Islamic insurgents.

"We don't know why Eritrea is still trying to destabilize Somalia and trying to create chaos and confusion in our country," Warsame said.

He said Mogadishu has proof of Eritrea supporting the insurgents.

"The minister of security has already provided a detailed account of how many weapons they supplied and how many times Eritrean flights land into Somalia. And he clearly stated and said on Tuesday and Friday, and also he mentioned that in the next few days, another airplane would be landing in our country," he said.

Warsame said Somali has asked neighboring Eritrea to desist from supporting the hard-line insurgents who are bent on destabilizing the new government.

"We are reiterating Eritrea should not interfere in Somali affairs. Otherwise, our government is now considering to write to the (UN) Security Council because that (its action) is a breach of

Security Council resolution of arms embargo on Somalia. So we are considering to write to the AU (African Union), to the Security Council, and all international bodies about what Eritrea is doing in our country," Warsame said.

Meanwhile, radical Somali Islamist leader Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys said over the weekend he was not willing to talk with his former ally, President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, who has repeatedly stated an eagerness to meet with his archrival.

Warsame says the new Somali government will embrace all Somalis in its rebuilding efforts after at least 19 years of ineffective government that left the country in tatters.

"We have stated all the time that our priority is security issue combined with reconciliation and development. The government is now preparing its security forces and trying to secure the city of Mogadishu the capital, and we are also trying to engage and reach out every available means to the opposition groups, including Sheikh Aweys. And we are very hopeful that Sheikh Aweys will join the reconciliation because he doesn't have any other option," Warsame said.

Meanwhile, following Mogadishu's accusation of Asmara's complicity to undermine its government, Eritrea in turn has accused western powers of meddling in Somalia, fuelling strife that has so far left thousands dead and scores injured, while many more have been forced from their homes in the last two years.

Political observers say the ongoing regional power struggle between Eritrea and Ethiopia is complicating peace prospects for Somalia. Addis Ababa and Asmara fought a 1998-2000 border war that has left deep suspicions on both sides which often spill over to neighboring countries in the Horn of Africa region.

A panel of experts from the United Nations which has been monitoring an arms embargo on Somalia has often tagged Asmara as the main weapons supplier for hard-line insurgents in the Horn of African region.