

Beat: News

US Airstrike in Somalia Kills 14 al-Shabab Militants

By Mohammed Dhaaysane | VOA News

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ARAC International Global Media Partners - Officials in central Somalia say a U.S. airstrike against al-Shabab militants has killed 14 fighters, the deadliest strike against the terrorist group in months. The airstrike that targeted al-Qaida-linked Islamist militant group al-Shabab took place Sunday in Somalia's central region of Hiran.

Military officials there who spoke with VOA by phone said the attack killed 14 al-Shabab fighters. They say the airstrike was conducted by the U.S. military to support Somali troops who were conducting operations against al-Shabab.

The Somali military said it captured the group's main stronghold in the region, located outside the town of Mahas, and also destroyed its hideouts.

The U.S. military has yet to comment on the attack.

Last week, the U.S. African Command, or AFRICOM, said it conducted an airstrike outside Beledweyne, the capital of the Hiran region that borders Ethiopia. AFRICOM said that an airstrike, also conducted in support of the Somali national army, killed four al-Shabab terrorists.

Abdurahman Sheikh Azhari, director of the Mogadishu-based Centre for Analysis and Strategic Studies, told VOA that the United States is increasing its role in Somalia again, noting that President Joe Biden has pledged to return the small U.S. troop presence that was withdrawn by former President Donald Trump.

"The U.S. engagement and its troops return in Somalia is part of ongoing U.S. strategic policy and interest in the region, especially Somalia, to fight al-Shabab and to stop them from attacking U.S. interests," Azhari said.

The recent airstrikes follow the election of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as Somalia's new president and Mohamud's pledge to fight al-Shabab on all fronts.

However, Daniel Furnad, the associate director for the Nairobi-based Farsight Africa Group, believes that is not the reason for the U.S. airstrikes.

"The timing of the American airstrikes is more likely a result of the installation of General Michael Langley as AFRICOM commander than support for the Somali president, although I think we are in a honeymoon period with Hassan Sheikh Mahamud," he said. "U.S. policy has been undergoing an overhaul, with General Langley now in place I think we are starting to see that policy unfold."

Furnad said that AFRICOM is selecting its targets carefully and only participates in actions that have little chance for civilian collateral damage while targeting high-value resources for al-Shabab.

He added that Washington is concerned about al-Shabab widening its scope of operations to include Ethiopia, but adds he doesn't think the airstrikes in Somalia are related to Shabab's recent incursions into Ethiopian territory.

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