

Kigali [Rwandan troops have left the eastern DRC]

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KIGALI, Sept 25 (AFP) - Rwandan troops have left the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), claiming to have dismantled Rwandan rebel bases there, but leaving security in doubt in the ethnic powder-keg region.

"The work is finished," said Claude Dusaidi, a senior adviser to Paul Kagame, defence minister and strongman of the Tutsi-dominated government.

Speaking to AFP on Thursday, Dusaidi said the soldiers "have all been pulled out, unless we have left some there under an agreement with (DRC President Laurent) Kabila, but I don't know that."

Major Rwandan troop movements were reported in recent weeks by various sources around Goma, capital of North Kivu province in the east of the former Zaire, prompting fears of Tutsi adventurism.

Rwandan troops have been opera-

tive in the region since October 1996, when Kabila began his uprising spearheaded initially by ethnic Tutsis living in eastern Zaire. His forces swept westwards to topple the dictator Mobutu Sese Seko in May.

Since then, Rwandan Hutu militias known as Interahamwe have been receiving training in the camps in the eastern DRC to mount raids across the border into northwestern Rwanda.

Kigali has been pressing for strict control of the border, as Rwanda has been beset by attacks blamed on the Interahamwe and Hutu former soldiers operating from the camps.

A massacre last month at a camp for Tutsi refugees in Mudende, western Rwanda, in which 148 people were killed by Interahamwe assisted by local peasants, was the worst reported in continuing unrest in the area.

The Rwandan militiamen and for-

mer soldiers were among hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled following the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 by Hutu extremists who killed more than half a million people before Tutsi rebels led by Kagame took Kigali.

Most of the refugees – together with many gunmen – returned home late last year when Kabila launched his rebellion.

Fear mounted in the east because of the systematic execution of civilians and local leaders by the rebels and reprisals against both guerrillas and villagers by the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan army.

Rwanda backed Kabila during his rebellion, which caught up thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees.

Rwandan militiamen and ex-soldiers were accused of fighting Kabila's forces, who have in turn held been responsible for massacring many refugees. The new Kinshasa authorities are currently at odds with the United Nations seeking to investigate the alleged slaughter, following reports of mass graves by a UN rights official.

While Dusaidi stressed that "the goal of the (Kigali) government was to dismantle the camps, which were training centres of the Interahamwe rebels," he added that the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) could continue to operate in the troubled Masisi region near Goma, "if it is necessary

and if the Congolese think it is appropriate."

However, he said : "Congo is Congo, it has its own security forces."

Diplomats said the troop withdrawal failed to clarify long-murky relations between Kigali and eastern DRC.

The area is populated by Tutsi settlers originally from Rwanda known as Banyarwanda who are virtually stateless. Many have been there for decades, while others are the descendants of people who settled as long as 200 years ago. None ever received Congolese – or Zairean – citizenship.

But Dusaidi said : "These Tutsis are Congolese. There is no doubt about that."

Tutsis, after decades of disfavour under Mobutu, have won high-ranking positions in the Kabila government, prompting other ethnic groups to feel that they are under foreign occupation.

But a high-ranking Rwandan official who requested anonymity dismissed the idea of Tutsi adventurism, saying : "Annexation of Kivu by Rwanda is an unfounded fear. Given the situation in the region, we just want security within our borders, and we have no desire to be mired in the Congolese mud."

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