

France doubles number of troops in Rwanda

Jean-Pierre Campagne

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NAIROBI, Feb 22 (AFP) - France has doubled the number of its troops in Rwanda to 600 amid further fighting between government troops and rebels who have seized the northwest of the country.

From 150 in January and 300 last month, the number of French soldiers was doubled over the weekend in line after a French foreign ministry statement stressed that their role was to protect French nationals.

Guerrillas of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR) hold the whole northwest of the central African highland nation from the Ruhengeri region to Byumba, relief officials working locally reported in documents made available to AFP in Nairobi.

The Rwandan army charges that the rebels last week massacred 500 civilians at a camp for displaced people at Rebero in the northeast.

In a statement made available to AFP, the liaison committee of Rwan-

dan human rights associations charged that the FPR also killed several dozen civilians in the town of Ruhengeri.

The FPR has strengthened its positions along a frontline in hill country, remote from its traditional bases in Uganda. It was from Uganda that the mainly Tutsi exiles of the FPR launched an offensive against the majority Hutu government in October 1990.

President Juvenal Habyarimana's regime could then have been swept aside but for rapid French military intervention, observers said, and the latest French move suggests that the Kigali authorities are facing military setbacks.

The regime accuses Uganda of backing the FPR, while the rebels say France is providing military support to the Rwandan army.

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