Beat: News

US ANNOUNCES $9 MILLION IN MILITARY SUPPORT TO SOMALIA

by Ahmed Mohamed

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The U.S. announced Sunday that it's giving $9 million in new military aid to help Somalia's ongoing campaign against al-Shabab militants. It's the first such direct military support since U.S. forces returned to Somalia and President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud announced an "all-out war" against the militants.

According to Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur, Somalia's Defense Minister, the military donation from the U.S. was a show of confidence and testimony that the Somali military can be trusted to manage the weapons without it falling into the wrong hands. He added that the weapons will play an important role in fighting the Khawarij.

Khawarij is a derogatory term which Somali officials use to describe al-Shabab.

Matt Bryden, a security expert and the founder of Sahan Research, a think tank covering the Horn of Africa, marked the new contribution as an endorsement of the efforts by the Mohamud administration to fight the militant group.

"The recent United States' commitment to provide additional military support to the Somali National Army is a sign of confidence," Bryden said. "It's not a huge amount of money, but it is a sign of confidence in the progress that the current offensive against al-Shabab is making in the central regions of Somalia."

Somali forces have been engaged in an offensive alongside local clan militias against al-Shabab since July.

The pro-government forces have captured many villages and towns, mostly in the Hirshabelle state. However, the militants continue to mount counterattacks against government forces and civilian targets.

Abdiasis Isaack, a security expert with the Hamad Bin Khalifa Civilization Center, told VOA the new military package will be critical for the Somali army which has a limited arsenal.

Isaack said the military aid will help Somalia in the war against al-Shabab. He added that the main challenge facing the Somali military was that it possessed weapons of the same caliber as that of al-Shabab — making it difficult to win the war against the group.

The U.S. is among the largest contributors of support to the Somali National Army, especially for its commando wing, the Danab Special Forces, which is trained for close-range fighting with al-Shabab in urban areas.

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