

Sudan and Chad in war of words

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UNITED NATIONS, Saturday

Sudan and its neighbour Chad accused each other on Friday of aiding rebels determined to topple their respective governments as fears grew that a new peace deal signed by Khartoum and N'Djamena could collapse.

The two countries signed an agreement in Doha this week in which they agreed to normalise relations and reject any support for rebel groups hostile to either of them.

Days later they accused each other of breaking their word as fighting between government forces and rebels in eastern Chad intensified.

The U.N. Security Council issued a unanimous statement condemning what it described as military incursions "coming from outside" Chad — which diplomats said referred to Sudan.

Chad's U.N. Ambassador Ahmad Allam-mi told a special meeting of the Security Council that his country had been misled by Khartoum into thinking that its neighbour would no longer support rebels intent on toppling his government.

"I have just arrived from Doha where, once again, I was naive enough to hope that the regime in Khartoum had decided to put an end to its attacks on my country, not to speak of its attempts to subvert or counter our policy to consolidate rule of law and democracy," he said.

This, Allam-mi said, had happened before.

"Before the ink is even dry we are attacked by forces coming from Sudan," he told the 15-nation council.

Chad said on Thursday its troops halted an attempted rebel advance on the capital N'Djamena after a fierce battle in the east in which 125 rebel forces were killed.

U.N. officials neither confirmed nor denied the Chadian allegations. Dmitry Titov, a senior U.N. peacekeeping official, told the council that U.N. peacekeepers in Chad had received reports that at least one column of rebels remained "in static position" across the border in Darfur.

Security Council diplomats said elected member Libya fought hard to prevent the council from stating explicitly in its agreed statement that rebel fighters were coming from Sudan.

"The council expresses its concern at the external support received by Chadian armed groups," the council said in the final version of the statement.

It also urged "Sudan and Chad to respect and fully implement their mutual commitments" and to "respect the security of civilians."

Sudanese Ambassador Abdalmahmoud Abdalhaleem rejected the allegations of backing Chadian rebels, saying the attacks were an internal problem that Khartoum had no connection to.

"We have nothing to do with that," he said. "This is a Chadian problem. It should be dealt with inside Chad by the Chadians."

He also accused Chad's former colonial master France of being the author of N'Djamena's request for an emergency council meeting on the conflict, a charge French Ambassador Jean-Maurice Ripert dismissed as an "insult to the Chadian government."