

French soldiers land in Kigali - diplomats

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UNITED NATIONS, April 8 (Reuter) - French soldiers have landed in the Rwandan capital of Kigali, apparently to secure the airport for the evacuation of foreigners, diplomats said late Friday.

One envoy said 150 had landed but others said the number was higher. "It is a more encompassing operation than just evacuating the French citizens," another diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

There are about 600 French nationals in Rwanda, mostly in the capital, Kigali. Belgium, which had put its paratroopers on alert, has 1,500 nationals in Rwanda, a former Belgian colony.

French military sources in Paris said earlier Friday they were considering using troops stationed in the Central African Republic to evacuate its nationals from Rwanda.

France, which for several years had about 300 soldiers in Rwanda, withdrew its remaining contingent last December. They were replaced by U.N. troops. France still has a small number of military technical advisers in Rwanda and Burundi.

The latest violence erupted after Rwanda's President Juvenal Habyarimana and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of neighbouring Burundi were killed Wednesday night when a rocket destroyed their plane as they were landing in Kigali after attending a meeting in Tanzania.

Hundreds of people have been reported killed since then, including political leaders, aid workers, nuns, priests, ordinary Rwandans and 10 Belgian U.N. peacekeepers.

The United Nations has a force of 2,500 troops in Rwanda, including more than 400 Belgians.

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