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Disagreement Between OAU and France over French Military Involvement in Rwanda

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BC-FRANCE-RWANDA

FRANCE DENIES INVOLVEMENT IN RWANDA FIGHTING

PARIS, Feb 15, Reuter - France denied on Monday that its troops had fought on the side of the Rwandan government against rebels seeking to topple President Juvenal Habyarimana.

An official military source told Reuters: "The highest (French) political authority is categorically opposed to French troops getting involved on the ground. We did not take part in the fighting."

The source said the only action in which the 250 French troops in the landlocked central African state had been involved was to evacuate 69 people, including 21 French military and civilian aid workers, who were isolated in the combat zone in the southern Ruhengeri region last Wednesday.

A spokesman for an Organisation of African Unity (OAU) military mission trying to police a ceasefire said French troops had shelled positions of the Rwanda Patriotic Front rebels in Ruhengeri.

The French military source said France had in recent months supplied Rwandan government forces with two batteries of 105 mm artillery with munitions and trained them to use the weapons.

The rebels broke the ceasefire last week to protest against massacres in January of about 400 Tutsi peasants.

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