

Belgium's policies in Rwanda expose Belgians to hate campaign

Graham Brown

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BRUSSELS, April 11 (AFP) - Belgium's controversial policy of neutrality towards Rwanda, its former colony, has left fearful Belgians there exposed to a propaganda hate campaign, Belgian African specialists said here Monday.

The Belgian media has said Belgians are being singled out among the hundreds of foreigners being evacuated from Rwanda and subjected to harassment, theft and sometimes beatings.

At least three Belgian civilians have been murdered in the orgy of ethnic blood-letting which has left thousands dead since Thursday, as well as 10 Belgian members of the UN Assistance Force in Rwanda.

Former Belgian Prime Minister Wilfried Martens said: "The 10 soldiers and the murdered Belgian civilians were victims of the hatred created intentionally by certain Rwandan media."

Radio stations and government-supporting groups in Rwanda have accused Belgian troops of shooting down the aircraft which crashed over Kigali on Wednesday, killing presidents Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi.

The crash sent the country sliding towards civil war between the majority Hutus, who hold political power, and the minority Tutsis, and torpedoed last August's Arusha agreement to reconcile the two groups in a new government.

The Belgian government was allowed to land aircraft at Kigali airport on Sunday to begin evacuating its 1,500 to 2,000 nationals in Rwanda only after protracted negotiations with the Rwandan authorities.

Filip Reyntjens, a specialist on Rwanda at the University of Antwerp, said hard-line elements of the majority Hutu Rwandan army

were accusing Belgium of supporting the rebel Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

Belgian Defence Minister Leo Delcroix acknowledged that France was the first country to begin an evacuation effort from Rwanda because it had better relations than the Belgians with the Rwandan military.

But while Belgium has been vilified by the Hutu hardlineers for wanting to bring the minority Tutsis into a coalition government, France has been criticised for backing the Hutu power structure in place.

One Rwandan civil rights group accused France at the weekend of backing the Rwandan government with massive supplies of arms, logistical support and training of the Rwandan army and the hardline presidential guard.

It was the presidential guard which killed the 10 Belgian UN soldiers as they unsuccessfully tried to stop the murder of Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyamana.

The Brussels-based Committee for the Respect of Human Rights and Democracy in Rwanda said it was fearful of the "negative consequences" of a new French military presence in Rwanda.

Reyntjens said Belgium was pay-

ing the price of pulling out its troops from Rwanda in 1990 at the start of the Rwandan civil war when rebels of the Tutsi RPF began their struggle for power.

He said Belgium was accused of not supporting "a reliable friend", of not delivering arms already paid for, and of insisting on respect for human rights.

The Belgian newspaper *Libre Belgique* said: "While Paris continued to support the regime of President Habyarimana, as French leaders have done in other African states with a strong regime, Belgium showed more neutrality, opting resolutely for the democratisation of the Kigali regime and Tutsi participation in government."

The French have been pressured from the other side. RPF spokesmen warned at the weekend that the French military would be attacked by the rebels if it tried to play any role in Rwanda beyond the evacuation of foreigners.

By contrast, the French are having a much easier time than the Belgians in Kigali. "You are French? That's OK then, you can pass," a Rwandan soldier said at one road-block.

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