

Kohl pushes for Germans to go on U.N. missions

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Reuters, April 18, 1994

BONN, April 18 (Reuter) - Chancellor Helmut Kohl said on Monday that German troops should take part in United Nations operations abroad, a day before a supreme court hearing to decide if such missions are constitutional.

The debate over widening Germany's military role, long a taboo because of lingering shame over Nazi militarism, intensified with news that Bonn had considered sending paratroops to evacuate its citizens from Rwanda.

The dilemma was avoided when Belgian troops rescued the 11 Germans - which some politicians saw as a humiliation which should make Germany take on a bigger foreign military role.

"Germany must not stand aside when peace and liberty are at stake in the world," Kohl said at a reception to honour the German soldiers who have participated in U.N. relief missions in Somalia and Cambodia and over Yugoslavia.

"Our security and our ability to act in foreign policy depend on our being reliable partners and our allies being able to trust us. For our allies have stood by us in the past and continue to do so," he said.

"The army's tasks will in future include dealing with crises and conflicts, peace missions and humanitarian deployments which go beyond the defence of the country and the alliance."

The government said at the weekend that the defence ministry had been investigating the possibility of getting the Germans out of Kigali when it heard that the Belgians had already acted.

Kohl's parliamentary whip Juergen Ruetters said this showed the debate over overseas deployments was not academic but "concerns people's lives and safety, and the issue of whether the SPD is ready to take on this responsibility".

Kohl has been trying to widen Germany's military role ever since unification in 1990, but the insistence of the opposition Social Democrats (SPD) that the constitution does not allow this has brought about the Constitutional Court hearing.

Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel and Defence Minister Volker Ruehe will both testify when it starts in Karlsruhe on Tuesday.

Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, a deputy SPD leader, accused Ruetters and the government of painting scenarios "always with the idea "How can we find somewhere to deploy the army?"

Kohl's parliamentary leader Wolfgang Schaueble has been trying to use the

court case and calls for international action to end the Bosnian conflict to ensure the SPD in a policy debate that could expose internal divisions.

He has even called for German troops to help keep the peace in Bosnia once the conflict ends – an idea firmly rejected by Kinkel, leader of the Free Democrat junior partners in Kohl's coalition.

SPD leader Rudolf Scharping told a news conference he believed the Karlsruhe judges would rule that German military missions outside NATO required parliamentary approval.

But he said those who argued that Rwanda showed the need for a higher military profile were guilty of warmongering.

He said the SPD saw no reason to change its view that German military deployments could extend to armed defence of peacekeepers or relief workers but had to stop short of waging wars such as the United Nations-led, 1991 Gulf War against Iraq.

Party manager Guenter Verheugen told German radio the SPD would not be drawn into a foreign policy debate. He said Kohl's Christian Democrats "want to divert attention from their failures in employment, social, financial and economic policy".

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