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## **Chad Pushes Back Rebels Backed By Sudan**

By Betel Miarom

N'DJAMENA — Chad said on Wednesday it had pushed back a rebel convoy which attacked two towns in the country's remote southeast and accused neighboring Sudan of backing the insurgency.

Chad's Foreign Minister Ahmat Allam-Mi summoned Sudan's ambassador to demand an explanation after the rebels briefly seized Goz Beida near the Sudan border on Sunday then attacked Am Timan further west as they moved deeper into the country.

"Having signed agreements to normalize our relations, we cannot understand how Sudan can send over motorized rebel columns with sophisticated weaponry," Allam-Mi said.

"We favor dialogue. We can still meet to resolve this problem," he said, but added: "Chad will protect itself against any acts or low blows that Sudan deals us."

Chad's government said army reinforcements had been sent to the region around Am Timan but that the rebels had withdrawn without putting up a fight. Communication Minister Hourmadji Moussa Doumgor said Am Timan was now under government control.

Fighting in Sudan's Darfur region, which has killed tens of thousands of people since 2003 and displaced more than two million, has often spilled over into arid, oil-producing Chad.

President Idriss Deby has repeatedly accused Khartoum of backing the rebels, saying Sudan's Arab government was trying to export its "fundamentalist system" to the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Sudan denies the charge.

"There is absolutely no support from the government of Sudan to any rebels," a Sudanese army spokesman said, but noted the border between the two countries was porous.

"It is entirely possible that rebels can enter the border and attack from Sudan as rebels enter and attack the Sudanese armed forces from Chadian territories," he said.

### **"Cat and Mouse"**

The army bolstered security in N'Djamena on Tuesday as the rebels appeared to be advancing across the mostly desert country. But the dusty city was calm on Wednesday, with a lone tank guarding the presidential palace.

The attacks recalled a lightning assault on N'Djamena in April, launched from the east by rebels who raced across the desert in pick-up trucks from the Sudan border. Several hundred people were killed in the capital before the army took control.

A leader of the rebel coalition, the Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD), said late on Tuesday its fighters would not advance immediately from the area around Am Timan, some 600 km (370 miles) east of N'Djamena.

Diplomats and government officials said the rebels appeared to be playing a game of cat and mouse, as they did in April, launching small-scale strikes on poorly fortified towns in the former French colony in order to disorientate the armed forces.

"This rebel column has been reluctant to engage the security forces, instead infiltrating a locality then pulling back so as to make the local and international community believe they occupy territory inside the country," Doungor said.

He said the rebels were using sophisticated weaponry, pointing to a ground-to-air missile fired at a French military reconnaissance plane on Monday, which missed after the aircraft took "precautionary measures."

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