

Rwandan troops have pulled out of DR Congo: Kigali

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KIGALI, Sept 25 (AFP) - Rwandan troops have withdrawn from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where they were deployed to dismantle refugee camps used as Rwandan Hutu rebel training bases, the defence ministry stated Thursday.

A senior advisor to Paul Kagame, defence minister and strongman of the Tutsi-dominated government, Claude Dusaidi, told AFP that the soldiers "have all been pulled out, unless we have left some there under an agreement with Kabila (President Laurent Kabila), but I don't know that."

Major Rwandan troop movements were reported in recent weeks by various sources around Goma, the capital of the northern Kivu province in the east of the former Zaire, an ethnically troubled region where Rwandan Hutu Interahamwe militias have been undergoing training for cross-border

raids, Dusaidi said.

Rwandan troops have been operative in the region since October 1996, when Zairean rebel leader Laurent Kabila began an uprising spearheaded initially by ethnic Tutsis, which swept westwards across the country to topple dictator Mobutu Sese Seko last May.

Dusaidi said the mission of the Rwandan soldiers had been "completed. The withdrawal was a natural process."

"Congo is Congo, it has its own security forces," he added. Rwanda, along with Uganda, were accused of backing Kabila during his rebellion, which caught up thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees from the civil war of 1994 in their own country.

Hutu militiamen and former soldiers from Rwanda were accused of fighting Kabila's forces, who have in turn held been responsible for massacring many Rwandan refugees. The

new Kinshasa authorities are currently at odds with the United Nations seeking to investigate the alleged slaughter, following reports of mass graves from 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 could continue to operate in the troubled Masisi region near Goma, "if it is necessary and if the Congolese think it is appropriate."

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