

Belgian troops trickle home after Rwanda mission

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BRUSSELS, April 18 (Reuter) - Belgian paratroops began arriving home on Monday from Rwanda where they evacuated Westerners from the central African country.

A defence ministry spokesman said 90 paratroopers arrived at Melsbroek military airport outside Brussels and that a later flight would bring in several dozen Belgian officers attached to the United Nations mission in Rwanda.

Belgium's full contingent of about 420 U.N. troops in Rwanda would start to withdraw fully from Tuesday, probably by road via Tanzania.

"We have not made a decision yet whether it will be by road or air, but by road seems to be the safest," a military spokesman said.

Belgium announced its withdrawal from the U.N.'s Rwanda operation after 10 of its paratroops were killed while trying in vain to guard the prime minister in an orgy of violence which erupted after President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in a rocket attack on a plane on April 6.

U.N. peacekeepers from Belgium, the former colonial power in Rwanda, have been holding the airport in Rwanda's capital Kigali and will be replaced there by about 800 Ghanaian soldiers.

"About 200 Ghanaians have already arrived at the airport and we are expecting a further 600 to be there later today," a military spokesman told Reuters.

He said the Belgian troops would withdraw most of their heavy equipment, but would leave behind some material for the Ghanaian troops.

The U.N. Security Council has not yet decided on the future of the 2,500-member 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.

U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has already said that the Belgians' withdrawal was allowed.

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