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Chad Rebels Attack Border Town, Government Blames Sudan

By Reuters

N'DJAMENA — Rebels fighting to overthrow Chad's President Idriss Deby attacked the eastern town of Adre on the border with Darfur on Thursday, in a raid the Chadian government said had been launched from neighboring Sudan.

Officials in N'Djamena said Chad's army had beaten off the attack and pushed the raiders back into Darfur, the western Sudanese region where a political and ethnic conflict raging since 2003 has been increasingly spilling over into Chad.

A rebel spokesman said the raiders had "achieved their objectives" and later pulled out of Adre, which straddles the main road from Chad to Sudan and is only 30 km (19 miles) from the West Darfur capital of el-Geneina.

"The mercenaries from Sudan attacked Chad National Army positions in Adre. They have been completely defeated and we are in pursuit," Chad's government said in a statement read by Communications Minister Hourmadji Moussa Doumgor.

Defense Minister Bichara Issa Djadallah blamed Sudan for the assault. "When someone attacks Adre, where do they attack from? Adre is 400 meters (yards) from Sudan, so do you think the attack came from Sudan or from Chad?," he told Reuters.

Humanitarian workers in Adre said the town's hospital had received 120 wounded, at least a third of them civilians. The rebels said 100 government soldiers and 13 of their own had been killed but there was no independent confirmation.

Deby's government repeatedly accuses Sudan of backing the rebels, including by allowing them to strike from Sudanese territory, as part of a widening campaign of regional destabilization. Khartoum denies the charge.

Feuding Militias

Djadallah said the Chadian army was in control of Adre, which lies 167 km (104 miles) east of Abeche, the hub for international humanitarian operations serving tens of thousands of Sudanese refugees and displaced civilians in eastern Chad.

A spokesman for the rebel Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD), part of a coalition battling to oust Deby, said rebels had reached the center of Adre after heavy fighting.

In the past, the rebels have usually quickly withdrawn from towns or villages seized, part of a hit-and-run strategy aimed at trying to wear down Deby's army and end his 17-year rule in the landlocked central African oil producer.

In separate violence further north near the Chad-Sudan border, government sources said around 30 people had been killed and 40 injured since Monday in feuding between rival militias.

The fierce clashes between fighters of the Tama and Zaghawa ethnic groups, some of them former rebels, took place at Djimeze, between Guereda and Hadjer-Marfaine. Chad's government had sent forces to the area to restore order.

The latest violence in eastern Chad came as a U.N. team continued a mission to evaluate whether to deploy international peacekeepers along the Chadian border with Sudan.

The team, sent by the U.N. Security Council, visited Chad last week and is currently in nearby Central African Republic, which has also blamed Sudan for rebel raids on its northeast.

Defying the U.N. and intense international pressure, Sudan is refusing to allow a strong force of U.N. peacekeepers to be deployed in Darfur.

So the world body is also looking to send troops to Chad and Central African Republic to secure their porous frontiers with Darfur, although some U.N. officials say this will not be effective unless domestic insurgencies are also resolved.

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