

# Shocked Belgium mulls pullout of foreigners in Rwanda

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Reuters, April 8, 1994

BRUSSELS, April 8 (Reuter) - Belgium on Friday prepared to evacuate foreigners trapped by savage fighting in its former African colony of Rwanda, after 10 Belgian U.N. soldiers were killed trying in vain to protect the country's prime minister.

Government sources told Reuters an emergency cabinet meeting would be held later on Friday to decide what to do about the eruption of violence in the capital Kigali. Rwanda has suffered from a sporadic civil war along tribal lines for four years.

One option would be to evacuate some 1,500 Belgians living in Rwanda and possibly other foreigners by sending crack paratroopers who have often been dispatched to Belgium's troubled former colonies in Africa, including Zaire.

Belgian radio said paratroop units in Belgium had been placed on alert but there was no immediate confirmation.

A government statement issued after a late night cabinet meeting on Thursday said ministers had "analysed the present dramatic situation in Rwanda, particularly with a view to taking appropriate measures for the protection of our compatriots."

Defence Minister Leo Delcroix, speaking on Thursday before the news of the death of the Belgian soldiers, said evacuation could not be ruled out. The government contacted the United Nations to see what action could be taken.

Belgian Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene had cut short a holiday in Malta to return to Brussels and Foreign Minister Willy Claes was also on his way back from a visit to Romania.

Government sources said it was likely Belgium would turn to other allies, including France, for help with any evacuation. Extra troops would have to be sent because the U.N. force in Rwanda had no mandate to protect or evacuate foreign nationals.

The Belgian armed forces said in a statement the 10 soldiers, part of a 2,500-strong U.N. mission in the country, were disarmed and executed by Rwandan troops at a military camp in Kigali on Thursday.

"These Belgian soldiers were in charge of the security of the Prime Minister Agathe Unilingyimana, whose residence was surrounded by Rwandan soldiers," it said.

“She tried to flee. Our soldiers were apprehended while they were covering her flight,” the statement said.

The prime minister was also killed by soldiers.

The commander of the Belgian peacekeepers in Rwanda, Colonel Luc Marchal, said it would be wrong for U.N. forces to intervene and that the country had to resolve its own problems.

He told Belgian radio the bodies of the dead soldiers were in a Kigali hospital and that they would be flown home to Belgium.

Violence swept Kigali following the deaths of presidents Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi in a rocket attack on their plane as it flew into the city on Wednesday night. It is not clear who was responsible.

Belgium has about 1,500 civilian nationals in Rwanda, which became independent in 1962, with around 900 living in Kigali. Another 1,200 Belgians live in Burundi, another former colony.

The U.N. Security Council denounced the violence in Rwanda on Thursday and called on security forces and the military to stop fighting and restore order.

U.N. Security Council President Colin Keating, New Zealand’s ambassador, said the airport in Kigali was still under the control of Rwanda’s presidential guard, responsible for much of the turmoil. He said he had reason to believe other U.N. peacekeepers were being held captive there.

Claes said an aircraft belonging to the Belgian national carrier Sabena was on standby in the Burundian capital of Bujumbura for use in evacuations if the situation worsened.

There was also a C-130 transport plane available in Kenya, and fleets of cars could be called on for an evacuation by road.

Belgium expressed outrage at the deaths of the two presidents and warned that the killings could destabilise both countries, bedevilled by violent tribal rivalries for decades.

U.N. officials fear that violence between Rwanda’s Hutu majority and Tutsi minority tribes could spread beyond the capital, scene of the worst fighting since the civil war began.

Youths wielding machetes, knives and clubs stalked Kigali, settling tribal scores by hacking and clubbing people to death or simply shooting them, witnesses said.

Hatred between the Hutu and the Tutsi, their former feudal overlords, predates Rwandan and Burundi independence. Tens of thousands of Tutsi and Hutu have died in ethnic slaughter in both countries over the years.

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