

# France to start Rwanda troop pullout on Saturday

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PARIS, March 18 (AFP) - France will start withdrawing some of its 600 troops operating in the rebellion-torn east African state of Rwanda on March 20, a foreign ministry spokesman said Thursday.

The pullout was part of an agreement reached on March 9 in the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam between the Kigali government and rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), said spokesman Maurice Gourdault-Montagne.

He said the withdrawal was taking place with the agreement of the Rwandan government and said France hoped that new negotiations in Arusha, Tanzania, this week would end in an early peace accord.

Informed sources said a 150-strong combat unit would return on

Saturday to its base in Bangui, Central African Republic, where France has a permanent base.

France sent 300 troop reinforcements to Rwanda after an RPF invasion from Uganda on February 8, bringing its total force to 600, to protect its 550 nationals there and other western expatriates, but has been accused of shoring up the regime of President Juvenal Habyarimana.

Under the Dar es Salaam ceasefire accord, RPF rebels were to withdraw northwards and foreign troops were to be withdrawn, to be replaced in a buffer zone by a neutral international force of the Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations.

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