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## **Ethiopia Warns It's Losing Patience as Somalis Clash**

By Hassan Yare  
Reuters

BAIDOA, Somalia — Ethiopian tanks rolled to the battlefield on Friday as Somali Islamists and Somalia's pro-government troops pounded each other with artillery and rockets in a fourth day of clashes.

In its first detailed response to the fighting that has killed dozens and wounded hundreds, Addis Ababa said its patience was running out and it demanded the Islamists stop all "hostile anti-Ethiopian activities."

"The situation in Somalia has turned from bad to worse," said a statement from Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Ethiopia has been patient so far. There is a limit to this."

Ethiopia has said it would make public any intention of war against the Islamists, who already view it as a fait accompli.

The Islamists said they would send ground troops to attack en masse on Saturday, as opposed to fighting from a distance with heavy weapons as the two sides have done so far, ignoring a European peace initiative.

"Our troops have not started to attack. From tomorrow the attack will start," Islamist deputy spokesman Ibrahim Shukri told a news conference.

Witnesses near the fighting on two fronts near the government's encircled stronghold of Baidoa in south-central Somalia said they heard the rumble of armor before dawn.

"I was awakened this morning by heavy sounds of tanks. I woke up and saw seven Ethiopian tanks heading toward Daynunay," Baidoa resident Abdullahi Ali told Reuters.

An Islamist fighter near one of the fronts in Daynunay said the tanks had attacked his unit, and he was awaiting anti-tank weapons to fight back.

"We can see Ethiopian tanks. They have started firing heavy shells at us," the fighter, who declined to give his name, told Reuters by telephone.

If confirmed, the involvement of the tanks in the battle would raise the stakes in what is already the most sustained combat so far in a fight many fear could mushroom across the Horn of Africa, sucking in rivals Eritrea and Ethiopia.

European Union aid chief Louis Michel, who met both sides on Wednesday in a day of shuttle diplomacy, urged all parties on Friday to stop fighting and set a date for peace talks.

The International Committee for the Red Cross said dozens of people had been killed in this week's clashes and 200 wounded. It appealed to both sides to allow wounded and captured fighters to receive treatment and to spare hospitals from attack.

### **New Front?**

Daynunay is the government's forward military base about 20 km (12 miles) southeast of Baidoa. Ethiopia has said it has military trainers there, but not combat troops.

The other front, Idaale, is 70 km (45 miles) southwest of Baidoa, a southern agricultural trading post which is the only town the government controls.

The Western-backed, but ineffective, government and the Somali Islamic Courts Council (SICC) say they have killed hundreds of each other's troops across the brushy flatlands around Baidoa.

Fighting began late on Tuesday, as an SICC deadline for Ethiopian troops to leave Somalia or face a holy war passed.

By Wednesday night, it was clear the EU's announcement the same day that the two sides had agreed to restart peace talks and stop fighting had begun to ring hollow.

The SICC has taken control of most of southern Somalia by dint of its military might and imposition of strict sharia law.

Washington and what it considers to be its top counter-terrorism ally in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia, say the SICC is led by an al Qaeda cell, which the military-religious movement denies.

The SICC says it has the popular support the government lacks, bringing law and order to a nation convulsed with anarchy since dictator Mohamed Siad Barre was ousted in 1991.

The SICC said Ethiopian troops were moving by air and ground toward Galkaayo, a strategic central Somali town held as a forward defense base by government-allied Puntland fighters.

"We hope fighting will simultaneously start there too. We call upon the Somalis to rise up and join in the jihad," SICC Secretary Ibrahim Suley told reporters.

Ethiopia and Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf, a Puntland native, are keen to keep the relatively stable, semi-autonomous Puntland region and its strategic ports out of SICC hands.

A Puntland fighter said by telephone from near Galkaayo: "There is a lot of troop movement. From the way things are going, fighting can start any time."

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