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B'Haram: Chad, Niger troops liberate Nigerian towns

MARCH 10, 2015 BY AGENCY REPORT 60 COMMENTS

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Chadian soldiers at the Nigerian border town of Gamboru in Borno State

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Troops from Chad and Niger have freed two towns in the northern Nigeria previously held by Boko Haram militants, making the first gains made in a joint offensive launched at the weekend, Niger military sources said on Monday.

About 30 Nigerien and Chadian soldiers were injured in fighting over Malam Fatouri and Damask. This happened a day after thousands of troops crossed the border to retake areas held by the Sunni Islamist group, whose insurgency has forced Nigeria to delay the general elections and her neighbours to mobilise their armies.

"We have kicked the enemy out of these areas and they are now under our control," one of the military sources said.

Damask, the town furthest into Nigeria, is 10km (six miles) south of the Niger border, where Niger and Chadian troops have been massing in recent weeks ahead of the offensive.

The source said that about 300 Boko Haram militants had been killed in fighting. There was no official confirmation of the toll and it was not possible to verify the figure.

"We had permission from Nigeria for this action," the source said. There was no immediate comment from the Federal Government which had launched its own offensive against the militants.

Boko Haram's six-year insurgency, with the aim of carving out a caliphate in Nigeria's North-East, has killed thousands. The group has pledged allegiance to Islamic State, which rules a self-declared caliphate in parts of Iraq and Syria, according to an audio clip posted online on Saturday.

Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin have this year mobilised forces to help Nigeria defeat the group after it seized swathes of territory and mounting cross-border attacks.

Nigeria and its neighbours have been working to pull together plans and rules of engagement for a regional force of 8,700 troops but cooperation between the region's armies has been strained at times.

"Also, troops from Chad and Niger opened a new front in the regional military fight against the Islamic extremist group, Boko Haram, as army vehicles full of soldiers crossed the border into the North-East of Nigeria", officials and witnesses said Monday.

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The escalation in a joint military campaign against the Nigeria-based Boko Haram comes just weeks before Nigerians head to the polls for an election which many fear will turn violent. This may also happen after the militants may have attacked neighbouring countries who have pledged to help Nigeria defeat the extremists.

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