

UN Council considering cutting Rwanda peacekeepers

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UNITED NATIONS, April 21 (Reuter) - Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali recommended Thursday that the Security Council either increase U.N. forces in Rwanda by several thousand or reduce them to about 270.

Security Council members said privately that the force, originally 2,500, would probably be cut to 274 with a provision for an early review in case a ceasefire is established in the country's civil war.

In a report to the council, Boutros-Ghali also gave a third option of completing withdrawing the U.N. Assistance Mission For Rwanda, known as UNAMIR, but rejected it outright.

The council is expected to work on a resolution late Thursday with a view to adopting it Friday, diplomats said.

Boutros-Ghali said the council had the option of a "massive reinforcement of UNAMIR" and a change in its mandate so it would be equipped to coerce combatants into a ceasefire.

UNAMIR had been established last October as a traditional peacekeeping force to help implement a new peace agreement. But the U.N. troops were caught in tribal violence set off by the assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana on April 6.

Boutros-Ghali said Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni urged him to maintain a large operation and that he would attempt to recruit troops from the region.

Rwanda's U.N. representatives had also pleaded for a strong U.N. presence. U.N. forces are currently protecting and rescuing some displaced people.

Several African countries have also privately complained that the Security Council beefed up the U.N. operation in the former Yugoslavia, now numbering about 30,000, in times of trouble but was reluctant to do so in Africa.

African members on the 15-member council include Rwanda, Djibouti and Nigeria.

Western diplomats said the proposed resolution would probably give strong assurance of a U.N. return to Rwanda when the situation was calmer.

The alternative the council is considering would leave the force commander and staff in Kigali to act as an intermediary between the warring Hutu and Tutsi groups and help resume relief operations.

This would involve an infantry company to provide security as well as some military observers and civilian staff for a total of about 270, Boutros-Ghali said.

UNAMIR has already been reduced from its original 2,500 troops and support personnel so that only 1,570 military personnel still remain, including 180 unarmed military observers, U.N. officials said Thursday.

Belgium had unilaterally withdrawn its 430 peacekeepers after 10 were killed, presumably by the late president's personal guard.

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