Move at UN to sanction Eritrea over Somalia links
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Steps include arms embargo, asset freezes, travel bans
Russia, China will have problems with draft - diplomats
By Louis Charbonneau

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 19 (Reuters) - A draft U.N. Security Council resolution calls for an arms embargo against Eritrea and travel bans and asset freezes for members of its government and military for aiding Islamist insurgents in Somalia.

The resolution, obtained by Reuters on Thursday, was drafted by temporary Security Council member Uganda and has been circulated to other members of the 15-nation panel, U.N. diplomats said.

The United States and other council members accuse Eritrea of supplying al Shabaab rebels with money and weapons as they fight to topple the fragile U.N.-backed transitional government of Somali President Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, the official leader of the virtually lawless Horn of Africa nation.

The fighting in Somalia has killed nearly 19,000 civilians since the start of 2007 and driven 1.5 million from their homes.

Among the measures called for in the draft is a ban on all sales to Asmara of "weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, paramilitary equipment, and spare parts."

The draft also calls for a ban on providing Eritrea with "technical assistance, training, financial and other assistance, related to the military activities."

The Security Council, African Union (AU) and United States have all warned Asmara against destabilizing Somalia. Eritrea denies supporting al Shabaab and has said that the threat of U.N. sanctions is of "no concern at all."

A U.N. arms monitoring body -- which was set up to record violations of a 1992 arms embargo on Somalia -- has said Asmara was sending plane- and boatloads of munitions to Somali rebels, as well as providing them with logistical support.

It was not clear when the council would vote on the resolution. Diplomats said it would need to be revised if it was to avoid a veto from China and Russia, which dislike sanctions in general.

The resolution would authorize U.N. member states to inspect "all cargo to and from Somalia and Eritrea" via land and sea if there were grounds to suspect that the cargo included banned items.

It would also impose a travel ban and freeze the assets of the "Eritrean political and military leadership" and other Eritrean individuals and firms suspected of supporting the hard-line Islamist rebels.

Somalia has been mired in chaos for nearly two decades and there is little sign the latest attempt to establish central government is proving any more successful than the 14 previous efforts since a dictator was ousted in 1991. (Editing by David Storey)