

Belgium admits it had more troops in Rwanda

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BRUSSELS, April 16 (Reuter) - Belgium said on Saturday it had sent more troops than previously announced to war-torn Rwanda for the evacuation of its nationals and other foreigners.

“About 750 (Belgian troops) took part in the evacuation in Rwanda,” colonel Gilbert Hertoghe told Reuters. Another 200 extra troops were on standby in Nairobi, Kenya, he said.

Belgium had maintained it had sent just 400 paratroops for the evacuation, which started when violence flared after President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in a rocket attack on his plane 10 days ago. There were 1,500 Belgians in Rwanda.

Army officials said they had kept silent about the extra troops because Rwanda had only given permission to send in 400 Belgian paratroops.

“The obvious reason why we held on to the figure of 400 is that we did not want to offend anyone in Rwanda,” said an official who declined to be named. He said the troops might stay for a few days in Nairobi to “observe carefully”.

“We still have 420 blue helmets in Kigali,” he said.

Belgium, the former colonial power in Rwanda, said earlier this week it would withdraw its 420 U.N. troops from Rwanda and urged the United Nations to suspend its peacekeeping operation there.

Ten Belgian U.N. peacekeepers and six civilians were among the thousands of people butchered in an orgy of bloodletting, mostly between members of the minority Tutsi tribe and the Hutu, who controlled the Habyarimana government.

The United Nations has not taken any decision on the future of the 2,500-man U.N. Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), set up last year to help implement an agreement signed in Arusha, Tanzania, aimed at ending a three-year civil war.

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