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Al Jazeera

Tunisian troops clash with Gaddafi forces

4/28/2011

Libyan government forces chased rebels into Tunisia and clashed with them in Dehiba, a Tunisian border town, until Tunisian troops pushed them back across the border.

Friday's fresh violence broke out when rebels continued their overnight battle "with fierce ferocity", over control of the Dehiba-Wazin crossing for access to the Tunisian town that is crucial for the rebels' refueling and resupply.

After two hours of intense fire between rebels and pro-Gaddafi forces, the Tunisian army and the national guard intervened, shooting the Libyan leader's troops back across the border, Youssef Gaigi, Al Jazeera reporter on the Tunisian side of the border area said.

The situation is much calmer on the Tunisian side after rebels regained control of the crossing, but the area remains volatile, Gaigi said.

Intense fire exchange took place in central Dehiba on Friday with one boy shot in the foot and a woman killed both by pro-Gaddafi forces' shelling and gunfire, according to uncorroborated witness accounts.

Tunisian involvement

Tunisian authorities had so-far taken a "very hands-off" approach toward the Libyan clashes, in an effort to be fair to both sides, but now "the battle has actually come to them", Al Jazeera correspondent Anita McNaught said.

Tunisian military and police left the border post Thursday evening, drawing anger from Dehiba residents to return and protect the town, she said. On Friday Tunisian authorities captured seven vehicles belonging to Gaddafi forces.

Rebels had taken the crossing a week ago, but on Thursday pro-Gaddafi forces attempted to retake it.

The crossing, near the western mountains, has been a main route of escape for Libyan nationals fleeing the conflict since the rebels claimed control on April 21.

Prior to then, residents of the western mountains area had been forced to take long and difficult roads around the crossing in order to seek shelter or medical help in Tunisia.

Controlling the crossing also gave the rebels better access to aid and supplies to continue their fight against Gaddafi forces in western Libya.

Government forces closed in on rebel outposts on Thursday, showering the western mountain city of Zintan with missiles and attacking rebels holed up near the border, according to rebel sources.

Gaddafi denies his forces are attacking civilians and describes his opponents as Islamist extremists and foreign-backed agitators who deliberately put non-combatants in harm's way.

Fresh attacks on Misurata

Separately on Friday, at least 12 people were killed in Misurata when pro-Gaddafi forces shelled their homes amid rage against rebels for control of the city's airport, a local doctor told Reuters. The casualties included two women.

Libyan rebels have fought for the airport, after pushing back government forces from the embattled city's sea port as the oil-rich country's tribes urged Gaddafi to relinquish power.

Rebels in Libya's third-largest city said they were confident victory was "very close" for them in the strategic port city as a UN panel arrived in Libya to investigate violence and human rights abuses.

"Our freedom fighters have managed to defeat the soldiers of Gaddafi" by forcing them out of Misurata, Khalid Azwawi, head of the local transition committee, said late on Wednesday.

"They managed to force them to leave, but not very far. That's why Gaddafi is trying to bomb the port," he said.

There are also reports of heavy clashes between Gaddafi forces and rebels in the desert town of Kufra in Libya's remote southeast, Al Jazeera has learned.