

Kenya, Somalia Trade Threats in Indian Ocean Dispute

By Mohammed Yusuf

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[FILE - A view of the Kenyan parliament building in Nairobi.](#)

Analysts warn that tension could rise as a U.N. hearing nears on a Kenyan-Somali territorial argument.

Kenya's parliament recently called on President Uhuru Kenyatta to send troops to the Indian Ocean to protect the country's territory from what it calls Somalia's aggression.

"In the event that diplomacy is going to fail and any other process fails, then our constitution permits the use of Kenya defense forces to protect our

boundary, and the authority to use Kenya defense forces is vested in the parliament,” said lawmaker John Mbadi. “The president can declare war or use our forces to protect our boundary, but the deployment of those troops must be sanctioned by the parliament. We told the president ... that parliament would support any means to protect our territory.”

Court of Justice hearing

The threat by Kenya comes less than a month before the U.N.'s International Court of Justice holds a hearing on the dispute.

Somali lawmaker Mohamed Omar Talha told VOA that his country would counter Kenya by sending troops of its own to the 100,000-square-kilometer (38,600-square-mile) area.

"If they send their troops to Somalia, we, the parliament of Somalia, will also bring a motion that will counter such a threat and give permission to our soldiers to defend our people and territory,” Talhar said.

The neighbors' maritime dispute began in 2014 when Somalia filed a complaint against Kenya in the International Court of Justice saying it had exhausted all other avenues of finding a resolution.

Kenya wants negotiations with Somalia, while Somalia insists the court process must stop before negotiations take place.

Security expert Mwachofi Singo said a conflict between the countries would benefit the al-Shabab terrorist group.



FILE - Al-Shabab fighters display weapons as they conduct military exercises in northern Mogadishu, Somalia.

'Fan the fires'

"Catastrophic. Nobody wants to worsen an already bad situation, because the security situation in the Horn [of Africa] is already not good," Singo said. "You have al-Shabab roaming around everywhere. Kenya is part of the AMISOM [African Union Mission in Somalia] force that is fighting al-Shabab inside Somalia. Now, if you open another front ... this can only fan the fires. I think al-Shabab will celebrate, because chaos thrives in chaos."

Mumo Nzau, who teaches diplomacy and international studies at the University of Nairobi, said the military threats were political statements.

"Those are kind of political statements by politicians, and they are normal," Nzau said. "But that cannot be the official position of the country. It's just positions that politicians take once in a while, but ... there are no troops at the disputed area for any reason. This is a matter that the United

Nations Security Council and the African Union are observing very closely, and they are working very closely with the two countries."

The hearing on the Indian Ocean dispute will begin Sept. 9 at International Court of Justice headquarters in The Hague.

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