

Rwanda generals defect to Uganda :The Monitor

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A senior Rwandan army officer, Brig. Gen. Emmanuel Habyarimana, "disappeared" yesterday. He reportedly defected and fled to Uganda with several other Rwanda Defence Forces officers, including one Lt. Col. Ndengeyinka

Government sources in Kigali told The Monitor yesterday that Brig. Gen. Habyarimana, who was until recently Rwanda's minister of Defence, fled through the Katuna border post on Sunday morning.

Sources near the Rwanda border said that Brig. Gen Habyarimana's official vehicle was yesterday morning found abandoned at a refilling station he was building at Gatuna (the equivalent of Katuna on the Uganda side)

Rwandan security quickly towed the vehicle away and mounted a huge manhunt for the general and the other officers. Brig. Gen. Habyarimana is one of only a handful of the mainly top Hutu officers from the former Rwanda army (the FAR under president Juvenal Habyarimana) to have been integrated and promoted within President Paul Kagame's Rwanda Patriotic Army (now the Rwanda Defence Forces).

The Rwanda Defence Forces spokesman, Maj. Jill Rutaremara yesterday confirmed Brig. Gen.Habyarimana's disappearance.

"I have unconfirmed reports that Habyarimana crossed the border this morning [Sunday] and was picked by two Ugandan vehicles that were waiting for him. I heard that he went with two other people but I am still verifying the reports," Maj. Rutaremara told The Monitor last evening on telephone from Kigali.

A foreign diplomatic source in Kigali told The Monitor that the Rwanda army officers took advantage of the huge crowd and confusion at the Katuna border caused by the hundreds of Ugandan fans returning from supporting the Uganda Cranes (national soccer team) in Rwanda to sneak across the border.

Rwanda Government Spokesman Joseph Bideri told The Monitor that Uganda Government vehicles that were waiting across the border picked Brig. Gen.Habyarimana and the other defecting officers.

"The Uganda security operatives were waiting across the border in government vehicles," Mr Bideri said last night in a breaking news radio interview with 93.3 Monitor FM.

He said the Rwanda Government is not surprised that Brig. Gen. Habyarimana has defected to Uganda.

Mr Bideri said that Rwanda always knew that the ex-FAR officer was working "very closely" with Uganda's Defence Minister Amama Mbabazi.

"Both Habyarimana and Lt. Col. Ndengeyinka are ex-FAR and were well known for their extremist [Hutu] views," Mr Bideri said.

"For Habyarimana we are not at all surprised by his defection given his close links with Amama Mbabazi and his extremist views that went contrary to the national unity programmes of this country. That is why he was recently sacked as Defence minister," Mr Bideri told Monitor FM last night.

In Kampala, however, Ugandan security officials quickly denied their involvement in Brig. Gen. Habyarimana's defection or disappearance. One senior UPDF officer said it was news to him, while another said he had only heard rumours.

Lt. Gen. Salim Saleh said he had not heard about it, while Lt. Gen. David Tinyenfuzza said he had only heard rumours from some Ugandan soccer fans returning from Kigali.

Col. Noble Mayombo, the chief of military intelligence, laughed heartily when The Monitor called him, but he also denied any involvement or knowledge of Brig. Gen. Habyarimana's whereabouts.

Col. Mayombo said it is not proper for Rwanda to accuse another country for everything that goes wrong inside their country.

He advised the Kigali government to report the disappearances to the Rwanda Police.

"If your citizens disappear, the first thing you do is to report to the police. You don't start accusing other countries. So let the government in Kigali report the disappearances to the Rwanda Police,"

Col. Mayombo said.

Mr Mbabazi was not available for comment. His cell phone remained switched off each time The Monitor tried to call him last evening.

Rwanda and Uganda have accused each other of sheltering dissidents bent on fighting their respective governments.

In July 2001 two dissident Ugandan army officers Lt. Col. Samson Mande and Lt. Col. Anthony Kyakabale fled to Rwanda from where they declared their intentions to fight President Yoweri Museveni's government.

Last month another senior UPDF officer, Col. Edison Muzoora, also escaped to Rwanda, where he has reportedly teamed up with colonels Mande and Kyakabale to command the new rebel People's Redemption Army (PRA). Uganda has accused Rwanda of sponsoring the PRA, which is reportedly trying to set up anti-Uganda rebel

camps in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Rwanda has denied the accusations and has instead accused Uganda of sponsoring the ex-FAR and Interahamwe genocidaires to destabilise Rwanda.

Uganda has, however, denied any links to the Interahamwe, the extremist Hutu militia responsible for the 1994 genocide in which about one million Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed in just 100 days.

Before Brig. Gen. Habyarimana, several other Rwandan army officers had defected to Uganda in 2001 and 2002.

They include Maj. Frank Furuma.