

Beat: Politics

Car bomb kills 2 Chadian peacekeepers in northern Mali

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USPA News - At least two Chadian peacekeepers were killed Wednesday when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives-laden vehicle at a United Nations (UN) checkpoint in northern Mali, followed by an intense gun battle near the scene, officials said. The attack happened during the early morning hours when a vehicle approached a checkpoint of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in the center of Tessalit, a town in the country's north that had been under rebel control until it was captured by French and African forces earlier this year.

"The driver of the vehicle approached the checkpoint at high speed and refused to stop, after which Chadian soldiers opened fire," a local security source said, speaking on the condition of anonymity. He said the vehicle exploded after which a gun battle broke out between UN peacekeepers and unidentified gunmen who attempted to reach local government offices. The source said a total of four people were killed in the car bombing, including two Chadian peacekeepers, a young child, and the suicide bomber. Martin Nesirky, a spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, would only say "a number" of Chadian peacekeepers had been killed and seriously injured. It was not immediately clear if there were additional casualties from the firefight. "I strongly condemn this attack," said MINUSMA head Bert Koenders. "I am shocked that innocent civilians and brave Chadian soldiers were attacked. I send my sincere condolences to the President of Chad and the bereaved families. This attack does not change MINUSMA's mission to restore peace and security in Mali." The UN Security Council, which is composed of five permanent members and ten non-permanent members, strongly condemned Wednesday's attack. "The members of the Security Council stressed that those responsible for this attack shall be held accountable and called on the Government of Mali to swiftly investigate the attack and bring the perpetrators to justice," the Council said in a press statement. In July, MINUSMA took over from French and African forces which have battled al-Qaeda-linked fighters in the country's north. The mission is intended to help Malian authorities implement a transitional roadmap towards the full restoration of constitutional order, democratic governance and national unity. Fighting in northern Mali began in January 2012 as insurgent groups have been campaigning for independence and autonomy in the region. President Amadou Toumani Toure was ousted in a coup d'etat in March 2012 for failing to handle the crisis, and by April, much of the region had been completely seized by rebel forces. Responding to requests from the Malian government, the French government decided in January of this year to deploy armed forces in Mali in an effort to prevent rebels from advancing south and reaching the country's capital. French and African forces eventually captured key cities and towns from militants and have handed over security responsibilities to MINUSMA.

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