

Eritrea planned massive attack against African Union summit, says UN report



African Union member States flags fly at their summit in Equatorial Guinea in June 2011

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The Eritrean Government planned a massive attack on an African Union meeting held earlier this year, according to a new United Nations report that states that this was just one of multiple violations of Security Council arms embargoes committed by the small East African nation.

“If executed as planned, the operation would almost certainly have caused mass civilian casualties, damaged the Ethiopian economy and disrupted the African Union summit,” states the **report** of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea.

The UN panel is tasked with monitoring compliance with embargoes on the delivery of weapons and military equipment to Somalia and Eritrea, as well as probing activities – financial, maritime or in another field – which generate revenue used to violate those embargoes.

The report states that the Eritrean Government “conceived, planned, organized and directed a failed plot to disrupt the African Union summit in Addis Ababa by bombing a variety of civilian and governmental targets.”

It adds that "since the Eritrean intelligence apparatus responsible for the African Union summit plot is also active in Kenya, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda, the level of threat it poses to these other countries must be re-evaluated."

The report, which is over 400 pages, also points to Eritrea's continuing relationship with Al-Shabaab, the Islamist militant group that controls some parts of Somalia's territory and has been waging a fierce battle against the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) there.

While the Eritrean Government acknowledges that it maintains relationships with Somali armed opposition groups, including Al-Shabaab, it denies that it provides any military, material or financial support and says its links are limited to a political, and even humanitarian, nature.

However, evidence and testimony obtained by the Monitoring Group, including records of financial payments, interviews with eyewitnesses and data relating to maritime and aviation movements, all indicate that Eritrean support for Somali armed opposition groups is not limited to the political or humanitarian dimensions.

The Group says that Eritrea's continuing relationship with Al-Shabaab appears designed to "legitimize and embolden the group rather than to curb its extremist orientation or encourage its participation in a political process."

Moreover, Eritrean involvement in Somalia reflects a broader pattern of intelligence and special operations activity, including training, financial and logistical support to armed opposition groups in Djibouti, Ethiopia, the Sudan and possibly Uganda in violation of the Security Council's embargoes.

Among the concerns the Group expresses regarding Somalia are the TFG's "lack of vision or cohesion, its endemic corruption and its failure to advance the political process," all of which are impediments to security and stabilization in southern Somalia.

The "burgeoning" engagement in Somalia of private security companies, whether to deter pirates or to provide security on land, is of growing concern, it adds. The Group believes that at least two such companies have committed significant violations of the arms embargo by engaging in unauthorized training and equipping of Somali militias.