

# More U.S. strikes on Somalia would make things worse

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – While he has said for years that terrorists were hiding out in Somalia, the apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Mogadishu said more U.S. airstrikes would only make things worse.

Bishop Giorgio Bertin of Djibouti, who also oversees the church in Somalia's chaotic and violent capital, spoke to the Vatican's Fides news agency Jan. 9, the day after a U.S. Air Force gunship fired on suspected al-Qaida terrorists in southern Somalia.

"Prudence must guide all human activities, and it is even more important when taking action in a country like Somalia," Bishop Bertin said. "This act risks throwing more fuel on an already explosive situation."

The bishop added, "I do not think this attack reinforces the support of Somalia's population for the fragile government of transition and for Ethiopia," which helped the transitional government regain control of the country in late December and early January.

A Pentagon official told The New York Times late Jan. 8 that a U.S. Air Force AC-130 gunship operating from a base in Djibouti fired on suspected al-Qaida terrorists in southern Somalia, causing multiple casualties.

The United States believed the suspected terrorists were responsible for the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

Bishop Bertin told Fides that for years he had been saying that "elements of Islamic extremism," including those responsible for the 2003 death of an Italian lay missionary in Somalia, were holed up in Mogadishu.

After the transitional government regained control of the capital, it was believed that the extremists fled south.

"However, this does not exempt us from reaffirming that there can and must be

other ways to stop extremism,” Bishop Bertin said. “Beyond the ethical aspects, sowing death and destruction is counterproductive for those who want to fight terrorism.”

The bishop said international support and assistance is absolutely necessary for the stability of Somalia and the consolidation of its new government, but it must be the people of Somalia who make the final decisions.

“In Somalia there is a proverb that says, ‘Only the hunchback knows the position in which he can sleep.’ The same thing goes for Somalis. Only they know what steps are necessary to stabilize the country,” the bishop said.