

One third of French troops pull out of Rwanda

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PARIS, April 12 (Reuter) - France said on Tuesday one third of its 500 troops in Rwanda were pulling out after completing the evacuation of French nationals from the war-torn central African country.

The Defence Ministry, anxious to stress that troops rushed in for the evacuation would not become involved in the civil war, said those staying behind were working with Belgian forces to evacuate remaining foreigners.

"France wants to show that its intervention in Rwanda is strictly limited to evacuating nationals whose lives are being endangered," the ministry said.

"This is why it is withdrawing an infantry company today, cutting by one third the troops deployed in Rwanda over the past three days."

France closed down its embassy in Kigali earlier on Tuesday and said all French nationals who wanted to leave Rwanda had had gone.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Richard Duque told reporters that Ambassador Jean-Michel Marlaud and his staff had left for Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic.

"French soldiers in Kigali were able to ensure the departure of about 1,600 people, including nearly the entire French community of Rwanda," he said.

Duque said the 1,600 included Europeans and Americans as well as Rwandans who had sought refuge at the embassy and were taken mainly to neighbouring countries.

The Defence Ministry said 454 French citizens had flown out on French military planes.

The ministry did not say when the remaining French soldiers would leave Rwanda.

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